

This arc, or this specific story, starts just before [Shattered union arc] [1] [Revolts] [9599]. Not this chapter but further chapters will explain what really happened at the Ark after the revolt.

[Ashuta arc] [1] [Ashuta's blade] [9599]

Rev 2.0

Year 9599, September 11th.

Dark night above with pretty glimmering lights, you could clearly see the stars on the sky including Earth. It was there all the time, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year since Moon does not have day and night; the sky was always dark, though clock defined which was day and which was night.

The street was packed neon signs. There were also packs of people on the street, minding their own businesses. Prostitution was among businesses on Moon, and there were many night clubs offering prostitution openly, which was legal to begin with.

Some people claimed that Moon was the dark side of the society from Earth. The rich lived on Earth, and the poor lived on Moon. That had been the silent rule for God knows how many centuries, it was basically ever since the Bau became the dominant clan.

Regardless to say, Moon established a well-developed economy and there was loads of information that was not found elsewhere. You could purchase certain

information for certain price or trade from certain pieces. The laws did not affect the society of Moon the way it did on Earth but another form of laws did exist; money and information were the laws here on the Moon, for civilians at least.

The Bau did not restrict Moon inhabitants too much. Some claimed that they chose Moon to be a buffer zone.

Let me introduce myself; my name is Ashuta, a class B hyper human. I used to be a professional bodyguard on Moon. I also took any part time jobs that required some bawling. It was not that I enjoyed bawling; it's just that a less violent job was hard to come by for someone like me who had no educational degree.

I am currently employed at the Ark. The pay grade was high and the job allowed me to stay on Earth. My original residence used to be here, Moon. The Ark is where politicians are basically.

It was purely luck that I earned my job at the Ark. Usually someone like me who had very little education had no chance of being employed there. But occasionally political factions wanted additional manpower for whatever they were doing or planning. And I got lucky and was selected. They didn't require any audits other than a simple background check. I went to the Ark to finalize my job and had been there for a season before they gave me a vacation.

I was to report in 45 days.

Before I would go back to the Ark, I decided that it was time for me to purchase a decent energy blade. A mass-produced industrial-grade energy blade was something I always had, but with my new job, I wanted a better blade. It didn't have to be top of line. I wouldn't be able to afford such anyway. I just wanted something better than what everyone had.

It was rather common knowledge for Moon inhabitants that information could be bought at certain pubs. I knew which ones after all I was born and grew up here.

My knowledge regarding blade smith was thin at best. In other words, I knew nothing at all about who were out there, hence the need to buy the info. It's also to avoid scams.

There was this pub I used to visit rather often in my youth. And being young, I was curious and eventually found out that the owner of the pub was an info dealer. The name of the pub was called "The Bitch Star". A small, but cozy, pub located underground. It was in downtown.

As I descended through stairs supported by only dim light, I saw brighter light ahead along with chatters. No one complained about the dim light here although it was easy to have an accident walking down.

"Hello, Ashuta, it's been quite a while, yeah?"

The info dealer of the pub was the owner. He usually served his customers alone. He would hire a waitress once in a blue moon and that was about it.

"Hi, master," I greeted him casually.

The pub was small as in there were only six tables, each table capable of serving three customers max. Each table was a round glass table with antique wooden chairs. Those who were regulars to this place enjoyed the cozy atmosphere. To be honest though, I doubted that the owner was making enough money to support himself by just running the pub. Probably being an info dealer was his real profession.

I took a seat on a stool in front of bar counter.

"Seen Anesita around?" I asked him casually.

“Boy, I should ask you that. She was your girlfriend, no?” He smiled at me and continued, “To answer your question though, no, I haven’t seen her in a while just as I haven’t seen you in a while.”

Anesita was my close friend. We both grew up in slums. She was an ESP while I was a hyper-human. We dated a while back before I started to take mercenary jobs. One day, when I came back from a job, she was gone. I hadn’t seen her ever since.

“No, I haven’t seen her ever since. I thought you might know since you know, well, you know.”

Info dealing wasn’t a legal profession since they dealt with sometimes classified information, and it was best to saying it out loud that one was in fact an info dealer.

“The usual, kid?”

“Yeah, sure.”

While he was making my usual drink, he told me, “I believe she left Moon. I heard she snuck into a transport and went somewhere.”

“Too bad. I kinda miss her.”

Anesita was a really cute girl. I think her relatively short height compared to other girls made her cuter. Since we grew up in the same area, I used to hang out with her almost every day. When we reached puberty, we dated. I never made out with her though. To be honest, I even had wet dreams involving her.

“Yes, she was a good lass, always sincere, sometimes too serious.”

Yeah, she was sometimes just too serious. She talked about helping out the poor. I couldn’t talk back on that topic because I knew what it was like to live in poverty. I wondered where she ended up.

“So, kiddo, what brings you here?” He slid my drink to my location.

I whispered, "I want to buy info."

He grabbed a piece of paper from his shirt pocket and slid it to my way. I explained him my situation and my desire to find a crafted energy blade.

Nodding, he told me, "Meet me in the back." Cleaning his hands with a towel, he went into back where I followed.

Chatters from people suddenly vanished; I realized the place was sound proof.

"Alright, blade smiths, yeah?"

"Yeah, I don't think I can afford good ones though? Have any idea on price?"

"Most will probably be out of your reach."

"Figures."

"But really good smiths don't generally sell their crafts. They give it away if they feel someone's worthy."

Shrugging, I told him, "My class is B. I doubt I am good enough for anything good."

"True that. Let me see if I can find someone for you. Hang on."

I saw his eyes becoming loose, a sign that he was diving into information network. The focus in his eyes came back shortly.

"Alright, I got few candidates. But first tell me how much you got."

"I got about 50,000 credit saved up."

"Okay, so your budget will be about 45,000."

Meaning he was going to charge me 5,000 credit for the info.

"Come on, master, you've known me for a long time. You know how many years it took me save up that much. Give me some discount."

"I already applied 50% discount, kiddo. Don't complain."

Well, that shut me up for good.

“You should hit Freedom colony. That’s your best bet.”

Ouch. The transit cost just tripled.

“The ticket to there isn’t cheap.”

“Not many blade smiths in Sol system. Well, there is the Crimson wizard, but I doubt he will craft a blade for ya.”

Agreed... I doubt I could even meet him in person. I didn’t even know the guy made blades. I figured he was always so busy trying to kill people or somethin’.

“And there is Dr. Cezary, but I hear he is ill. He is on Mars. I bet his standards are pretty high also. Not far from here, but I think you will just waste your money.”

Agreed, again.

“There is a guy named Bosvch on New Creg’s.”

“You mean Andromeda union?”

“Yes, a little too far, isn’t it?”

I nodded. I mean even getting to Freedom colony is far enough for me. New Creg’s is like tripe of the distance from here to Freedom colony.

“He supposedly makes okay blades, but I hear he is going through some personal issues. He’s a whackjob or something right now. Don’t bother him unless you want troubles.”

“Hang on, you mean to tell me that there are only two smiths in Sol system?”

“I am positive that there are more, but those two I mentioned were the only registered ones on the network. Then there is Sae the little witch on Freedom colony. Personally, I’d call her Sae the bitch.”

I heard about her, Sae the little witch. A cold blooded assassin who knew no mercy was what she was known for.

“There is also Sslien, the leader of the Gypsies. No idea at all on her location, so don’t bother.”

So far, no one was really within my reach except for that Bosvch guy who he told me to stay away.

“Your best bet is Freedom colony,” He told me, “There are ought to be more unregistered smiths out there.”

“Unregistered smiths can’t be good? I mean why they wouldn’t register if they were good.”

“Some smiths prefer to remain unregistered.”

I was skeptical with little choices. He read my mind and tapped my back.

"I suggest you go to Freedom colony. There are many unknown but skilled smiths there. You might have a better luck getting your blade for a cheaper price. That's all I can tell you."

“Thanks, master. If you ever see Anesita, tell her that I miss her.”

He smiled at me. “You miss her pretty badly, eh?”

“We didn’t even break up. For all I know, she is still my girlfriend. Besides, don’t you miss her, too?”

Anesita often used to work as a waitress at the pub when she was younger. Boy, was she popular among customers. And she didn’t wear anything sexy, either. All she wore was wornout blue jeans and a white T-shirt. She was never sexual; she was just cute which was why I never made a move on her.

“Perhaps, to tell you truth though, I’ve seen so many of you kids come and leave. Hard to remember them all.”

Smiling bitterly, I bid him farewell and left the pub after giving him 5,000 credits. I felt he was lying about not remembering us well. He helped a lot of us out, giving us free foods and recommending us mercenary jobs. Granted, some of us were killed during such jobs and never came back, but most of us were grateful for what he had done to us. Anesita included, I think. Though only few of us managed to survive long enough to become adults. Regardless, I will never forget about him.

Before taking a transit off to Freedom colony which would take weeks just to get there, I decided to visit Dr. Cezary. He resided on Mars which was relatively close to Moon. It was only a week of travel. More importantly, I would pass by there anyway on my way to Freedom colony. The ticket would cost few hundred credits additionally, but I was willing to take that risk.

There had been some political tensions between Earth and Mars. Some loose rumors claimed that the Dietrich clan was going to revolt. No one really knew what was going on there on Mars. And ENN wasn't certainly helping because they loved to exaggerate a lot. Anyhow, thanks to that, there was no one on the transport I was in. I didn't blame them though. There could be a war soon. The tension was there. There were reasons, one of them being the Dietrich never got along well with President Mirren.

I was woken up by a broadcasting message that I arrived at Mars shuttle port. I took off the shuttle. The shuttle port had emptiness as expected. In the meantime, there were really many guards here. And quite naturally, they all stared at me one way or another since I was the only civilian in there.

I rushed to leave the port as quickly as possible. Just as I set my feet outside of main entrance, fierce sand storm hit my face. I had to spit numerous times to repel dirt out of my mouth.

“I am on Mars, alright!” I exclaimed as I was literally swimming in a sand storm.

Unlike on Moon, I had no idea where to go. However, the logical choice was to hit the capital downtown. The capital of Mars is Kamtaka. It’s an underground city. Only a small amount of residents lived on surface due to sand storms. The city also had a floating island directly above the city compound. And there was a castle on it where the Dietrich clan resided.

“Crap, I should have asked him back on Moon.”

Eventually though, I managed to find out that a pub called “Sand Giant” which happened to be a well-known place for exchanging information. The pub was also one of few that stood on surface. Most pubs were underground for safety and ease of cleaning.

On surface, Kamtaka was a small village. There were only a small number of buildings. They seemed to have been built around a sand park. I had no idea the purpose of such a park. But then I wasn’t a Marian. It was none of my business. With only few buildings on surface, it wasn’t hard to find the Sand giant pub. One third of the building was buried in red sand when I got there.

On door, there was a notice attached. It said: Open the door when wind dies off.

And so, I waited and waited. I waited for about few minutes and wind wasn’t slowing down. A man approached and just opened the door and passed by me without paying any attention on the notice. Pouting, I followed him to inside.

An empty scene came into my eyes. There was only one customer who entered before me.

"Hello, there," The bartender hailed me first. "I haven't seen you around here. You new?"

"Yes, I am."

"What can I do for you?"

Since the bartender was polite, I figured that I'd make a sale for him.

"A strong drink. What do you recommend?"

"We call it sand drink."

He told me that it was the traditional drink on Mars.

"Let me try one then."

The bartender poured me the drink. It tasted like a mix of whisky and beer.

"Is it always like this?"

Beaming a grin at me, he replied, "At this hour, yes. You can at a quiet hour."

"I see. Do you sell information here?"

"That depends on what you are looking for."

"I need the location of Cezary."

The bartender shook his head. "I don't think you are lucky."

"Why is that?"

"Cezary's health has been extremely critical past a few years. Now, Cezary is being nursed in his house outside of Kamtaka. It's Southeast from here. It's not far. However, he has not been accepting any kind of guests past a few years."

I groaned a bit. I was beginning to think that I should have taken his advice back at the Bitch Star pub.

“Why are you looking for him anyway?”

I had nothing to hide, so I told him. “I am looking for blade smiths.”

“I don’t think Cezary is capable of crafting any. He is on his death bed basically.”

“1,000 credit and you tell me what you know about him?”

"The business has been slow recently. I got a family to feed, you know?"

“Fine, two thousand.”

“Thank you, sir.”

"Well, there have been really a lot of rumors going around with Cezary. Some information is probably false. It’s up to you what to believe."

He poured me another drink. "It’s on me."

"Thanks."

The bartender began to talk.

"Dr. Cezary is not a blade smith actually, but he has plenty of expertise in that area. He was involved with Project Marat as well."

“Project Marat?”

I had never heard of Project Marat before.

“The project was supposed to discover a new way of space travel. I don’t know whether it was successful or not. But since we don’t have a new way of travel, I suppose it didn’t bear any fruit.”

“You sound as if it was an important project.”

“Not sure about the “important” part, but it certainly was a famous one at that time.”

“How so?”

“Four people were involved in the project and three of them were very famous people.”

“Such as?”

“Cezary, as I mentioned. The Crimson wizard, Masu the sage, and Marat.”

I had no idea who Marat was, but indeed two of them were very famous people. Well, one of them was notorious rather.

“I learned something new today.”

“Well, you paid for it.”

And I hope it’s going to be worth it someday. Probably not to be honest. And my memory isn’t good, either. Why am I wasting two thousand credits for this info again?

“Who’s Marat anyway?”

“The president Mirren’s only child.”

“Never knew he had a child.”

I knew very little about President Mirren. I knew what everyone knew but that was it.

“Well, she was killed. Not many remember her now.”

The bartender became silent. It was his way of saying that he was done.

“Thanks, bud.”

It took me 17 days of shuttle traveling to get to Freedom colony from Mars.

Freedom colony was the heart of the neutral zone. As the name of the colony suggested, there was no governing body. Aedy Freedom built the colony hundreds ago and it grew in size. Now they had a small fleet as well as a fleet to defend it. The population was in hundreds of millions.

It started out in a lawless zone that stood between Andromeda union and United Sol. Originally, only runaway criminals found their way into the colony. Eventually, however, people who wanted to leave either United Sol or Andromeda union flocked into the colony.

The Freedom colony was known as a place with freedom. There was no tax at all and there were no written laws. People generally behaved themselves in their newfound heaven. A small group of elites controlled the colony, or so I was told.

Due to the nature of the colony, there were various kind of people. Some were hardened criminals, staying low for whatever they had done wrong in the past. Some were refugees. Some were ex politicians seeking a shelter. There were also native residents, living rather peacefully. Peace and order were kept by local law enforcement units controlled by the elites that had control of the colony led by Aedy Freedom. Since there was no written law or anything, punishment was case by case.

It was my first time ever visiting the colony and my first impression was somewhat similar to that of Moon except the overall atmosphere was bright whereas the atmosphere back on Moon was rather dark. Maybe, it had something to do with the sky. On Moon, it was always dark sky. In the colony, I could see artificial blue sky of Earth.

In addition, everything was packed so tight. I could see the famous rail bus literally flying through above. Several of them were flying through at once. On the ground, there were crowds of people minding their own business. I was in an industrial block.

I was completely lost on where to go next and I wasn't going to ask a random stranger about blade smiths.

Thankfully, I was able to obtain a map of the colony from a reception lobby when I took off the shuttle. The colony was made of blocks. Each blocks had its own names. I was apparently in industrial block # 6. And there were 24 more industrial blocks. I wasn't going to explore all 30 blocks mindlessly, but I decided to explore the block I was currently in throughout to get an idea of what kind of place I was in. I might not get another chance to come here.

Although called industrial block, it was pretty much a giant market place. There were all kind of different shops, ranging from simple clothes stop to sophisticated implant shop.

“Ah-”

Then I came across a shop dealing with energy blades and I saw “custom” blades on display. I immediately entered the shop. The shop was selling all kind of different grade of energy blades. I saw civilian grade, industrial grade, military grade, and custom grade. The shop was clean and the blades were neatly arranged on walls. Some were hanging in air by wires from ceiling.

“Is this even legal?” I said to myself.

“There is no law here, you new?” The shop clerk heard me and answered me from afar behind his counter.

“Yeah, I am new.”

“Help yourself.”

“What are these custom blades?”

“Hobbyists made them.”

Hobbyists? Seriously?

“People make energy blades for fun? I thought they were expensive to produce by hand.”

“They are. Are you after custom blades?”

“Sort of. I want a decent one.”

“The ones I have here are all decent, me approved.”

Yeah, like I am going to trust some random guy’s approval.

“Custom blades have its crafters’ signature somewhere on its hilt.”

I approached a custom blade on display. I saw no such a thing.

“Of course, sometimes they don’t put a signature.”

I realized there was no price tag on custom blades. “How much are these?”

“No idea. If you want to buy one of those, tell me and I will have to call its maker.”

“Anything you can recommend?”

“Depends on how much you got.”

I told him I had about 40.000 credits.

“That ain’t much.”

Tell me something I don’t know, dude. I originally had 50.000!

“How much do good ones cost anyway?” I figured I’d ask.

“Define good ones?”

“You know, like the ones made by the Crimson wizard or someone.”

The clerk had a good long laugh at me.

“Those people never sell their blades. They give’em away.”

“Who has them?”

He shrugged at me. “Beats me. Some have them though. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be known as a blade smith.”

“Oh, well.”

“I heard Reed asked the crimson wizard to craft him a blade. The wizard refused, I heard.”

“Who is Reed?”

“Are you from another world?”

Shrugging, I replied, “I guess I am out of loop.”

“Reed works here in Freedom colony. He is one of leading elites here along with Lila.”

“I am not from here, remember?”

“You from United Sol?”

I nodded at him.

“Then you should still know him. After all, he is Gvew’s son.”

I was going to ask who that was but decided not to.

“So, what can I get for 40.000 credits?”

The store clerk finally stood up from whatever he was sitting on behind his counter. He walked toward me and pointed me at a blade hanging on a wall with few steel wires.

“See that one? I think its maker will let it go for about 40,000.”

Energy blades varied heavily in weight. While their volume was compact, their masses varied greatly depending on what materials were used. Looking at the steel wires and its tenseness, I could tell that the custom blade was heavy, probably a lot heavier than mine.

He stopped me from touching it. “It’s hanging there just barely. I don’t want it to fall. It’s going to break the floor and I will need a lifter to get it back up there.”

“Is that one good?”

“It’s within your price range. That’s all I can tell you.”

Seeing me hesitate, he told me with assurance. “It’s much better than the crap you have on your belt. It’s industrial grade-B blade, right?”

He got that right. I guess he has some experience in dealing with blades.

“That thing weights like what, 40kg?”

“Yeah.”

“That custom blade you are looking at weights 82kg. That should tell you something.”

“Can I at least wield it first?”

He seemed frustrated, presumably due to not wanting to bring in a machine to put it back up there.

“I will help you put it back up there.”

Wanting to make a sale, he seemed to have accepted my request. “Fine, but let me see your ID first. I want to know that you can lift that thing. I’ve met too many customers who wanted a good blade without being able to lift them!”

I showed him my ID gladly.

“Alright, your name is Ashuta and class B Hyper-human. Let me verify this ID.”

“Sure thing.”

He took my ID and went back to his counter. He came back soon after.

Giving my ID back to me, he said to me, “Alright, mister, you can wield it.”

I carefully lifted the blade. It felt slightly heavy. I swung it few times in my hand. It felt completely different from my industrial blade. I would need some time to get used to the new weight. Wielding a heavier blade would result in great increase in raw slashing powers.

“Can I activate it?”

“Sure thing.”

It felt awkwardly different. I never wielded a custom blade before and it certainly felt different. The clerk watched me swing the blade numerous times and eventually asked me.

“Want to buy it?”

I deactivated it and inspected the hilt. I saw an engraved “J” on bottom, presumably this was the signature of the maker.

“So, 40,000 for this?”

The clerk nodded.

“How about 38,000? I gotta buy a ticket back home.” Actually, I lied, sort of. My ticket was two-way but I’d end up on Mars and would have to buy another ticket back to Moon. And I did need some extra credit for food and such until I report back.

The clerk looked obviously disturbed. “I will make a call to its maker and I will let you know.”

He ran back to his counter and clicked a spot right below his year. He must have had a comm. implant installed. Turning his back on me after glancing at me, he started to talk to someone. He talked for a while, sometimes raising his voice. I overheard few parts of his sentences. Those were among lines of, "Yeah, like you are ever gonna sell this one.", "Don't miss this chance." as well as "Are you drunk?"

Made me doubt the maker of the blade. But the blade itself seemed to be decent. I would have to get used to the new weight, but that takes time.

After he seemed to have ended his communication finally, he returned to be with a big smile on his face.

"Deal! The maker has decided to let it go for 38,000 credit."

I gave him my ID and he charged me 38,000 credit which I approved.

"You won't regret it."

Yeah, yeah, typical lines. Placing my new shiny blade on my belt, I left the shop.

"Thank you for your purchase!" He shouted as I left his shop.

Touching my new blade, I said to it, "So, J, I am your new master. Let's get along, shall we?"

I had some time left. I had 45 days when I left Moon. Now, I had 29 days left. By time, I get back to Moon, I would have about 13 days left. I wanted to stay here a little longer, but my bank account was almost empty. I didn't have enough to afford a hotel. Therefore, I had no choice but to leave. I had barely enough for food until I report back to the job.

I visited the Bitch Star as soon as I landed on Moon. Showing the master my new blade, I smiled at him. "I got it finally."

He whistled in response. "Congrats. Who made it?"

My face darkened. "A drunkard named 'J', I think?"

He had a good laugh at me. "So, you bought a custom blade from a shop, eh?"

"You knew about it?"

"Yeah, a lot of unregistered blade smiths make a living that way. J, you said?"

I attempted to hand the blade over to him.

"No, no, I won't able to lift it, kid."

I showed the J mark instead.

"Hm, no idea who J is."

"I hope I am not scammed."

"Don't worry, kid. They are shady, but they don't tend to scam customers."

"Well, glad to hear that."

"So, I looked into Anestia a little bit since you were craving her."

My ears prickled. "Really? What did you find?"

He shook his head slowly. "Sorry, I couldn't find much except that she may have been on Saturn. Where she is right now, I have no idea."

I wonder where she went.

"Thanks, master, for the effort."

"No worries, kiddo. I hope you become big."

Heh, not gonna happen. "Thanks."

I went back to Earth and reported back to the Ark on my 44th day of vacation. I had no idea, at that time that I would soon be involved in an ugly political agenda and would soon be labeled wanted.

- Fin