

Please be advised the content of this podcast contains violence, murder, blood, smoking, alcohol, mentions of suicide and driving sound effects. Please avoid listening to this in a car. We also swear... a whole lot. So... there's that.

ELIO

So, if my timeline's correct, Shinji, you're on a boat going to rendez-vous point.

SHINJI

Well, not directly.

ELIO

No.

SHINJI

The smugglers took me to the hidden shore of another island, about an hour away from Toshima. They jumped on the docks and a really fat man welcomed them with a hug. He had some sort of permanent smile on his face-

You know... like when anxious people smile for no reason?

TALIA

Yeah.

SHINJI

He was like that.

So I go and meet him, we shake hands and he takes me to his weirdly fancy car, which was... reassuring in a way, because it meant that those people were fairly connected, right? Wealthy. I waved goodbye to the boat-guys and... the road continued. I fell asleep immediately. It took me about a couple weeks after that to get to Mexico.

ELIO

Yeah we'll get to that. And you Talia?

TALIA

Honestly until I met you my trip was pretty chill. Just one boat straight to Mexico and then a few days walk to the rendez-vous point. But you spent a night talking to a goddess before moving on so I wanna hear about that.

ELIO

Well, she hates movies.

TALIA

What?

SHINJI

You talked about movies?

TALIA

With a goddess?

SHINJI

She knows what they are?

ELIO

She was in my head, she knew everything I've seen and experienced in my life until that point.

TALIA

And... why the hate?

ELIO

Oh because ummm... how did she phrase it? She said the church has always been the most influential actor in the history of the United States, so when cinema appeared, they were the one with enough money and power to control production, distribution, censorship, everything. And... basically they picked a young film star, groomed him to become this sort of holy figure- and the whole nation got to see it! Their faith ignited at once and... That's how we ended up with the Holy Emperor. Movies.

TALIA

Wait, you had TV in your village?

ELIO

It was the country side, not the 18th century... we had internet.

TALIA

Oh, ok. So you just talked about movies all night?

ELIO

No - No, no. Of course I did ask about our past and... It was incredible.

She made me walk the path of my ancestors. I wore their armaments. I've heard them speak and sing and joke. We had jokes, man! Stuff I've never heard before. Play on words and turn of phrases that meant there was a love and a pride for this language I've only heard in whispers before. In fear and subligation. And we built an empire. We built pyramids. And we celebrated ourselves every day.

SHINJI

It must have been beautiful.

ELIO

It really was.

But once the morning came I felt so- distant, from last night. I had been through centuries in a matter of hours and I wasn't quite sure who I was. I recalled what happened to me like they were just another vision and... It's in that state that the Path found me, walking around the ruins, hallucinating... They took me in, laid me down in one of their trucks and we drove away. They gave me food and water and-

Those folks are pretty silent aren't they?

SHINJI

Well, the less we know about them, the less we can reveal if we get caught. It only makes sense.

ELIO

All they explained to me is that I had to be extracted and they'd take me to a transport. I spent a couple days on that moving truck just... piecing back together who I was and... When I was done, I hadn't cried once. My parents died and I never got to mourn them.

TALIA

...Well that's sad.

(A beat. Elio burst out laughing.)

ELIO

Right, I'm really ruining the comedy special right now. Well... life sucks. What do you want me to say?

TALIA

But friends make it better?

ELIO

Absolutely not! You tried to kill me and- remember that time Shinji fucked a Warlock?

SHINJI

Okay-

TALIA

(Talking over)

Yeah that was mad.

SHINJI

Everything turned out fine!

ELIO

We almost *died* like *three times*.

SHINJI

Because you never listen to me-! Just- y'know forget it. It's fine- You've spent a few days with the path, you're minutes away from getting on a boat to Europe... what happens next?

ELIO

Okay, well, we were... imagine the edge of a jungle...

Trees, centuries old, branches high above claimed by bats and monkeys, and a ground only panthers dare to step on. That's what our little group of refugees had to cut through. A green spiderweb the size of a state. Imagine a hunched figure making its way in the night, followed by a dozen more, almost tip-toeing. We had deviated from our initial route because the rendez-vous point had been compromised and we had to readjust a day before extraction. And I knew it was a matter of time before crusaders found us because... I was leading them straight to us. Everyone attuned to spiritual energy felt what happened in the ruins.

Now I don't know how priests can locate sources of energy like that but I knew they could so... I kept that quiet. If I had told anyone else that I carried a goddess with me they would have ditched me on the curb first thing. Luckily, the Path doesn't like to talk. Our guide was pressing us forward when we suddenly heard a gunshot echo through the night.

SFX: Sudden sharp metallic ringing

A few looked back, I heard some quiet swearing and a mother grabbed her child a little closer. I just kept going until we rushed out of the jungle and reached a beautiful beach, a perfect arc of sand by the sea, where our transport awaited. The boat wasn't really reassuring, it was all cutting angles and dark steel, efficiency over grace. Ready to cross the Atlantic. We got knee-deep into the water and sailors immediately started ushering-in our little group, one hand kept on their rifles. Our guide told them we didn't have much time and one of the sailor asked how many were after us.

The guide said "too many", and right on cue-

SFX: Sharp BANG, followed by two smaller bangs.

The blood shield deployed immediately, but this time it felt different. This time it took all the air from my lungs and punched me in the throat. I felt a cold whisper on my forearm and realized... I was draining myself. And I had no idea how to stop it. Crusaders emerged from the forest and started firing away. Sailors took cover however they could, but my group didn't have to. As long

as they stood behind the shield they were safe, but it took them a few seconds to realize that I didn't for how long I could sustain it. I just felt the cold spread through my veins. And then a woman jumped from the bridge of the boat, landing right by my side.

SCENE: Back to studio

TALIA

(Cocky, tongue in cheek)

And she saved everybody's lives ladies and gentlemen, a blue shine from the moon on her dark skin, hair flowing over her shoulders like the waves at her feet and she held her dagger like an extension of her own arms.

ELIO

Yeah, you know what I saw?

TALIA

It was epic.

ELIO

I saw a dumbass, with a big pointy bone the size of a spear, jump into the line of fire, while professional psychopaths were shooting at us. And with the most, arrogant, superhero smile, she said:

TALIA

I'll take it from here.

SCENE: Battle torn beach

The beach was slowly turning into a battlefield. More crusaders had emerged and took positions behind rock formations or hidden within the jungle shadows. Behind Elio's shield, I threw my spear with a mighty cry.

ELIO

Mighty?

TALIA

Shut up.

The soldier I aimed for stepped aside and the spear dug into the sand behind him. I saw him smile before firing again. I pulled back my arm and the spear jumped out of the sand and impaled his back.

SFX: Metallic piercing, followed by a pained grunt.

ELIO

With her hand, she whipped the air, and the dagger flew off again. She was dancing. And the blade followed her lead, leaving a trail of death in its path. The sailors stopped firing, completely mesmerized. And once done, she just... opened her palm and the spear flew back to her. The threat gone, my shield disappeared.

I took a deep breathe, overwhelmed with relief, and I asked:

ELIO (CONT'D)

... Que fue eso?

TALIA

Talia. My name is Talia- I- uh, my Spanish isn't very good.

SFX: *Metallic piercing, followed by a gurgly grunt.*

The cry of a sailor suddenly interrupted us. He fell to the sea, a burning dagger through his throat.

A lone silhouette walked out of jungle, no haste in its movements.

SAILOR

Inquisitor!

ELIO

The sailors started shooting... Bullets rained all around the priest, but not one reached him. And that wasn't luck. That was... a power we didn't understand and something we've never seen before. He was untouchable. It felt like we were just doomed. The inquisitor whispered something under his breath and another dagger flew from his sleeve. The blade pierced a sailor's torso, and the smell of burning flesh rose in the night. A second dagger, its steel on the edge of melting, immediately found the heart of another man. A third quickly followed, to ricochet against my shield. I fell to my knees, immediately. It felt like being cut from the waist down, the blood drained so quickly I couldn't feel my legs at all.

TALIA

The rest of the crew was frantically trying to start the boat and I saw the priest frown, then raise his arms to the side. He looked up to the heavens, and started praying.

He's going to sink the boat!

ELIO

Don't move.

TALIA

I threw my blade and he just... caught it? He didn't even stop his whispers, he just moved aside and his palm closed on the blade. And it burned between his hands, in a burst that should have blown his face off but instead wrapped around him like a mantle, then went out. And I felt this... rage, engulf me. It was like- how dare he? A mere servant! And he dared to stand against me, the chosen one of an old god? Before I realized I had jumped forward, ready to strangle him with my bare hands or... something. I would have raised an army from down below, I would have called upon the ghosts resting between the jungle roots... But I never did.

ELIO

I caught her ankle and pulled her back. She had barely stepped outside the shield when the priest had stopped his incantation and threw his last dagger. The blade bounced against a surge of blood with a thundering sound...

SFX: Metal strikes and reverberates

...And for me everything went dark.

TALIA

I think that's when I woke up. When fear overpowered whatever arrogance Samedi had infused me with. Nothing can prepare you for power. When the lines between god and mortal start to blur, you feel as if nothing could take you down. And as I looked back at the priest I knew it was exactly how he felt. The same zealotry.

I saw him move a hand and I immediately jumped to the side. The daggers all flew back to him, and one of them missed me by an inch. I knew the trick.

I heard Elio fall in the water and I pulled him out, trying to bring him to safety. It was a stupid move in retrospect, it just made us both easy targets, but the boat was finally starting and we were so close... Still we'd all be dead if it weren't for a flash of light in the sky. I saw a hooded figure slowly descend on the beach. The priest hid his daggers back in his sleeves and fell to his knees, eyes wide-open in marvel.

SHINJI

And he said...

PRIEST

... I... I am blessed, to bask in your presence, Lord Angel.

TALIA

The winged figure lowered itself closer, its white cloak unstained, almost shining on its own.

PRIEST

Have you come to join our crusade?

SHINJI

And I shot him.

SFX: Shot followed by the heavy, solid thud of a body hitting the ground

TALIA

I startled in the water and dragged Elio to cover. Two sailors hoisted him up the bridge while the angel's wings gracefully took him to us. Hands raised, I saw the sailors aims their rifles, hands trembling, and with a confidence I didn't have, I ordered:

Stop there.

His wings disappeared, and he fell into the water.

SHINJI

I pulled back my hood and I saw you all perk up in surprise.

TALIA

What... are you?

SHINJI

Japanese?