

**Volume**

**1**

THE MADD HATTER

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Winter's Eve

A FANFICTION OF FINAL FANTASY IX

# Winter's Eve

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## Introduction

*...Show your beauty.*

*in you somewhere, somewhere in me.*

*Pure as pure as heaven, sent you money sent you flowers, could I worship you for hours? In whose hands are we in anyway?*

The soft green-clad figure leisurely pulled a book from the shelf, just like the rest of the way she carried herself. She took a seat by the balcony, enjoying the soothing sound of the rushing falls surrounding her. A slight breeze lightly kissed her face as she opened the book. This book was no normal imaginary tale written by any author, but an honest historian who wrote about an event that happened not too long ago. The only record of it was here. It was a much more accurate approach to it, rather than the commercial stories out in the rest of the planet. It was the heroic story of a group of diverse characters that saved the world from evil, only by a breadth. The passionate story of the bonds of friendship and determination. She began on the first page, but, as any other time when she opened a historic manuscript in the Secret Library of Daguerro, she peacefully nodded off, lulled by the rush of falling water.

## Gaia

Daguerro was pleasantly quiet, and remained so, even after the event with Kuja and the evil Mist. It remained hidden between the two waterfalls and only scholars and the intellects knew of this secret library. It was here that Freya returned to after her voyages with Zidane. She decided to stay here for a few reasons. A few Cleyra inhabitants had come here, and she still felt the bond that she had created between herself and Cleyra's people from the history books. She also enjoyed the quiet atmosphere, wanting to take a break from the uptight busy world outside of the quiet falls. She felt another certain bond with Daguerro, the dragon god who overlooked this place, keeping it safe and sheltered. Freya was not expecting to leave Daguerro for a long time.

After Zidane's dramatic appearance before Queen Garnet, he remained with Tantalus, preferring the life of a bandit rather than living in royalty. He often visited Alexandria and Garnet, but remained in Lindblum, his hometown. Life had pleasantly returned to normal again. Concerning

his fellow people from Terra, he never associated with them. He certainly felt a distinct bond with them, but felt as if he could not owe up to see them again. Rather, he put those thoughts aside. At the moment, he had more important things to think about.

Garnet had become Queen of Alexandria. Responsibility and honor rested on her hands. However, she was an independent freethinking queen, and everyone admired her. Some even commented that she was better than the former queen, Brahne. Peace was reigning in the all the provinces, and Garnet rarely had much to worry about, unlike her past. Everything that had confused her before seemed to be revealed to her, and she was, at last, content.

Her kindred, Eiko, returned to the ruins of Madain Sari amongst her moogle friends. Rather than pursuing an unattainable goal, she resided with her moogles, once again setting the desert town of Conde Petie in a wonder of who-took-it. She still enjoyed the miracles of cooking from the advice taken from Quina.

Quina had, indubitably, remained with Garnet at Alexandria Castle, preparing the finest dishes in the kingdom.

Steiner remained the bodyguard of Garnet, forever professing to his sworn duty. Now, however, he had no competition from Beatrix...

Vivi, along with his four offspring, retired in Alexandria, rather than the Black Mage Village. Vivi preferred Alexandria's environment better than the segregated life on the Outer Continent. But with the help of the moogles, he still communicated with his numbered mages in the village. He lived contentedly in Alexandria, but still stayed the same clumsy self.

After the incident, as many people called it now, Amaranth, the redheaded mercenary, disappeared. No one knew of his whereabouts. Every once in a while, someone would say that they had seen a redheaded person in the distance, but the mirage never stayed long enough to be observed.

## **M I S T   C O N T I N E N T**

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Alexandria, now ruled by Queen Garnet, was a peaceful, bustling town, visited with just as many nobles as before the incident. They still showed great plays, provided by the many actors from Lindblum. It had finished its rebuilding project much more quickly than the rest of the towns and cities on the continent. Greater than before, tourists came from everywhere to sense the beauty and uniqueness of this powerful and majestic city laid on a high plateau over the Evil Forest.

Even still, a small portion of mist remained in the Evil Forest. The reason, no one knew why, and most would not bother to go back into the Evil Forest.

Dali returned to the small, farming village it used to be. Its inhabitants went back to their original occupations, and competition disappeared among the workforce. The South Gate was completely repaired and updated.



The Castle of Lindblum was more magnificent than before. The technology was renewed, making it the most modernized realm on the continent. Aircrafts and clocks alike were the trademarks of this bustling industrious kingdom. The world-famous theatre ships came from this

region. Anyone wanting to become an actor or pursuing any academic business would come here. Lindblum was the place to fulfill all the corporate dreams and anticipations of anyone. Anything one was searching for, it was in Lindblum.

Burmeccian soldiers reoccupied Gizamaluke's Grotto. As with the rest of the eternal rain region, Burmeccia had been rebuilt. This time, it was more magnificent than before, but still held the same rural feel as before. The population, however, was undersized for the town. It was growing slowly and steadily however, and the new Burmeccian king (since the one who had settled at Cleyra had been assassinated by Brahne's evil plot) was confident in its eventual growth. A memorial had been built to preserve the memory of Cleyra and her inhabitants.

Treno was still the same small never-ending night city. The town still abounded with nobles, and the auction was still as popular as ever. The Gargant Roo was still in good use by private persons between Alexandria and Treno. Quan's Cave remained a hidden and mysterious place with the healing waters.

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## **OUTER CONTINENT**

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Apart from the Mist Continent, no one went past its borders, keeping the rest of the continents on Gaia unexplored. The elves at Conde Petie remained unreceptive to the events that occurred about them. They had much more things to worry about. Every once in a while, they would receive an adventurer attempting to travel past to see the Lifa Tree. But they would present them with the same problem as they did with Zidane's party. As for the Iifa Tree, once again it could not be penetrated past a certain point. It was presumed that the eidolons had replaced the seal that had been there once before with a stronger one. Eiko did not bother with this seal, as she was certain that the eidolons did not want any more tampering with the planet anymore. Madain Sari remained in ruins, as Eiko did not care much in restoring the summoner's village.



The Black Mage Village was still hidden in the deep woods. No one could bypass the secret magic that cloaked this village deeper in the forest than the owls dwelled. Only the inhabitants, the black mages and the Terran peoples, could penetrate this magic field. In addition, the black mages created a certain bond with chocobos...

The Desert Palace remained unknown to the people of the planet, and Zidane and the rest of his party managed to put that dreadful place out of their memory. But they could never completely forget that place.

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## **LOST CONTINENT**

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The Lost Continent remained lost for the most part. No person ever ventured into the desert region of this land, and rarely dared to get lost in the canyons. The beaches were as far as anyone would go in this harsh environment. Therefore, its abandoned monuments remained so. Oilvert was still hidden in the canyons, as it was even a wonder that Zidane had found this legendary magic-restricting fortress. Ipsen's Castle and its past remained only in text in Daguero, located on the Southern Islands of the Lost Continent.

## **F O R G O T T E N   C O N T I N E N T**

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Esto Gaza stayed the same as when Zidane last saw it. The immigrants remained there, keeping it populated more or less. The high priest miraculously was still alive; he seemed to deem a magic air around him, some people said. Tourists never came, partly from the monsters, and partly because not many would venture as far into the cold and ice. The abandoned town past Esto Gaza, Mt. Gulug, was silent. The inhabitants of Esto Gaza never ventured into the cave, fearing the words that the high priest had exclaimed. Not many cared either way.

As for the four shrines, they remained untouched, as a part of the planet's history, and therefore no one ventured into them. Qu's Marshes were the same as before, as Quale reigned over the kingdoms of the marshes. Cleyra was completely destroyed, and was now only a desert crater near Burmecia. As for the roots that appeared after Terra was uncovered, they had retracted back into the planet, leaving bottomless cracks in the ground. Many had built various bridges; Dali's watchtower resided with a rather creaky, suspended wooden bridge, while places like the North and South Gate had magnificent, stone bridges.

The dying planet's fate, Terra, was unknown. In all resolves, Zidane had stated that it had fallen to its death, but no one was really sure of the planet's accurate outcome. Some figured it was still in embers, still dying. Others believed it was already completely faded and no more. No one really knows what had happened to the Lost Planet of Terra.

.....End

## The March Hare

*Look at all the lonely people walking miles around the town,  
I can see the old cathedral, but I had to play it down,  
boats along the river setting up their sails and life carries on as normal,  
as though you're not around. . .*

Freya bent down and picked up the book that had fallen from the now sleeping Regna. She shook her head, musing that every time Regna began to read a book – any book – she somehow managed to fall asleep every time. She shouldn't read books, but then again, she wouldn't really have anywhere else to go other than Daguero. She looked at the book Regna had been reading: “A Study of Gaia and Destiny, written by Dr. Zarr.” She recalled seeing this book. Actually, when she arrived in Daguero right after she left Zidane's party, the Doctor himself had just begun the manuscript. She put the book back in its shelf and returned back to the balcony over the streaming waterfall. Ever since she had come here, she felt as if she were home. The atmosphere and environment was always the same. Strangely, the rest of Gaia was too. The kingdoms were at peace and there was no commotion or troubles whatsoever. It was too quiet on the planet, and Freya knew something was wrong. Everyone was happy the way it was, and should always be like this, but Freya knew in her heart that it could never possibly be perfect. She walked to a balcony that led outside of Daguero onto the rocks. Almost every night, Freya would go onto the slick black rocks and watch the stars appear. The sun was high in the sky right now. She always looked past the waters of the sea, but failed to see any sign of other life forms. Every so often an airship would glide past, but almost always it was in the far distance. Not many knew of Daguero's existence, which, in a way, benefited Freya. She didn't want to return to the city again. It only reminded her of her loneliness and her search for her lost love. She had already looked through many of the manuscripts in the library, looking for any kind of clue as to where he was. But they only provided her with information that she already knew. She set herself down onto the rocks and began reminiscing about herself back in Burmecia. She hated reminiscing, but it just came upon her. She was lost in thought when she heard her name being called from someone inside.

“Freya!” She looked up from her thoughts. She turned and saw Dr. Bani appear at the opening in the rocks. “Ms. Freya, I have something of importance to tell you.” He continued. Freya stood up, and Dr Bani disappeared back into the cave. /I wonder what he has to say,/ Freya wondered. Dr Bani had been the first person she had met when she had arrived at Daguero. He had introduced her to the people in the library, and certainly been friendlier than the other

intellects that gathered here. She followed him inside to his study, which was off to the side from the Dragon Rock.

“What is it?” She asked once she was inside.

“Ms. Freya, I am pleased to say that I have at last completed the manuscript I have been working on since the last two moons. I humbly ask that you be the first to read it.” He went to his paper-laden desk and handed Freya a cord-bound small tome with a crude leather cover. On the leather was scratched, “An Assessment of Terra.” “Since you are the only one I personally know who has actually been there, I would like you to have the privilege to read it first, so I can make a few adjustments if necessary.”

Freya nodded. “Do you believe that Terra is completely gone now?” She questioned the professor. She turned to the last pages, to see if Bani had placed his opinion there.

“Do you?” Bani replied. She looked up at him.

“I...well Kuja did destroy it.”

“Yes, but did you ever physically see the planet die?”

Freya thought for a moment. “It was burning as we were flying away on the ship. What are you trying to say Dr Bani?” Dr Bani smiled and sat down in his chair behind the desk.

“Just think about it Freya. Did Terra really die, or is it still out there, reviving itself?”

“How could it revive itself? Does it not need an overseer? Like Garland?”

“Ahh, Freya. You must read my manuscript. I have gathered all the knowledge of the land, from the texts of the past to the things you had told me when you first came here. Maybe you have forgotten some of it.”

“I may have Dr Bani. My memory is confusing at times.” Freya felt an eagerness to read this manuscript, and she turned to the door after she thanked him. She went to her abode in the cave, which was only a small cavity in the cave underneath the synthesizer’s shop. Inside her room were a rustic, but homely bed, a crudely-built nightstand, a scrawny-looking chair, and an elegant writing table. She placed herself on the chair and held the small book in her hands.



## **An Assessment of Terra**

Freya opened the manuscript and began reading. Unlike any other book she had read, she concentrated more with this. She wondered why this book of knowledge of Terra interested her so deeply, and she read on.

1. Introduction ~ a word from the author
2. Terra ~ Where it came from

3. Terra ~ How it prospered and survived
4. Terra ~ Legends and Myths
5. Terra ~ Historian's account and Information from people who have been there in the past
6. Terra ~ The people and locations
7. Terra ~ Law, order and education
8. Terra ~ The Black Box
9. Terra ~ Pandora's box – the planet's fall
10. Sources of Information ~ Notes

### **The Past**

“Terra’s struggle to survive began five thousand years ago when it began dying. The planet, needing a newer planet in order to resume its cycle of life, sought to absorb Gaia’s life spirit. However, it needed a planet without life, such as its nearest neighbor, Gaia; however, Gaia already had life existing on the planet. Therefore, Terra needed to rid Gaia of the life before it could absorb it. Meanwhile, Terra had been decaying: vegetation, and eventually life on Terra began dying. The Terran people gathered and tried to revive the planet using four different means. However, they failed. The last, they sought a new mother planet. The leader, realizing that all life on Terra would cease to exist if they went any further without action, created a tree on Gaia, which became the gateway to the souls on Gaia into Terra. The souls would enter Terra, thus reviving the Terran society. The Mist produced by the Iifa Tree was a by-product of the refining of souls. A perfectly intelligent way to put to ruin life on Gaia.”

Freya set the book down. It was all coming back to her now. She noticed that the name Garland never appeared in the book, and there wasn’t much information on much else. She decided to go back to Dr. Bani and inquire where he got the information.

She went back to the highest level of the cave to his office, but discovered he was not there. /I wonder where he could have gone...? Maybe he’s researching on a new book.../ She walked out of his office and looked around from the balcony overlooking the inner view of Daguerro. She didn’t see him in sight, and decided to search for him. She went through most of Daguerro, but didn’t find him. She even looked inside storage, which was underneath the platform. He was no where to be found. She walked out from the dark, wet room and stood for a moment in the water. /Where could he be? He had said to tell him of any changes that he should make...But he’s not here./ She looked up and saw a professor passing by.

“Dr Ayto!” she called out. The old man turned his head.

“Have you seen Dr. Bani anywhere?” The professor shook his head, and resumed walking. Freya’s shoulders slumped. How could he disappear like that? She walked back up to the platform and sat in front of the Dragon Stone. She retrieved Dr. Bani’s book from her pocket and opened the front cover. The book was dedicated to no one, which seemed rather odd to

Freya. Usually every manuscript any professor wrote had a dedication. She turned the pages and skimmed through the book. Somehow, this book didn't give enough information, or it seemed like it was hiding something. Wondering if he had gone outside, she got up and ran quickly to the entrance and looked about. The sun had begun to set in the west, and the water and slick black rock were bathed in crimson. The doctor was no where in sight though. Freya dejectedly turned around. The inner confusion sickened the peaceful rushing of water, and Freya decided to see if Drake, the innkeeper, had any liquor up his sleeve. She slowly wandered up to his quarters.

"Hey Freya, why the down look?" Drake questioned when Freya appeared at his stand. She shook her head. "Oh I get it..." He turned around and rummaged through a few barrels. Freya took a seat in front of Drake's stand and knew he had his supply. Not many drank in Daguerro, partly because some didn't have time, but mostly because the intellects blatantly refused. Freya, on the other hand, had no problem with it. It was the only thing she missed from the city. Drake reappeared with a couple bottles, and Freya flipped him a coin, even though he never asked for it. He had learned to silently accept it, as Freya refused to take it back every time.

"So what's the big hustle that ya gotta have a drink so bad?"

Freya took a long drink and took the book out of her pocket. Drake glanced at it.

"Looks new. Where'd you get it?"

"Dr Bani gave it to me."

"Oh that old geezer? This what he's been up to lately?"

"Yeah. He just gave it to me this afternoon, but now I haven't a clue where he is. Did you see him walk out of his office recently?"

"Mmm...can't say I have. Sorry miss. Why you need to speak to him so bad?"

"Well...he has some information that I really want to know." Drake picked up the book and looked at it.

"Hm...Terra eh? Can't say I know what that place is about, never been there. But I know I have heard the name before around here...of course."

Freya was silent for a moment, and drained the first bottle. Drake just looked at her. Drake had been here as long as anyone could remember (which wasn't much), but he never seemed to look any older. Freya took the second bottle, but Drake grabbed her arm.

"Hey, this stuff ain't so light. I don't know what you're thinking, but I recommend you get some rest or something. The stress ain't doin' nothing' good for ya."

Freya's dark eyes peered up at him through the brim of her hat, and Drake couldn't help but let go of her arm and think of what she had been before she had come to live a peaceful life in Daguerro. He sat back down and watched her finish off the second bottle in silence. It seemed to take no effect on her. Her hands were on the third bottle when she spoke.

“Who’s said the name Terra around here?” She sounded the same but seemed more lax with her speech, but not quite. Drake had to rack his brains for this one, and was dreading the thought that Freya might be a little impatient.

“Um...well...I think it might have been Dr. Sherrul...no wait, it wasn’t him. It was...damn! Umm...”

“It’s alright, take your time.” Freya interrupted. Drake only looked the more apprehensive. He thought harder, going over the names of the professors in the library over and over. Suddenly he remembered.

“Dr. Francis! It was that guy...you know him?” She shook her head, but stood up with the bottle still in her hand. Drake hurriedly continued before she left.

“Um, he’s usually not in his study, but you could still check – it’s on the first level.” He pointed to the far side of the cavern a level down. “Or you can usually find him in the Main Library...nevermind.” Freya had already turned her heel and was heading towards the first level. Drake just shook his head. He was sure Dr. Francis wouldn’t be able to handle such a creature like Freya.

## Dr Francis



Freya arrived at Dr Francis’ door, and knocked lightly, the bottle still in hand. There was no answer and Freya opened the door slightly. As predicted, no one was in the study. She turned. Drake hadn’t given a description of this professor, and Freya decided to ask around. She saw a short professor kneeling in front of a shelf, pondering over a book in his hand. She walked over to him and tapped him on the shoulder, hoping he wouldn’t be one of the crabby professors that resided here.

“Yes’m?” he mumbled, and looked up. Suddenly he jumped back when he saw the bottle in her hand. “Sacre bleu! Are ye alright Miss!?” He exclaimed as he stood up, staring at Freya in the face. He was a full half-height of Freya. Freya looked at his gaze and quickly hid her hand with the bottle behind her back. The small professor’s eyes followed her hands behind her back.

“Pardon me, but would you know the whereabouts of a Dr. Francis?” she asked pleasantly.

“Why, certainly!” He answered immediately. “I am he! And who are ye??”

“I’m...” she looked at him curiously. “I’m Freya. I’ve been here for quite a while now. I was wondering-“

“Well then! Let us get acquainted, I’m afraid I’ve never met or seen ye before!”

“Yes, yes, I know. I-“

“How did ye know who I was?”

“I-“Freya furrowed her eyebrows. “I didn’t, Drake told me. I wanted to know-“

“Well Drake old laddie! He’s always been a big help around here hasn’t he!”

Freya sighed. She had never before in her life met a more sociable professor. Maybe he was just making up for all the times he never said anything.

“So what brings ye here?” the doctor questioned. /Finally.../ Freya mumbled.

“Do you know Dr Bani?”

“Yes, a brilliant mind. Why do ye ask?”

“He had given me a manuscript he had just written-“

“Oh! I must see it! What did he write about this time?”

“About Terra.” Freya waited to see if Dr Francis would give a reaction.

“...Terra?”

“Yes...Terra. You’ve heard of it before, right?”

“Well miss...” Freya looked at him. Drake wouldn’t ever lie to her, and she knew it. She looked up across the open room to where Drake was. He was busy talking to Regna, who had apparently woken up now.

“Well haven’t you?”

Dr Francis looked up at her silently. Suddenly he exclaimed, “I refrain from answering your question!”

Freya gave him a look of disbelief. “What?!”

The professor fiercely shook his head. “Good day!” He pronounced, and squatted back down and opened a book not bothering to even look at what it was. Freya stood in disbelief for a few more seconds.

“Do you know where Dr Bani is?”

There was no answer. Freya’s eyes clouded with suspicion. This doctor was hiding something, and was refusing to tell her.

“Why aren’t you saying anything? Is there something that I should know that you are not voicing?” She said in a firm tone. Maybe that would trigger something. The doctor remained as silent as stone. Freya looked around, very frustrated and starting to get annoyed. As she did, she saw in the corner of her eye Dr Bani disappear out the entrance of the library.

“I’ll get back to you,” she muttered to Dr Francis as she jumped onto the balcony. She leaped across the open air and across the shallow waters onto the platform right in front of the entrance. She quickly looked out and saw the professor heading towards the cliff.

“Dr Bani!” She shouted.

It was twilight, and the stars were not yet out. He didn’t turn his head. She ran towards him, hoping he was alright. She caught up to him quickly and put a hand on his shoulder.

“Doctor! What’s wrong?” she asked trying to see his face.

“I must do this,” was the reply.

“Do what Doctor? Are you alright??”

Dr Bani stopped his pace, and Freya saw that they were at the edge of the cliff.

“I am sorry Ms Freya, but they are calling. I cannot hide any longer.”

“Who’s calling? Can’t hide from who?” Freya pleaded. Dr Bani took a step towards the cliff. Freya tried to hold him back but he freed his arm from her grasp with surprising strength. She took a step back.

“I must...Good-bye Freya... Take care of yourself...”

“Doctor! Please, I beg you, do not do this! You have so much more to offer! Doctor!”

Dr Bani turned around ceremoniously with his back to the cliff. “Freya...the book of Terra...find it...the truth...Be careful...the future...is not...clear...” He disappeared over the cliff.

Freya cringed back. There was no sound, only the noise of the waterfall far behind her and the sound of waves in the far distant below her.

/Dr Bani...you were always there for me. You were the first one who helped me...guided me...and tried to help me. You may not have succeeded, but I am grateful./ She lowered herself and bowed before the cliff. Through the brim of her hat, she saw a translucent white obscure spirit rise from below towards the sky. /?/ She looked up at the amorphous ghost rise up higher in the sky until it disappeared into the darkness. Freya slowly backed away and stood up. After a



moment, she apprehensively edged toward the precipice and looked down. She didn’t see anything, not even a piece of cloth on a rock. Freya confusedly retreated a few steps. Somehow, even though Dr Bani’s fall off the cliff meant inevitable death, it seemed to have some kind of holy implication. Freya didn’t know what it was however. Her fear that something was going to break this planet’s peace resurfaced for a moment, but she pushed it back down. Freya turned and swiftly made her way back to Daguerro. /The book of Terra...apparently Dr Francis won’t say anything about Terra. No one else really knows what Terra is...he must be implying about a book that no one’s ever seen...it should be in the library. And what truth was Dr Bani talking about? Something about the future not being clear.../ Before she entered Daguerro, she

turned and looked back. The stars had begun to appear, and the night was silent. She saw nothing out of the ordinary, and she turned to the entrance. Behind her, an owl slowly dived low above the water and swooped out towards the ocean.

## The Return

Freya stood at the entrance, looking around. The clock above the Dragon's Stone indicated it was late. Many of the professors had retreated to their studies, and only a few remained in the Main Library, gathering information or trading books from the Main Library to their personal library. She wondered if she should go talk to Drake first or search for Dr Francis, since he was nowhere in sight. She decided to talk to Drake first, and made her way up to his domain.

"Hey! What brings you back?" Drake exclaimed rather cheerfully.

"It's about Dr Bani..."

"Oh, did you find him?"

"...Yes. He left Daguerro, and he is not returning." Drake looked at Freya somewhat confused.

"Did he have family or somethin'? What made him make up his mind?"

"Something was bothering him...Has he been acting strange lately? I haven't noticed."

"No...he's been the same...quiet. But they never talk so I wouldn't know. Where did he go?"

Freya slowly gestured up toward the ceiling of the cavern.

"?" Drake looked at Freya, then it hit him. "You've got to be joking...why?"

"He said that he couldn't hide anymore, and that they were calling him. Would you know who he's referring to?" Freya questioned.

"Ahh, well, honestly, I don't think I would. Maybe another scientist might know, but I wouldn't think so."

"Come on Drake, you've known all the gossip around here, even if they were worth telling or not."

"Well...Dr Bozrah's claimed that he's heard him mumble to himself sometimes about a 'Garden of Eden,' but he's said that he's only heard it a couple times and that's all."

"Garden of Eden..."

"Yeah. Maybe you could look that up around here."

"He also said that the future is not clear. Do you ever wonder if the future is always going to be like it is right now on the planet?"

“Nope, can’t say that I do. To be honest, I’ve thought that the longer somethin’s at peace, the worse the problem is gonna be in the future. . . .By the way, have you talked with Dr Francis?”

“Heh. He’s an odd figure. I think he’s hiding something.”

“Maybe he’ll open up if you tell him about Bani.”

“Yes, I will go look for him.” Freya turned around and decided to check his study first. When she got there, the door was open and no one was inside. Either he had disappeared too, or he was in another’s study at the moment. She decided to look inside as long as he wasn’t here. She walked over to his desk and saw mounds of paperwork, all written in small, curly print. . . .similar to his personality. The papers on the top of the piles showed that he was temporarily observing the small town of Esto Gaza. She didn’t have much interest and she turned towards his library. Many of the books were on Esto Gaza, and some on the history of the Lost Continent. She was perusing one of the books that had sketches of historic Esto Gaza when she heard a rustle behind her.

“Sacre bleu! Miss! Wut in tarnations are ye doing in here?” Freya turned around and saw Dr Francis in the doorway handling a few books in his arms.

“I came here to talk to you,” Freya replied, placing the book back in its position.

“Good, let us talk then.” He closed the door, went to his desk and laid down his pile of manuscripts.

“Do you have anything to say about Terra?” Freya inquired as she walked towards the desk.

“Why do ye ask? I know nothing of that place.”

“Well then, what about the book of Terra?” Dr Francis’ small eyes looked up from his paper.

“How do ye know of this?” He asked somewhat suspiciously.

“Dr Bani said this before he died. He claimed that ‘the truth’ was in that book.”

Dr Francis paused after hearing this, then said, “There is no truth in that manuscript.”

“Do you have this manuscript? If you do, please, may I have access to it?”

“No’m. I do not have this manuscript with me.”

“Where is it then? I will find it.”

“Ye cannot find it that easily. It is hidden in this library. I have read zee manuscript before, but ‘twas a very long time ago. I put it back, and have not been able to find it again.”

“Just tell me where you last saw it.”

“Zee Main Library, First Level.”

It was silent for a few seconds. Dr Francis was looking at Freya in a peculiar way, as Freya pondered where to begin. She decided to look in Dr Bani's study first to see if there were any clues, then in the Main Library.

"Thank you," Freya exclaimed, and started for the door. Dr Francis remained silent.

Freya departed from the doctor's study and headed towards Dr Bani's study. /Why was he looking at me like that? I still think he's holding a secret./ She looked inside Dr Bani's study. Only one small section was dedicated to his study on Terra. Freya didn't think there were that many books on Terra on the planet anyway, and every one of them probably only existed here. She looked at the documents that the professor had in his library, but many of them were small and almost seemed irrelevant to Terra. No wonder he didn't have too much to offer in his manuscript. She looked out from Bani's study. She wondered if anyone would be bothered about Dr Bani's disappearance, since every one of these professors seemed to be in their own little world. She decided to begin from the north side of the library. Thus began her search.

Scarcely over an hour had passed, and Freya was hardly done with the first two columns of books, and there were about twelve more to go. Freya sighed. She resumed her search. Towards her search on the third column, she fell asleep.



With a start she awoke. To her left, a professor was busily browsing through some books. Freya yawned and figured she had slept through the whole night.

"Excuse me professor," she said as she stood up.

"Yes ma'am?" The doctor replied without looking up.

"If you see a book with the name 'Terra' in it, could you tell me, if you don't mind." The professor nodded, and resumed his search, probably forgetting what Freya had just said. She shook her head and began looking for the book of Terra.

Another hour passed, and another. Freya slowly sat down on the ground and wondered if she would ever find the book. She saw Drake approach her and she stood back up.

"Hey...how's the search?"

"To no avail..." Freya sighed.

"Francis gave you a hard time, eh?"

"You can say that again, I'm beat."

"Well I just came to drop this off. I found it in the water last night after you went to see Francis. It's kind of messed up from the water, but I thought it's readable." He handed her a small manuscript, which was still damp from being in the water. Drake walked off, and Freya put the book in her pocket, leaving it till later to look at. Right now she had another task in mind. She resumed her search, and she slowly approached where the Dragon's Stone was. Suddenly, she felt a timid tap on her shoulder and she turned around. It was Dr Francis.

“Yes doctor?”

“Umm...I've been thinking for a while, and I want to help ye.”

“Really...”

“Yes'm. I think I know where zee book is. Follow me.” He began walking towards the Dragon's Stone, and Freya stood up and followed him. He stopped when he was exactly behind the stone, and Freya stood beside him.

“If I can recall correctly, when I put zee manuscripts back, it claimed that it would disappear into the stone, and only be recovered to zee one whose hands are worthy.”

“Why didn't this spell happen before?”

“Because no one had read it before yet. I told ye 'twas a long time ago when I read zee book.”

“Who wrote it?”

“No one knows, Miss. Only a few have heard of this book. Reach into here,” he said as he pointed into a small crevice in the stone wall. Freya reached her lithe hand into the hole and felt a small lever. She pushed it to one side, and nothing happened. “?”

“Calm yerself down miss, just follow me.” He began walking and Freya got up to follow him. He went down to the main platform in front of the Stone.

“What happens here?” Freya questioned.

“Watch and learn.” Came the reply. Dr Francis knelt down in front of the Stone and placed a gem, a Sapphire, in front of the Stone. Suddenly, blue and white sparkles of energy swirled around both Freya and Dr Francis, creating a slight breeze which Freya could recall with her trips with Zidane. The swarm of energy spiraled and spiraled around them until they were in a tight coil, then suddenly exploded and dissipated. The only thing that remained after the flash of white was a small, somewhat torn, tome floating in the air between Freya and Dr Francis.

“Now, Freya, if ye are the one whose hands are worthy, ye will be able to take zee book, and it will be yours. If ye are not, then ye will not be able to hold zee book, and ye will feel nothing but air.”

Freya deliberately stepped up to the book. She looked at it for a moment, praying that she would be able to touch the book. She reached up, and the tome slid into her hands.

“Well done missy!” Dr Francis exclaimed. “Now let us go to me office where we can observe this in privacy.” He started for his office. Freya looked up and saw Drake looking over his hammocks on the second level. He flipped a thumbs-up at her, and Freya could not help but smile at him. She went up to Dr Francis' study and found him waiting.

“What took ye so long? I've been waiting here for ye forever!”

“I beg your pardon Dr Francis,”

“Have ye looked inside of it yet?”

“No-“

“What’s takin’ ye so long? Come on, let’s see this magical manuscript!”

“...magical?” Freya opened the small book. Inside were writings and small sketches...an entire book on Terra. From the looks of it, it seemed as if the author had been there himself.

“This looks like a guide to the planet Terra itself...it even has something like a road map in it. And here’s Bran Bul!”

“Bran Bul?!” Dr Francis exclaimed. “Have ye been there!?”

“Why, yes I have doctor. I thought you knew.”

“I had not known! Ye should have told me!”

Freya looked through more of the pages, ignoring the sputtering little old man, and saw a sketch of some Terran Genomes. One looked particularly familiar, but Freya couldn’t distinguish who it was. She flipped through some more pages, then put it down on her lap.

“I have to know if this place still exists.”

“And why would ye be so curious as to that? Don’t ye think that ye will be causing trouble for this planet?”

“I just want to know if the planet still exists. If it does, then that means that it is still a dying planet, and that it will try to revive itself by any means, just like any other life that is dying. I cannot let it try to absorb Gaia again.”

“Well by all means, go ahead, and tout de suite! I shall help ye!”

“But Dr Francis! You’re- you have-“

“Are ye saying that I can’t come along!”

“Doctor...well, alright.” Freya became silent.

Dr Francis grinned. “So, where shall we begin?”

“Well...first we should try to find a way to get where we want-“

“Simple! I can arrange!”

“What do you have?”

“Chock!”

“What is Chock?”

“Chock is me chocobo!”

“You have your own chocobo doctor??” Freya exclaimed in disbelief. “Are you really a professor?”

“Yes’m! But I’ve had Chock since I was a wee laddie, and he’s always been me golden bird. So we can leave as soon as ye like miss!”

“But what about what you’re working on right now?”

“I’ll bring them along with me. I already have most of zee information to finish zee manuscript – I am almost done with it anyway.”

“Well then meet me at the entrance, I’ll be there quickly.” Freya exclaimed. Dr Francis nodded, and Freya left the room. She went down to her small room and pulled out her lance from underneath the bed, the Dragon’s Hair. It had been quite a while since she held it last, and the all-too familiar feeling that she would be needing it soon came back. She looked around one last time around her room and said a silent good-bye to Daguerro. Hopefully this wouldn’t take that long. She walked out, and on second thought, decided to say good-bye to Drake. She went up to the second level and began towards Drake’s domain. She had barely gone around the corner when she heard him.

“That is one mean-looking monster ya got in your hands Freya!”

She smiled and walked up to his stand.

“Where ya goin’ now, I thought ya said you weren’t leaving this place for a while.”

“Well it has been a while. I’m just going with Dr Francis to have something settled. Just wanted to tell you good-bye. I’ll be back!”

Drake nodded. “Good luck Freya!” he exclaimed as she leaped over his hammocks down onto the platform below. “...Freaks me out every time she does that!” he muttered to himself.

Freya approached the entrance and saw that Dr Francis was already waiting.

“Come on miss! I’ve been waiting for ye forever again!” He complained. Freya took it in stride, and they both walked out of Daguerro. When she arrived outside in the clear air, she was surprised to see a golden chocobo waiting on the bridge.

“Chock! Me good ole’ fellow! It’s been a long time friend!” Dr Francis exclaimed as he went over to the chocobo. The chocobo squawked, and Freya looked on with wonder seeing the two unite. Dr Francis turned around.

“Freya, I want ye to drive Chock. I’m afraid I’ve gotten a little older and I’m not zee young man I used to be.” He said with a rather sad tone.

“Certainly,” Freya replied.

“And keep that trident away from me chocobo!” Freya shook her head.

“So where will we be heading first?” He asked.

“Lindblum. I’ve got to go and see someone there first.”

“Who?”

“You’ll see.” She approached Chock, and Chock stepped back a little. Dr Francis soothed the chocobo, claiming that Freya’s lance was only a big fork that she used to eat with. Freya rolled her eyes and mounted the golden bird. She was now high off the ground, and the days when she used to travel all over the world with Zidane returned. She looked over the island, Sacrobless Island, and up across into the horizon. She still couldn’t see any islands other than the chocobo island. It seemed rather hazy today however, and she stared at the horizon. The haze seemed to be moving, like a fog rolling over. Underneath her she heard Dr Francis huffing, trying to put his bags onto Chock. But on the horizon, Freya could see a thick haze rising and rolling in. She could now see it actually moving towards the island. It rolled over and seemed to move faster as it got closer. She looked to her left, and saw all around that an intense fog was rolling in. Only a few seconds passed, and Freya could now barely see the land below the plateau where Daguero was. A thick heavy blanket seemed to fall over Freya’s body. She knew her fear had come to pass...the Mist had returned, and she knew that it was over the whole planet again. She shut her eyes and shook her head, letting out a deep sigh.

“What is the matter miss?” Dr Francis concurred.

“Look around you doctor...you’ll know.” She said quietly. Dr Francis looked up from tying a string around Chock, and his hands slowly stopped their twisting.

“Why...” He stopped mid-sentence. Freya just shook her head again.

“Let’s just get to Lindblum. We can’t do anything about it right now.” Something had gone wrong at the Iifa Tree, Freya knew. Something had triggered it again to begin to produce the Mist. She knew that Terra was still alive...or was there another force that was trying to take over Gaia? Impossible...

Dr Francis finally finished and heaved himself up onto the chocobo.

“Well, ready to go! ...Oh my, Freya, are ye alright?”

“Yes...I’m alright.” She urged the bird forward, and it let out a squawk before dashing off and leaping into the air.

.....End

## The White Rabbit

*Whispered in some lonesome voice, too afraid to come out of the dark  
Sinking down into the covers, sleep now to the beat of your heart*

**L**indblum Castle slowly loomed in the distance. Freya held back her memories and lost feelings as the golden chocobo steadily flew them closer to the huge castle. It had changed somewhat from the last time she had been there, but overall it still possessed the same feel. And there was Mist as far as Freya could see. She shook her head and guided the golden chocobo through the massive iron gates. Inside looked even more majestic than it did from the outside. Huge and small ships gone airborne flew around the huge mechanism in the center of the city, and Cid's castle was above the huge mass surrounding him underneath. She guided the golden chocobo down towards the center of the picture-perfect city underneath, and the miniscule buildings underneath began taking shape as they got closer, and small ants began appearing on the snaking paths. She finally landed the chocobo onto the level pavement and jumped off the golden bird, ignoring some stares from the surrounding townsfolk.

“What’s the matter Dr Francis? Haven’t you ever been to the city before?” She questioned the professor, who was still on the chocobo’s back with a look of awe in his face. After a few moments he snapped out of it.

“Why, ‘tis been a long time since I’ve been to such a town – I have forgotten what it’s felt like.”

“Don’t get lost doctor. I’ll be back soon.” With that, Freya disappeared down the street. The doctor sat still on the golden chocobo, looking around. A small child ran up to the bird and began muttering a few meaningless words, then ran off shouting for his friends. Dr Francis decided to get off and look around. He, rather, fell off the tall chocobo, and brushed himself off, hoping no one had seen. He wandered over to a stand where an old lady was standing. As he approached, he began to smell a putrid stench.

“Oo-eeh! What is that stench me smell! Good-day ma’am!”

“Good day, sir! Would you like to try my world-famous pickle? It may smell awful, but it tastes magical!”

Dr Francis warily looked at the green pickles lying in a row on the old woman's stand. He timidly picked one up, all the while trying to hold back from taking a whiff. He took a small bite, and his eyes lit up.

"Why, they're the best I've ever tasted! Mm!"

"Certainly! Have you been here before? You certainly know how to enjoy a delicacy, unlike some I've known."

"And what do ye mean by that?"

"Well, I once knew a traveler, a queer one he was! He ate one pickle in one huge gulp! I've never seen any person do that before! Haha, he only got what was coming for him though!"

Dr Francis chuckled. This town didn't seem that bad at all.

## Tantalus

Freya methodically walked towards the one place she always went to when she was in Lindblum, the local bar near the palace. As always, it was quite crowded, and there was only one open stool at the bar. She took it and waited for the bartender. He appeared from the back, and systematically asked Freya what she would be having. Suddenly he jumped back a little.

"Hey now, it's you! Freya! What brings you back here? I thought you had just gone and disappeared forever!"

"Well I have some business that I have to run."

"Business? Hehe, are ya gonna save the world again?" Bobo exclaimed as he turned to get her drink.

"We'll see," Freya replied as she placed some gil on the counter. "Did you know that the Mist is back?"

The bartender stopped mid-way as he was putting her drink on the marble.

"What? Are you tryin' to scare the bejeezus outta me or somethin'?" he exclaimed in disbelief. The person next to Freya turned his head slightly. The rest of the tavern remained noisy.

"If I could, I'd show you. But yes, it's out there again. I'm going to try and find out why, that's why I'm here."

"Well, let's hope you can do it again like ya did the last. Good heavens, I thought it was all over!"

"I did too...and it should have stayed like it was before. But something's gone wrong..."

"Alexandria ain't behind this ya think?"

“I’m not sure. I don’t think so...”

She sat in silence, and the bartender left to serve some other impatient customers. A million thoughts raced through Freya’s mind on what could have triggered the Mist to come up again. Could something or someone from Terra have triggered the Lifa Tree back into existence? How could that even be possible? She felt a tap on her shoulder.

“Hey.”

She turned her head to face the patron next to her. He was a small, dog/rat-like creature with a lowered oversized green hat, and a rugged outfit.

“Who may you be?” she questioned apprehensively.

“So you’re sayin’ that the Mist’s back.” He answered.

“...Yes.”

“You have any idea who triggered it to return?”

“...No, but-“

“You want to know who?”

“... Who are you?”

“...”

“Well if you’re not going to tell me who you are, then how can I trust your information?”

“Just listen to me. I’ll give you a piece of advice, miss. Don’t think you’ll find something at the Lifa Tree, ‘cause you aren’t likely.”

“And how might you know?”

“Because I do.”

“Who are you?”

“...”

“What else do you know?”

“...”

Freya looked the other way. Obviously this stranger knew something, but then again, maybe he was just being a jerk and lying. Freya finished her drink and sat thinking. She decided to keep the stranger in mind, but for now, she’d let him slide. She got up from her chair to begin searching for Zidane. Of course there was only one obvious place he’d be, in the Theatre District. She began heading for the door, and decided to ask the stranger one more question.

"Will I be seeing you again?" she asked him politely.

"Maybe."

She shook her head, and walked out into the sunshine. Everything was bustling around as normal, as if the people couldn't sense that there was Mist outside again. Eventually they would find out. She headed for the Theatre District straight to the Tantalus hideout. She peeked inside, but no one was there. She walked inside and leaned against the wall. She decided to wait.

\* \* \*

Her eyes fluttered open as she heard footsteps at the doorway. She had fallen asleep standing up and she straightened herself and wondered who was coming inside. She looked in amusement as Zidane walked in and jumped aside as he realized a stranger was inside his quarters.

"Freya!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Long time no see, how've you been??"

Freya nodded her head in reply. "You probably know why I am here,"

Zidane walked over to the table in the center of the room.

"Yeah, I heard there was Mist back outside. What do you think caused it?"

"I am not sure why it has even returned. Someone must have triggered it-it only seems logical."

"But who?" Zidane shook his head as he said this. He didn't want to get caught up in this whole mess. Personally he didn't want to screw around with the whole Mist thing period. Once was enough, and he had almost gotten killed too. No, he definitely didn't want to screw around with it again. Unless Freya was involved...

"I wouldn't know of anyone that'd want to trigger the Mist back again though," Zidane exclaimed.

"I agree. Unless someone from Terra wants to take over Gaia again. But I thought that the idolons..."

"Terra? I thought that planet was a goner. Are you sure Terra's still alive?"

"More than likely, Zidane. I wanted to show you this." She handed the book of Terra to him. She continued. "I found this in Daguerro - it claims that Terra can never really die, only remain dormant until something triggers it to attempt to revive itself. That may be why the Mist is back."

Zidane silently looked through the old tome.

"I don't remember a lot of this stuff from the last time I was there..." Zidane mused. He handed the book back to Freya. "So you want to find out if Terra's still out there?"

"Yes."

He shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't go back there Freya. Maybe you could ask someone else from the party."

"Why can't you Zidane? You were our leader, we looked up to you!"

"It's personal Freya. I just can't go back there. I'm even afraid to go and visit my brothers and sisters in the Mage Village. I can't."

"..."

"I'm sorry Freya."

"Well the only possible recruit I could get is Amarant, and who knows where that bastard is."

"I know you and Amarant couldn't really stand her, but you could ask Eiko. See what the idolons are up to."

"Good point." She got up from her chair.

"If you ever need help, you know where to go. I'm sorry we don't have any recruits right now. If we get one, I'll let you know though."

She thanked him, and headed out the door. She stood over the balcony and wondered if she should go search for Amarant or question Eiko. Then she just remembered she still had Dr Francis in her responsibility. She'd have to get rid of him before she could do anything dire. She went to look for the doctor and leaped off into the city.

## **Searching and Making Haste**

Freya found Dr Francis in the renewed shop where Vivi had found his Kupo Nut. He had jumped quite high when Freya had tapped him on the shoulder. His only reply was, "Sacre bleu, 'tis ye again!" She only waved it off and decided to take Dr Francis somewhere private to talk.

"Doctor, it is getting darker outside, I think it is time to find an inn."

Dr Francis ran out the open door and looked up at the sky.

"Why, ye are right! We must find an inn immediately!" With that he began running in no obvious direction. Freya only sighed and hoped that getting rid of him wouldn't be so hard.

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Freya slowly sat down on the tough bed. Dr Francis was working by candlelight on the desk in the corner of the room. She wasn't sure if he'd get upset if she interrupted him, but she figured there was only one way to find out.

"Dr Francis?"

"No, no'm, I'm busy right now."

"Please, Dr Francis, I have to tell you this."

Dr Francis paused in his writing and turned around to face her. Freya took a breath.

"I talked to the person I needed to speak to today, and he abstained from coming. This means that I have to find some other comrade-one who can fight." She added when she saw the professor's eyes lighting up.

"Well I certainly must be able to go with ye."

"Yes, I know you want to come, but the question is will you be able to endure it."

"Of course! I can take care of me-self."

"Can you defend yourself?"

"Of course! Who do ye take me as?"

"Well...if you come along, you'll have to battle a lot of monsters."

"Monsters, shmonsters. I can take them!"

"..." Freya thought for a moment. She came up with another idea. "Well you are a priceless addition to my group-"

"Of course."

"-how about you stay in one location so I can reference to you anytime I like, so you will be safe and I don't have to worry about you and your safety?"

The professor was silent for a moment. Freya waited patiently.

"Of course!" came the reply. Freya sighed inwardly. At least that was out of the way.

"I know of where you can stay. Or you can choose to go back to Daguerro-"

"No'm! I shall not return there until ye have completed your quest. Where else shall I stay?"

"I will take you there tonight, unless you prefer tomorrow morning."

"Tonight? What are ye? A night scavenger?"

"..."

"Well certainly, we shall stay here tonight! I refuse to go out in the dark!"

Freya shrugged. She guessed it'd be better to get some night's rest before beginning her search for Amarant.

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Freya finally walked out of the Tantalus hideout in the Theatre District. Dr Francis had made an impudent deal about the quarters and after much coaxing from both Zidane and Baku, he finally decided to calm himself. Baku of course hadn't really cared too much, only wishing that Dr Francis would be a mute professor in his own little villa. Freya had convinced him that most of the time he was.

Now she was finally out again, and she found her way back to the bar where she had first gone when she arrived at Lindblum. Bobo was there, as usual, and greeted her lightly. She noticed the green-cloaked creature wasn't there this morning.

"Quite the early to be askin' for anythin' hard ma'am," he exclaimed. There weren't too many customers in the early morning, as Freya was an early riser.

"I am aware of that," she replied, requesting something besides her usual. The bartender shook his head and turned to get a drink. Freya looked around the hub in languor. A few broken pieces of glass here and there indicated that there had probably been a small brawl last night. No matter, she didn't care. Bobo arrived with her drink and she slowly sipped it. A customer walked in and it was no one in particular as Freya observed from the long look through her hat. She decided that she would first ask around if anyone had seen a redheaded goateed huge man. There obviously weren't too many of those wandering around anywhere any time. She decided to wait awhile and she sat in her stool, waiting for the minutes to go by.

An hour past, the bar began to get busy, and Freya decided to get down to business. She turned to her neighbor and began questioning. The cat-like animal didn't have much to offer, as did many people in the rest of the bar. She even questioned Bobo in the end, but nothing came up less than any clues. She sighed and returned to her stool. Usually a bar would contain the most information and gossip. Yes, this bar had enough of that, but not exactly of the kind Freya was searching for. Just then she noticed an interesting dog-like creature walk in and take a seat. She decided to ask a few questions and she got up from her seat and headed towards him.

"Excuse me, sir."

The dog looked up at Freya. It had a patch over one eye and it was crudely dressed in some ragged green clothes. Freya continued.

"I don't mean to bother you but have you ever seen a huge redheaded man with a goatee anywhere?"

He looked at her incredulously. He pointed with a sharp claw to his black patch.

"Have I seen him before? Hell miss, I've been with that devil before!" Freya looked up in surprise.

"Where did you last see him? I need to talk to him!"

"Talk to that little fruitcake? You must be outta your mind lady!"

"It is urgent. Do you know where he is?"

"Don't really wish to know. And 'sides, last time I saw him was 'bout a year ago. Left him 'cause he was givin' me problems."

"Did he ever say where he was going?"

"Hmm...well he did say somethin' bout having to make up somethin' 'bout his past. From what I knew about him, I'd give 'Treno a shot. But still don't know why you gotta let your pretty face get ruined by that jackass."

"It's alright sir, I've known him from before."

"The name's Risco."

"Thank-you Risco."

The dog nodded and turned back to his table. Freya couldn't help but smile at the dog's petulant feelings towards Amarant. Many disliked the headstrong man. Maybe that explained for the huge hair strands atop his hard skull. She shook her head and went over to the counter to pay and depart.

Freya headed to the trolley. She would go to 'Treno the easy way rather than searching for Chock, Dr Francis' unusual chocobo. She boarded the trolley and collected her thoughts while waiting.



## The Mercenary

The tired iron gates spread open to let Freya through. The same sleeping guards were standing aside as usual; however, the thief that usually stood at the entrance was gone, probably disappeared into the depths of 'Treno to lurk around searching for anything he could get his dirty hands on. She decided to go to the local tavern and investigate if the red-headed man was wandering around in 'Treno, which was located deep in the heart of the city of nobles.

She found her way through and found the place swarming with pick-pocketers and low-townsfolk. Wondering if it was really such a good idea to go inside just this moment, with effort she made her way to the counter and asked for a drink. The bartender nodded and turned to get her drink as Freya began looking around for any auspicious-looking characters. Many just turned their heads when she looked at them. It was better that way, Freya considered. She received her drink and glanced around the room again and saw a bandit-looking man staring back at her. Maybe he would know something she figured, as she started towards the brigand.

"Excuse me, sir," she began as she took an empty seat besides the thief. He only nodded to her and looked back. She continued. "I was curious if you have ever seen a red-headed man with a goatee around here recently."

The man stared back at her with widening eyes and an incredulous look.

"What for?"

"Well I need to speak with him."

"He ain't here."

"Where is he then?"

"Last time I saw him he was roamin' around the Hunter's Mansion."

/So he's been playing around with his free time,/ Freya mused.

"How long ago was that?"

"Before I came here. He might be gone by now though. I heard he wasn't plannin' on stayin' in this junk yard of a town. His words not mine."

Freya nodded quickly and got up from her chair and thanked him. She made her way out of the tavern and quickly retraced her steps to the higher levels of the town. She continued down on the path towards the auction house, looking every other way hoping Amarant hadn't disappeared already. She stopped in front of the Hunter's Mansion and mused whether or not she should go inside. /I wonder what his reaction will be when he sees me? Is he still the same odious creature that he had been during Zidane's party?/ she wondered. /If I even do meet him.../ She decided to step inside and the old lady was standing as normal behind the counter.

"Good day, ma'am, how may I help you?"

"Have you seen a red-headed goateed man...?"

The lady's eyes grew and for a second her mouth was in frozen mid-speech. Abruptly she then vigorously shook her head. Freya tilted her head, curious why the old lady was so eager to deny.

"Please, I need to speak to him."

The lady looked back at her incredulously.

"Please, it's important."

The averse old woman shook her head again. Freya sighed, her shoulders slumping. The dome underneath her was silent. She could see the glistening reflection of fresh blood gleaming on the algae-covered rocks. Freya looked back up at the tender.

"Well thank-you," she said, and turned back and began for the doors. The old woman remained in her position in frozen stance.

Freya walked back out onto the ledge. The old man was there no more, for reasons unknown. She couldn't help but remember the last time she had been here. Their party had caused a ruckus throughout town, and most of the nobles presumed them as the common thieves that were dominant in this city. She shook off the memories and continued her mission.

She lithely sprang up onto a rooftop, ignoring the curious glances of onlookers. She crouched down and calmly looked over the city. Treno was located too high on the surface for the Mist to encroach it, and the residents nonchalantly went on with their affairs. Even when the Mist was there in the past, they lived on in ignorance, too worried about the item of the day at the auction house and who would win the next card tournament to benefit their gambling.

Above the city, Freya could see no red-haired monster man. But the man had said he had only seen him a few moments ago, so he couldn't have gone far. Either he was in the recesses and waterways of the town, or he was long gone somewhere outside. Freya decided to risk the latter and pursue the former. She leapt and dove down past the stone bridge, a small stone ledge conveniently placed forty feet below her. Not even a rock was scathed as she landed, and the newt two inches from her foot didn't hear a vibration.

The maze stretched out before her and disappeared behind the dusty grey curves and pillars. The hustle from the city above was drowned out by the distance and the concentration of still air that resided in the tunnels. There was no way she would swim through, and she spied a small raft tied to an opening in the stone. She soared to it and her slender fingers untied the rope with ease. A nearby pole served to push her along. The channels weren't very deep in most areas – only the areas private or secret deepened, sometimes to unimaginable depths.

It was quiet and uneventful in the canals, and Freya began to get discouraged. She knew she hadn't even gone through half of the underground maze. Occasionally, an opening like the one she had come through loomed above her, but none of the citizens above noticed her. Freya sighed and leaned on her stick, stopping the motion of the raft. She was methodically perusing the tunnels, and her intelligent eyes darted back and forth looking for any sign of Amarant. Then she spotted a lone figure sitting in the shadows a few hundred yards straight ahead. She silently put her pole to use.

“Hello...?” Freya called out when she was almost in front of the figure. It remained still. The shadows made it impossible to decipher his contour. “Are you all right?” She heard the figure shuffle. Amarant would never do that...she pulled herself closer, her eyes adjusting to the darkness. Her feet touched the cold stone pathway that edged this channel. Suddenly the figure scrambled up to its feet and backed against the wall.

“Stay away!”

“Nothing but a common crook,” Freya muttered to herself. She put out a reassuring hand. “Are you all right? What's wrong?” She questioned softly. She could hear the body heaving in and out in short gasps.

“He's crazy – he-he's gone crazy!”

“Who has?” But Freya didn't even have to ask. This time, she was glad for the shadows so she wouldn't have to see what had happened to him.

“He!”

Freya shook her head. “Where did he go?”

The man pointed a shaky finger towards a small tunneled canal ahead.

“Thank you, kind sir,” Freya bowed and retreated to her raft.



“He’s crazy!” He cried out as Freya floated for the tunnel. Of course he was crazy, Freya mused. He has always been...too independent for himself, even.

As she slowed to the entrance, she realized she’d have to carry on by foot. Gingerly, she stepped out. Thankfully, it was only a few inches deep. The cold water splashed delicately around her clawed toes in synchronization with the monotone drip in the vicinity. There were no torches in this channel, and soon, Freya was cloaked in pitch blackness. The only thing that told her of her whereabouts was the increased resonance of leaky pipes. From around the corner, a thin stream of light wafted through the blackness in front of her, and she followed it to a man-sized hole in the ceiling. She grasped the sides and hoisted herself up with a little help from her legs and landed on the tiled floor. Bits and pieces of red stuff littered the floor near her.

The room was about twelve feet by twelve feet, with a single lamp suspended from above the hole in the ground leading back into the tunnel. She spied a small iron door in the far end of the room through the shadows. This must be a control room, she observed as she looked at the gauges and meters in a corner.

A metal object clattered to the floor.

Freya whirled around, her trident poised.

A huge figure menacingly stood in the shadow.

“Amarant...I know it is you,” Freya whispered, her trident still threatening.

He was silent.

But Freya couldn’t help but notice a strange outline of his head. She took a step back, at the same time glancing at the floor. That was certainly his hair spread out on the floor.

“What have you done?” Freya asked timidly.

“Why are you here?” A voice retorted from the shadows.

“I am here to ask of your help.”

“I help no one.”

“But yourself, of course. Amarant...please. Have you forgotten the things Zidane taught you, the things that you yourself came to question? Traits and principles that made you query your motives?”

“I’ve chosen to put it in the past.”

“Amarant...” Freya was at a loss. She lowered her trident but kept an eye on the man in the shadows. “I truly thought more of you...”

He emerged from the shadows. Freya tried not to look astonished but her tightened lips gave it away. Amarant had chopped off his thick dreads. The crimson hair fell to an uncomfortable length on his enormous shoulders, now feathery as opposed to the stiff objects on the floor.

“Amarant, why?” Freya asked with her head slightly tilted.

Amarant’s eye sparkled for a second – the only proof of his smile, and then it was gone. “Things have changed.”

“Yes it has,” Freya saw this as an opportunity. “Certainly you would not hear it from the people here, but if you are not aware of it yet, Mist is back-”

Amarant indifferently pulled out his daggers from his side and lustfully gazed at the glint from the lamp. He looked up. “And so...?”

“Don’t you see!” Freya was starting to get frustrated now. “Terra is still alive! Something is happening out there, and no one is doing anything about it!”

“Ask Zidane, he’ll know what to do,” Amarant snapped sarcastically.

Freya stamped her foot. “I have! And he refrained. As well as everyone else, who have their own lives now. I came to you because you’re the only one I could count on!”

“Well count me out.” He sat down and began to chisel away at the tile.

“Please,” Freya lowered herself to his eye level. “Please, I’m begging you.”

He sat for a full minute, staring at Freya. She had never seen his eyes before, as his hair always fell over them. They were an icy green and extremely piercing – but she refused to put her gaze down. Finally, he was the first to lose. Expertly, he put his daggers back into the secret pockets and stood up. Freya followed, not wanting to be caught off guard.

“Please...” She breathed.

He turned around after a final glare at her and disappeared into the man hole. The splashing of water echoed in the tight channel. Freya stood there until the echoes were no more. Dejectedly, she noiselessly moved toward the iron door. Might as well get out of here, she thought. There’s no point...And to think I thought he would join me...

...End



## The Mock Turtle

*A million points of light ascending to the sky, monuments in the darkness standing in watch till the sun will rise, screaming into an emptiness of how we once defined ourselves with our hands over our eyes, claiming all of creation. What inspires in us this madness that our existence should be defined by a light that we can't see, by a life that can't be seen. A million points of lights all rise, I can't see this all as progress, claiming nature for ourselves, by our actions we betray the instincts in our race. . . we kill everything. . . in a thousand years, what will be our legacy. . . a million lights that no one can see. . .*

**W**here else can I go...? Freya thought to herself. Dr. Francis was resting in Lindblum – what help could he offer? Garnet was a queen, everyone was...gone. She put aside the thoughts of her own pitiful life. /I have a mission now, something equally as important as everyone else's lives! / She tried to convince herself.

Freya sighed and climbed up the steps to the foyer of the city. She walked over to the balcony and viewed the city in all its nightly glory. It was all just a façade, hiding its well-known thieves and haughty nobles behind the blue and gold glow of the city lights. And somewhere in there was Amarant, loathing his life but too cowardly to do anything about it. She turned and walked out.

The air was colder than usual – it had the same cold feeling when the Mist was here before, but since it had returned, the coldness was back. To her dismay, she could spot a few monsters crawling in the distance. This Mist had to go.

Suddenly, she heard a familiar 'kweh!' and a golden glow emerged from the distant horizon.

Freya smiled to herself. So Chock did have a knack for her. Chocobos usually had that sort of sixth sense about their riders. She stood patiently for the bird as it appeared larger and larger.

She could hear the thuds of Chock's footfalls when all of sudden, Chock went for a tumble. Freya shook her head. Chock didn't trip, chocobos never do- "Oh no!" Freya cried out.

A writhing, twisting beast from the earth sprawled around Chock, tightening its fence of its body around the chocobo. The frightened chocobo stuttered back and forth in disarray, now squawking in protest.

“I’m coming!” Freya shouted. Judging from the distance, she wouldn’t make it in time – it was time for her Spear attack.

Higher and higher she climbed into the sky, propelling herself off of invisible peaks.

The creature now grasped Chock. Violently, Chock pecked and kicked. But its massive clawed feet failed to penetrate any of this beast’s scaly skin. Tiny eyes an inch apart glittered in battle lust. It raised its head, and a huge expanse of slimy tentacles sprang from behind its webbed ears. Chock maniacally struggled, her breaths slowly becoming shallower. It could sense that Freya was near, and she froze. The beast’s tentacles sprang in for the clear target.

The worm shrieked in agony and abruptly flung Chock from its grasp. Freya jumped back, making sure Chock was still in one piece. And then the worm struck back.

Freya defended more than she attacked, but she took a breath and coolly maneuvered herself, learning its moves and trying to spot its weak point. Her trident twisted around a few tentacles and she gave an immense pull, forcing the creature to recoil. Swiftly, Freya was on the thing’s back slicing and jabbing. But she forgot one thing.

An intricately thorned tail slammed into her back, sending her flying a hundred yards out. She rolled, but the searing pain in her back was enough to compel her to remain motionless for a few seconds. She jumped up when she saw the worm race toward her with lightning speed despite the flood of purple ooze flooding out of its backside.

The tears in her back were enough to send her flopping back to her bottom, and she frantically twirled her trident above her head, hoping that the poisonous tentacles wouldn’t penetrate through.

Suddenly, a huge downpour of purple fluid showered above her; she stopped her trident and looked up. The monster’s head was decapitated in one clean blow.

“Looked like you were in a bind there.”

Freya growled and picked herself up more carefully this time.

Amarant unhurriedly cast Chakra on Freya, and she felt her strength returning. But the huge tears in her coat remained nonetheless.

“...Thank you.” She said.

Amarant shook his head. He pulled his hair back and tied it into a ponytail.

Freya knew an unspoken alliance had just been made.

Chock bounded over with a loving ‘kweh’ and stood beside Freya. It lowered its neck and Freya gently slid her fingers through the golden feathers. In the night, Chock glowed a strange aura.

“Is she yours?” Amarant questioned.

“Chock belongs to a friend of mine, Dr. Francis. He’s from Daguerro, where I have been staying.”

“I see.”

“Yes...so as you can see,” Freya took a few steps toward the cliff. “The Mist is back. It just came back this morning actually. I believe Terra is reviving itself-”

Chock scuffled uncomfortably and nudged Freya.

“Monsters,” Amarant stated. He instantly jumped onto Chock’s back. It scuttled in protest but quieted when Freya followed Amarant. Before Freya could even give the order, Chock sprouted from the ground, unhindered by the extra weight and fluttered its wings, quickly ascending into the night sky. Below, Freya and Amarant could see the ground splitting in nine different areas with the worms squirming out and crying angrily, their screech an ear-splitting shudder. Freya made sure the creatures sullenly returned to their homes. Not one monster like that would be attacking Treno as long as Freya was there.

## **Direction**

“Ye back so soon! Did ye destroy zee Mist?”

“No no Dr. Francis, I have just returned to get rest and gather my things,” Freya replied. It was almost midnight, but Dr. Francis was still up scribbling away with his quill pen.

“Who is this?!” Dr. Francis suddenly jumped up from his chair and squeaked in alarm. Freya could sense that Amarant had just walked in behind her. She smiled when she saw the doctor’s hands shuddering.

“There’s no need to be afraid, doctor,” she said, taking a step aside. “This is my friend Amarant. He’s going to be helping me...but two will not suffice,” she added quietly.

Amarant just looked at Dr. Francis who was still trembling, and he made his way to one of the beds in the corner of the room. They both watched him sit down for a moment, then abruptly lay down and turn his back to them.

“Me not like the likes of him,” Dr. Francis whispered.

Freya chuckled. “Not many do,” she said. “But people underestimate his prowess by prejudging his physical appearance,” she noted, thinking back to all of his unaware former comrades he had picked up along his meaningless journeys. Dr. Francis quickly shook his head and sat down. He didn’t pick up his quill though.

“So where are ye going tomorrow?”

“I wish I had more companions, but I guess I don’t have a choice. I am going to the Iifa Tree to see if I can find any clues...and I’ll visit Mikoto to see if she knows of the recent events.”

“Hear ye, me heard zee folks scurrying about today whisperin’ that Cid disappeared,” Dr. Francis mentioned as he put his spectacles back on and dipped his quill in the dark brown ink.

“The king of Lindblum?” Freya’s ears picked up. “When did this happen – where did he go?”

Dr. Francis impatiently looked up as if Freya was asking questions she knew the answers for. “Blimey, miss! Why don’t ye clean zee wax out of yer ears more often? He’s gone today and no one knows where he went! His little wife’s going mad because she’s so skeered! I hear many people saying that someone stole him away because all his ships are still in zee docks.”

Amarant muttered some inaudible profanities at Dr. Francis’ outburst and shuffled his sheets.

“That is odd...” Freya wondered. The kingdom of Lindblum was not associating with any foreign affairs as far as she knew, so there wouldn’t be any reason for Cid to leave.

“There’s nothing I can do about it tonight,” she exhaled as she made her way to the bunk above Amarant. Zidane and the rest of his troop were at Burmecia to perform a special play just for the Burmecians. She hoped everything was alright.

\* \* \*

The next morning shone bright, and Freya curled into a tight ball. But the melodic whir of the town and the industry section lulled her aquamarine eyes open. She brushed the fine white hairs from her face and sat up, her feet dangling off the edge of the bunk.

“Took you long enough,” Amarant said. His arms were crossed as he leaned against the wooden wall. “Chock’s already outside.” He kicked a small crate of glass bottles. He pulled out an oversized brown belt with ropes and sacks. “Your little friend gave this to me and said it’s for the chocobo.”

“Hm...” Freya jumped down to the floor and walked over to inspect it. “Did you hear what happened with Cid yesterday?”

“Yeah.”

“Have you heard anything new?”

“Listen Freya, we’re not going to go search for him right now. We can think about him later, I’m sure Cid can take care of himself now.”

“I suppose...” Freya dejectedly took the belt. Amarant always had a knack for belittling everything. “Let’s go,” she said as she headed for the entrance. Chock’s golden shimmer glinted off the sun. Thankfully, the Mist couldn’t float into the city despite the huge gates that yawned

open for every traveling airship, pedestrian or commercial flight. They mounted the chocobo and it squawked in delight.

\* \* \*

“T’is a wonderful day,” Dr Francis remarked, his short elbow leaning on the wooden cart.

“Quite so,” the old woman agreed. “Here, have a pickle, it’s on me.”

“Why thank ye!” Dr Francis replied merrily. “An even more wonderful start to me morning!”

She smiled and looked up, then shielded her eyes. “I never knew there were two suns!”

Dr Francis peered up and laughed. “Oh ho ho! That is me chocobo! Me friend is riding off to save zee world! Isn’t it wonderful? I put a magic spell on zee shipping belt I gave to them. They will be safe.”



“Oh how nice,” the woman said, a crooked smile on her face. She started when Dr Francis raised his arm and accidentally knocked over a rack of pickles.

“Me so sorry ma’am!” Dr Francis cried in alarm, immediately kneeling down and pursuing a few runaway pickles.

From the structure behind the old woman’s stand, a lone owl spread its wings and soared upward in pursuit of the golden jewel in the sky.

\* \* \*

The two had managed a drink for old times and have a short nap before the Outer Continent loomed in the distance.

“I can see the mountains but...” Freya thought out loud.

“...The Iifa Tree...” Amarant finished for her.

Even when the Mist was present, one could see the Iifa Tree from many miles away. But even when they were above the roaring beaches, the Iifa Tree was gone.

“What the hell is going on?” Amarant asked for Freya. She furrowed her eyebrows and urged Chock forward. But the bird suddenly stuttered on an imaginary landing strip and refused to go any farther.

“Chock, come on!” Freya insisted. But Chock wouldn’t go any farther. “Oh come on,” Freya begged. She craned her neck to get a better look at the Iifa Tree, but the Mist densely covered the area where it once stood. She sighed in frustration and turned the chocobo towards the Black Mage Village.

“You know, next time, don’t do that.” Amarant exclaimed.

“Do what?”

“Just sit there on a chocobo thousands of feet above the ground. I’m not too comfortable with that.”

Freya let out a frustrated sigh but regained her composure. “I’ll try and remember that next time,” she assured.

The Black Mage Village was only a few mountain passes east and Chock expertly fluttered down into the magical woods. Of course, anyone from Zidane’s party could access through these woods, as opposed to the typical winding roads and never ending paths that lead to nowhere for the common wanderer.

The three characters softly stepped into the black mage land, now occupied along with the genomes from Terra.

“Something’s not right here,” Freya mused. “There’s no one here.”

“Kweh!” Chock replied. She bounded over to the chocobo stall, but none were inside. “Kweh?”

“?” Amarant peered through a mage shop’s window. “No one’s in here,” he said, as confused as Freya. Freya bounded through the porches. “Not even a trace of a genome!” Amarant called out, making sure the departing Freya would hear him. He huffed and diffidently followed her.

A few new graves had popped up since she was last here...and from what she could see, they were quite recent. “Black Mage No. 248 ... A Beloved Father ... May he Rest in Peace”

She kneeled down. “We have to find out where they went!” She declared as soon as Amarant was near.

“Yeah...” He condescendingly looked around the area. He bounded to the rocks behind the cemetery and put a hand over his eyes. “Looks like they made a run for it.”

Freya scampered up to where he perched. Normally there would be a thick forest enclosing them in, but somehow the magic had become penetrated and it looks as if genome and mage had trekked a straight path through the forest...leading straight in the mountainside. Freya raised a hand, and Chock was there in a moment.

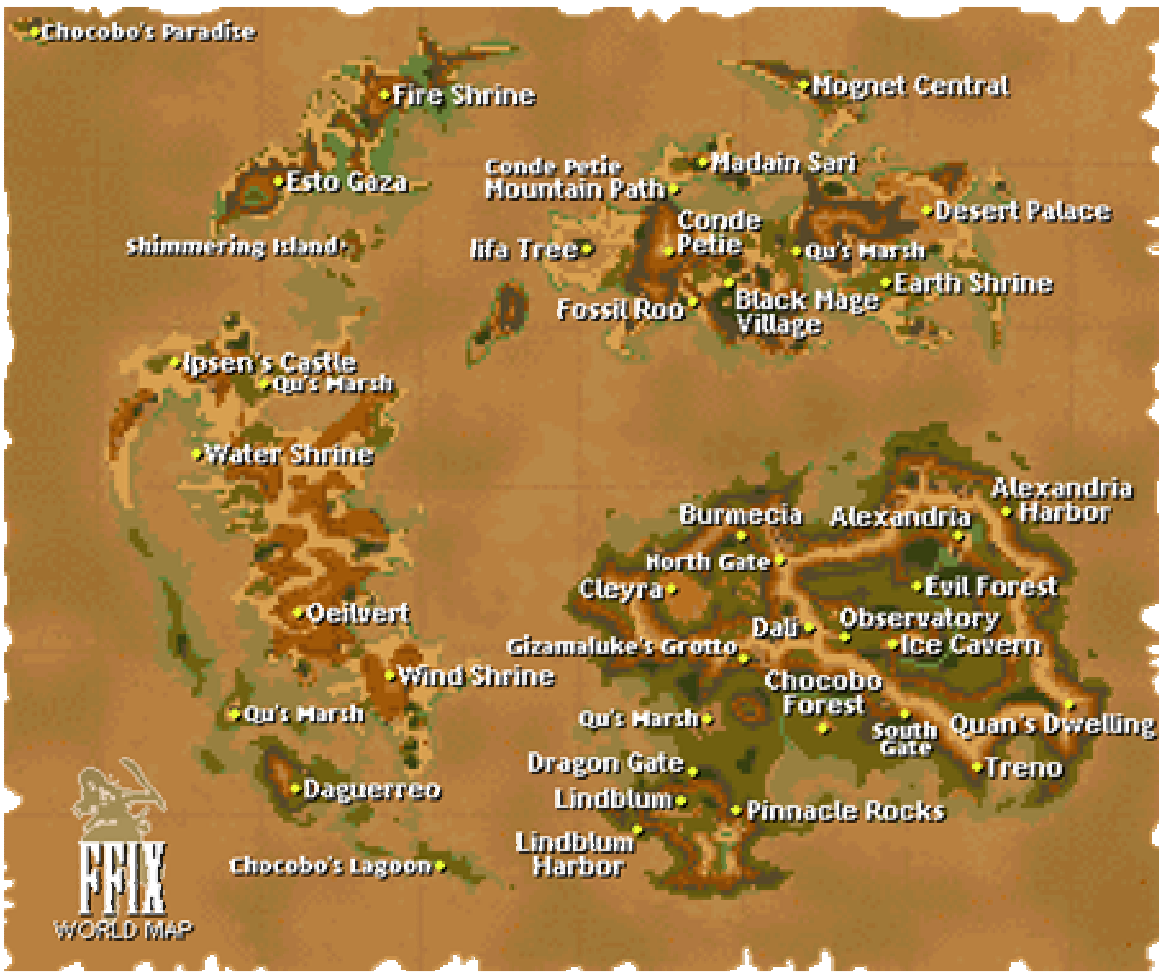
“I know you’re good at this, Chock.” Freya said, patting the chocobo’s head. It trilled and deftly raised the two onto her back. She thundered through the forest in lightning speed, then came to a sudden halt at the foot of the mountain. She swooped her head in and out, scoping the tracks invisible to a human eye, then bounded off again.

An owl soared high above them, heading for a certain target.

## **Ancient Words**

FOOTNOTES

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World Map



Terra



Desert Palace



Lindblum