

WEDGE had got used to not going above the plate much. There were other guys who were runners for the watch; they took care of sourcing the equipment everyone used to defend themselves, mostly old and defective Shinra scrap. That was all he needed, except food for himself and food for his cats, and the slums had plenty to eat even if most of it was more fit for feline than human consumption.

He shielded his eyes as they headed up the steps into Sector 8, and Barret coughed and then laughed, slapping Wedge on the back almost hard enough to make him stumble.

“Not been up here before, huh?” he remarked.

“A few times,” said Wedge truthfully. “I just forget what it’s like, you know? Without the plate over our heads.”

“Damn right,” said Barret, pausing to look up at the sky himself.

“Not seen it much either?” Wedge hazarded.

Barret shook his head. “Nah, seen it plenty. Just thinkin’ about those Shinra bastards. As if bleeding the Planet dry ain’t enough, they gotta take the sun away from us as well. Damn assholes.”

“It’s bright, though,” Wedge murmured.

“What,” said Barret, looking back down at him, “you think those suits are doin’ us a favour? Takin’ away what we’re naturally entitled to?”

“No, no,” said Wedge. “I guess ... I’d like it more if I had some of those, you get me?” He nodded towards Barret’s

shades; Barret frowned for a moment, then raised his hand to the frame, pulled the glasses down a little and grinned.

“Well, you ain’t having mine,” he said. “Come prepared next time, you hear me?”

“Yessir,” said Wedge, smiling back.

Barret snorted. “Good. Now come on, we got reactors to sabotage.”