

Tales of Solei: Dauntless (Part 3 of 3)

"Find him, find them both," An angry voice shouted from across the street. Deri pressed down behind a large box. None of her guns were quiet. Her long ears twitched and pivoted. They didn't sound close. Pulling herself up and out, the wolfwoman crept along the alleyway. Tall windows with thick bars told her this was the jail.

She could smell Remi. All those years on Grandpa Winchester's ranch; it was a scent the wolf would never forget and never lose. Deri leaned out and peered into the street. Orange eyes saw no threats.

Running up the steps to the jail, her chest tightened as she gazed upon the door left barely hanging.

"Shit," she muttered. She bolted inside, tail raised, hand upon her revolver. The cell was open. The office was in complete disarray. And a pair of shackles at her booted feet. Deri's jaw clenched tight.

"Shit," she said loudly this time. A breeze from behind tugged a scent of gunoil and grease across her nostrils. Her eyes widened and she dove behind one of the brick pillars. Gunfire deafened her, the fluffy triangles atop her head folding back. Her pistol plucked free and she fired. Hot lead kissed the air with a triumphant shock. Deri's arm rattled. Return fire danced around her, slapping brick and wood and sending shards of both across the empty jail.

She leaned out. Firing one shot, Deri exploded the corner of the doorway, withering away at the cover. Two shots came back. Her chest tightened. Ears folded back, she fired again. Then silence. Forcing the pent up breath from her chest, Deri bolted up. Though her ears rang, she heard the familiar clink of casings from behind the bullet ridden door. A silhouetted shadow blackened some of the holes and her orange eyes tightened with intent.

Deri slammed her full weight into the door, pain radiating across her shoulder. Her feet danced across the ground before slipping and she rolled into the sand. The jailor was staggering to his feet. Taking a gulp of air, the wolfwoman forced herself up, her tail rigid as she charged. She tackled the heavy set, leather strapped man with a triumphant roar. Hands grappled against her fur, as she sank her weight on top of him. Working one arm free, she slammed her fist down on his face. Her knuckles rang with the familiar jolt of pain with each strike. A plume of sand flew into her face and she flinched.

Her orange eyes burned and blurred as gritty grains bit into her face. A snarl escaped Deri's canid maw. She tried to shield her face, hands at her eyes as they watered. Pain rippled across her abdomen and she stumbled back into the sand. Furred hands braced her fall, and under Deri's palm, she felt the familiar worn grip of her revolver. Her opponent's rapid breath and desperate kicks tugged at her triangular ears. She lifted the elegant, heavy revolver, and aimed. The shot rippled down her arm, her watery eyes watching as the man dropped down.

Deri rose up unsteadily upon her feet and her ears pitched to the chaotic sounds sweeping across the camp.

“Over here,” a voice cried out, pulling Deri’s head down the alleyway. Three men charged forward. The steel of their drawn weapons glinted in the desert sunlight. Her jaw clenched, Deri faced down the men. She had one shot left. Her tail twitched. Orange eyes focused on the leader of the three. The wolf dove into cover for the inevitable shoot out. They weren’t stopping, though.

In fact, they weren’t even looking at her. Deri noted as she peered pointed ears and lupine face atop the stack of barrels. She watched bewildered as they ran right past, jaw slackened in disbelief. One looked right past her, in broad daylight. Deri raised her gun but he didn’t seem to notice.

“She was here,” one of the group yelled. Another cursed. The leader of the three stamped down the road a little farther.

“Come on, this way! We have to find her,” He yelled before leading the three forward. Deri watched as the three ran away, her tail slacked down the back of her thighs. Her mind fumbled over what she just witnessed.

“What the fuck,” She murmured, before snapping her brain into focus. Her finger flipped the cylinder latch and she flicked the cylinder open. The clink of casing echoed out as she pulled on the cartridge extractor rod. Gunfire rang out the next street over followed by screams. Fumbling into her vest pocket, she produced a fistful of brass. Practiced grip slipped each round into the cylinder. Snap, click. Her held breath forced from her lungs and she stared down the street. A creeping creek echoed from within the jail.

Maybe it was Remi, she thought, her mind tugging her toward the supposedly abandoned building. Stepping to the door, she felt a chill behind her. Deri turned quickly, pistol raised at the shadowy mass lunging toward her. At once it morphed in midair. Cloudy mist became tangible fur. Lumpy clouds formed fox face. Penny landed with a giggle, her head pressed against the barrel of the gun.

“I was sent to protect you,” the fox exclaimed with glee, her garnet hues boring deep into Deri’s orange eyes. A shiver ran down the wolf’s back and she shook her head. She snapped her hand back and holstered the pistol.

“Well you got a funny way of showing it,” Deri answered as her eyes flicked to the interior of the jail, “Remi isn’t here. The idiot must have gotten out during the chaos.”

Penny oozed between Deri’s leg’s like a gelatinous ball of fur and flesh bringing a cringing furrow to the wolf’s brow.

"Where would he go," she said, running pink tongue across the glass littered floor.

Deri stared for a moment. The question almost didn't register against what she was witnessing. A sinking feeling replaced the discomfort the fox gave her. Her jaw clenched and she huffed.

"If I were him, I'd be trying to get to the ship," Deri said before stamping her foot down. "Fuck!"

Penny stared at the wolf, her head tilted with curiosity. Atop her black furred head, two triangles bobbed with muted amusement. Their eyes met and a tingle of excitement buzzed through the vulpine woman's body. Her bushy tail swished.

"Come on," Deri commanded before rushing out into the street. Her strong legs carried her forward. Each step brought the loud clinking rustle of her gear upon her harness and belt. She didn't care about stealth anymore. They needed to find her brother. Turning the corner between two stone buildings, she ran into five gangmembers guarding the road. The blood in her veins froze, eyes wide like a Shlynak in hovercar headlights. One guard spat at the ground and turned away. Another checked his gun. None seemed to see her.

"I don't understand... are they high... under a spell," She asked. Deri had seen her fair share of weirdness in the galaxy, but never anything like this. The fox noodled along the ground, stretching between the guards before reforming onto the other side of their roadblock.

"Not spell... disease. Me," Penny hissed with snickers before flicking her ear.

"Did you hear that," one called out before they all turned. Slowly, the men shuffled past Deri. The wolf watched cautiously, heart thumping in her chest. Letting out a shaky breath, she shook her head.

"That's something else, let's hope it holds," she said. They were already in too deep. There was no time to question the strange fox. Her mind raced with the ramifications of this escape. Deri shook her head. Her eyes focused on the ground and buildings around her. She couldn't lose her head now. Not when they were so close. Her ship loomed ahead, unmistakable in profile against the rustic adobe buildings. Almost as unmistakable as the pitched spooling whine coming from her ship's engines. Deri's pace quickened.

"No... Remi... no," She said between heavy breaths. Dust and sand blasted from the freighter. Deri dug in as wind gusted through her jacket and blouse. She watched with ears folded back. The freighter, their only escape, lurched up into the air.. Her ship hovered for a moment, absorbing gunfire and plasma bolts before ascending without care.

Deri watched from the streetcorner. A shuddering breath escaped her tight chest.

"We got problems," Deri said, staring up at the freighter. She thought of her brother. In that cockpit that was hers.

Turn around, Remi, she thought. The whining freighter was more than escape. That was her home. Her main mode of income. Her eyes were pulled by the sound of the fox forming up beside her.

"We have other problems," Penny said, staring forward at the men shooting up at the freighter. This is not what they should be doing, the fox thought. The gusts of sand and dust had scattered her essence. She hissed softly as the men turned toward them.

"There she is!"

Deri blinked before gazing forward. Her orange eyes danced across the three as her hand dropped to her revolver. Too many. She dove behind the corner of the adobe building as shots rang out toward the fox. Bullets tore through the fox like rocks through smoke. As though the fox weren't really there. Deri drew her revolver and leaned out. The deafening blast rang against her folded back ears. She dove back as bullets licked at her position. Plasma struck the fox, warranting an aggravated hiss. Before Deri could blink, the strange abomination was beside her and even more shouts came from around the corner and up the street. They couldn't stay here.

"What do we do now," Penny hissed, scratching with short claws at her singed shoulder. Smoldering... hardened ooze licked at the portion of shady furflesh struck.

Deri looked from the fox to around the corner.

"Your goddess. Whatever she is..." Deri said before her voice trailed off. Her eyes lingered for a moment on the wound Penny carried. She gave the fox a gentle nudge before taking the lead.

"Let's find her and get the fuck out. We can take the skip fighter... you gonna be okay?"

Penny nodded and tilted her head around unnaturally. Her tongue dragged across the coarse, hardened shadow flesh, a giggle slipping from her lips.

"Yess," the fox answered with a hiss. The two darted down the road as more voices closed in.

Stop... Zanara thought, and a group of bandits froze. She turned and shuffled down the street, if one could call it that. The sharkwoman had seen many a dull backwater town in her long life of adventure. This place, though? Its decrepit, sand worn buildings disgusted her. It's criminal citizens repulsed her. How anyone could live in such grovelling squalor was beyond her comprehension. Eyes rolled as she compelled another man to stop moving. She sauntered past him, white skirt drawing out behind her. She knew the bar was somewhere. Likely where all the gunfire was coming from.

Turning the corner, she paused and blinked, gold eyes watching the spectacle of violence unfolding before her. Penny and Deri pinned behind a large... machine. Dozens of bandits. Why... it must be the whole camp. Bullets bounced and kicked at the ground around Zanara, tugging at the strands of her hair with menace. Yet none found purchase upon her sacred scales. With a sigh, the shark-woman crossed the wide road.

"What are you doing," Deri yelled. She'd seen the shark deflect a single bullet, but this was another story. They could all get killed. Leaning out, she fired at the swarming gunmen. Her heart raced.

"I'm finding a drink," Zanara answered above the chaotic cacophony of combat. Hands pulled open the door to one building, dislodging it entirely from the hinges. She set it aside and peered inside. Nothing.

"But Zsa Zsa, they hurt," Penny hissed. Patches of her body were hardened from plasma impacts. Her fur sizzled. Something else, something akin to pain, radiated through her fox form.

Zanara's eyes rolled as she moved onto the next building. She braced her hands upon the door.

"You said you could handle it... my helping wasn't part of the deal," she said, pulling the door open. Her eyes lingered on the wolf and the fox. They looked so determined and so afraid. So desperate. The sharkwoman's jaw clenched as a weight shifted against her soul. If their loss was so meaningless... did life even hold meaning?

"Deal with this, fish bitch," a voice tugged Zanara's attention. She heard the click, the snap, and fire and smoke washed across her face.

"ZANARA," Deri shouted as the shark woman staggered back. The grenade blast echoed across the battlefield. Penny pressed the wolf back into cover.