

Tales of Solei: Undaunted (Part One)

Zanara hadn't felt quite like this in some time. Pain from the grenade's explosive shockwave rippled through the scale and bone of her face. Her head rocked back; her mind rattled, her body staggered. She squinted against the flames but didn't see the tongues of fire licking across her golden orbs.

The sharkwoman saw a face. Eyes. Portals into a world that meant everything to her. A shiver shuddered down her spine. Bits of shrapnel carved into her clothing, skittering across her stayed form. The face faded from her vision as smoke licked through the silver strands of her hair.

Zanara emerged from the smoke, wind whispering through the holes of her now ruined outfit, and her gold eyes locked on the man fumbling to reload the grenade launcher. She waited, watched. An anger stirred beneath her gray and white scales. It wasn't fun anymore. The sharkwoman's eyes locked with the man as he raised the gun.

Pain... she thought with focused intent. He locked up as agony twisted his face. The goddess watched before letting out a sigh. She turned, long slender ears flicking to the tune of war. Eyes lingered on Deri and Penny. Zanara's lips curled as she let out one final sigh. The fox was worth saving.

Gold gaze took in the legions. There were so many. The dark spots set against the gray of her body began the shimmer with a luminescence born from within. Her hands balled into fists, tired joints popping into place as the Solei'anna let the ancient power flow into her limbs. Turning a spoon was easy, a trick to amuse the children. Routing an army...

Zanara's eyes flicked back to Deri. The mortal wolf who would attempt such a feat with nothing but gunpowder and grit. The wolf that kill and die for her very own everything. The glow against Zanara's spots glowed brighter. She drew in the air; tasted its dryness. Letting eyes slip closed, the sharkwoman stepped forward, toward the gunfire. The bullets deflected well before striking her. Plasma hurled her way stopped short against the aura of energy exerting from her form. She walked, undaunted, hand raising toward them. Cosmic forces twirled around her fingers like distorted transparent ribbons. She could kill them. Should kill them. They were criminals in the eyes of mortals. A smirk tugged at her cheek. But it was better to have survivors to tell her tale.

Eyes opening with light radiating from the gold surrounding her pupils, Zanara's finger braced together. She snapped. The action was normal but the arcane energy that sparked between her fingers released with a thunderous rumble. Adobe cracked. Wood splintered. The buildings began to give way and crumble.

Her long finned tail snapped to the side. The currents of air whipped from it, the wind exerted growing in breadth and intensity, pulling sand into a wave. A satisfied exhale flowed from her curled lips. Panic was upon the mortals now. They fled for new cover. Zanara turned, tail

swishing and casting another sweep of wind. Her eyes looked at the other buildings, the groups of banditry. They thought they wielded power because they had numbers and guns. She drew in another breath. Her body already grew weary under the energy she wielded. It had been so long since she last cast with such scale.

Still, Zanara had more than enough power to prevail. Through glimmering gold eyes, the sharkwoman could see the hordes of banditry gathering behind the adobe buildings. She stretched out her hand as gusts driven by divine power tugged at the holed white skirt around her waist. Stepping forward, Zanara let the scales of brown radiate gold light, the power sweeping down her arm as it gathered to her will. It ached in her bones. Ached in her chest. Ready to release.

The Solei'anna swung her arm up and the buildings lifted. Sand toppled from their base as one by one they rose into the air. The Gun Rustler's, for their part, responded appropriately. A torrent of bullets and lead scorched the air. It sparked against Zanara's aural pressure, deflecting or absorbing on the torrent of unseen energy she projected. The silverhaired shark, unfazed, walked toward them.

Deri's eyes watched, wide with awe. She knew the sharkwoman was powerful. Instinct told her that the moment they squared off the temple.

But this... Deri thought, orange eyes watching with jaw slacked. The gray and white fur covering the wolfwoman bristled at the sight. Every instinct in her gut told her to run. Her body tremored with that impulse and yet she remained planted behind the overturned wagon. She couldn't look away from the spectacle that was Zanara unleashed. She couldn't help but feel small in the presence of the terrifying cosmic force.

Terrifying... but beautiful, Deri thought with breath lightly taken. Her eyes slid across Zanara's glowing form. Like staring into the heart of a galaxy. A black furred hand gripped her shoulder.

"Deri... wolf, we must go," Penny's voice hissed across Deri's triangular ears. The wolf tore her eyes away from Zanara. A part of her wanted to remain. It felt wrong leaving Zanara behind. But there was pragmatism to the fox's words. Her eyes wandered back to the sharkwoman's mighty stand one last time. Slowly the wolf's hesitation relented and Deri nodded.

"Yeah. If we make it to the Skip Fighter, we can contact my idiot brother, then swing by and pick her up," she said, her mind snapping her lupine body into action. She reloaded her auto-revolver, each fresh sliver of brass sliding cleanly into the chamber. Orange wolf eyes swept the sand frenzied horizon. The fighter was somewhere out there. Beyond the walls of the compound.

Taking a deep breath, Deri pulled herself up. She followed the fox into the swirling squall of sand. It pelted her ears, and her black and white hair. It was deafening. Abrasive. Her fur and

clothing provided little comfort against the blasting grains. She had to shield her eyes with her hand. Penny was but a faint shadow against the driving sands. The sky was mottled to dusk.

Looking back, her hair billowed around her face as the winds that swept toward the shark swirled around her. A faint, persisting glow of gold emanated from the twisting darkness of the sands. Deri coughed up the sandy lump in her throat and turned forward. Her feet plodded to a stop.

Where was the fox, Deri thought as her chest tightened around her already choked lungs. She pressed onward. Step after step through the blowing grains. Through folded ears, she thought she could hear voices. Or maybe it was the howling wind. There were no tracks to follow, no sun to navigate by. The wolf huddled her jacket close around her body and stomped her boots forward.

It was hard to tell how long she walked. Midnight locks frosted in white wisped wildly in the wind. She must have made it beyond the gate. The ground was growing rocky. The winds were slacking. Her orange eyes peered farther into the sea of sand. She burst from the fringes of the localized sand storm, pantining. A shiver ran down her spine as she gazed back. Somewhere in there she could only assume Zanara was still fighting.

"Going somewhere," A mechanized voice roared from above. Deri swivelled on the ball of her foot to the sound. A dark shape. Swinging metal. Deri scarcely got her forearms up and regretted it immediately as metal met her fur and bone. Pain rolled across her arms and back as she lay sprawled on the ground. Orange eyes flicked up at the metal clad man. The Gun-Rustler himself.

Jaw clenched through the pain, the wolf rolled and her furry hand collected her weathered revolver from sand and stone.

"Just fuck off, dude," She bit back and the revolver barked in her hand, the painful jolt snapping up her already aching arm. Three shots rang clean, bouncing off the shimmering metal man. Deri grimaced. A boisterous laugh rang from the man.

"My turn," He roared before raising his hand. A mess of swirling barrels and feeding rounds came to life around his forearm. Deri dove as the thunder unleashed. Bullets peppered the rocks. Sparks carved through the air around her. She held her breath, heart in her throat, eyes closed. All she could do was wait.

Where the fuck was the fox... she thought to herself.