

NOT everyone knew Benzo was Shinra's brother. The way the Al Bhed raised their children made it easy to hide such things: all the adults looked after the children together, and so it wasn't always clear who was related biologically. Moreover, Al Bhed children tended to wear the same clothes, including a large mask that covered their entire face. Due to this, nobody knew which of them shared a resemblance. If Benzo and Shinra had taken their masks off, somebody might have realised they looked similar, but such things happened only rarely.

Benzo was gifted in languages, and Shinra in science. It couldn't be denied that both of them were geniuses, although Shinra was always the one who got the praise. While Benzo tried to be happy for his brother, he couldn't help feeling somewhat jealous. He attempted to persuade the other Al Bhed that it would be useful to learn the language of the Yevonites, but they weren't interested; they had absolutely no desire for him to teach them.

"If we need to go and live in their cities, we'll learn their language then," they always said. "Otherwise, there's no point. Hopefully, we'll be living here at Home for the foreseeable future anyway."

"But you might not pick it up that easily," Benzo warned them. "Don't you want to learn a bit? Just so you can familiarise yourselves with the basics, in case something happens and we all suddenly have to go and live on the mainland?"

“No,” they said, “other things are more important.”

Having made little progress this way, Benzo tried another method. “What about Rikku?” he reminded them. “Cid’s daughter, you know? She speaks the Yevonite language excellently. She’s very intelligent, good with machina, and everyone respects her. And then there’s her brother: to put it bluntly, he’s a complete idiot. Who would you rather be like? Don’t you want to be educated and sophisticated, like Rikku is?” Al Bhed culture had a somewhat unusual concept of sophistication.

But still nobody paid him any attention, and nothing changed, not until Home was eventually destroyed by the Guado. After that, though, the Al Bhed needed to leave their homeland much earlier than they had anticipated. For a few weeks, everyone was keen to learn the Yevonite language, although their interest quickly waned. And when Sin was finally defeated for good, Shinra was once again the one who came out on top: Rikku’s idiot brother and his friend asked him to join the crew of their new airship, hoping he would be able to take charge of the navigation. There was a rumour that it was because they didn’t want to have to take Cid with them.

Benzo was jealous to begin with: as always, Shinra had been rewarded for his talents, while his own had got him nowhere. But he felt more optimistic after a few days. Now that Shinra was gone, it was already easier for Benzo to per-

suade the others that he was just as intelligent as his brother. And after a while, when the Cactuar Nation was discovered in the desert, Benzo realised his next move was obvious. He would be capable of deciphering the cactuars' strange language much earlier than anyone else would. Indeed, after spending several weeks among them, he succeeded in gaining the ability to understand them perfectly. As a result, the rest of the Al Bhed were finally starting to respect him. He hoped Shinra would never come back.