

[Ashuta arc] [7] [Nano circulation unit] [9631]

Rev 1.2 (Creation date forgot and not recorded | Last modified on December 3, 2018)

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[Juron arc] [4] [The council] [9616]

A unit called *Nano circulation unit* was recently released by a toy company. The name of the company was ZzZ toys. The unit enabled children to create magic-like effects by ingeniously utilizing nano bots. The first units had two devices. One would be equipped on a belt which acted as storage for nano bots. Another would be equipped on wrist as a small bracelet which acted as a controller for nano bots.

Their second version had only the bracelet which had contained its own storage compartment. The effects were completely safe as the bracelet automatically controlled powers of its effects.

The company was run by two key figures. Tacitus was the chief engineer who had over 50% of shares of the company, and Razarl was the assistant chief designer who had a little over 30% of company shares. The rest of shares were sold to public.

Their second version sold well from the beginning. All seemed to be well for the company. It was a few seasons later that a trouble paid them a visit. It was a trouble that they could not escape by any means.

One day on year 9631, a registered letter was delivered to the company. It bore the emblem of Andromeda council.

The letter named the two key figures of the company, Tacitus and Razarl. It was a demand to hand over the blueprint and a prototype of a Nano circulation unit as well as an exclusive right to manufacture the units.

"What the hell is this about?" Razarl read through the letter and complained. The message itself was clear, but he was unclear whether the letter was legit.

"It's cynical," Tacitus added. "But it seems to indicate that the council wants us to hand over the technologies behind our product."

They were in their private quarter at the moment. Rightfully so, they didn't want anyone to know the content of the letter.

"They can't demand that," Razarl raised his voice in annoyance. "Nano deck is our intellectual property."

Nano deck was another name for Nano circulation unit. In fact, Nano deck was more commonly used than its full official name.

"Keep your voice down. We have to think," Tacitus whispered although no one was present in the area.

Having no clear resolution, they paid a visit to their company lawyer who read through the letter and came to a conclusion that it was beyond his ability to verify the letter.

"I think it is legit at least," He said anyway, "But I cannot verify it for sure. You will need someone with some political connections to accomplish that."

Indeed, requesting an official council letter case number to be verified was an offense by itself since it meant doubting the council's intention. It would be a dangerous move and the lawyer wasn't willing to sacrifice his career.

However, Nano deck, or Nano circulation unit, was indeed their intellectual property. They designed the device from ground up. And now they were apparently being asked to hand over their intellectual property for seemingly no apparent reason. They had every right to be furious over the situation.

"They can't do this, can they? The technology is ours," Tacitus stated.

The lawyer made a troubled face, saying carefully, "Not impossible, they can seize properties. They do have to provide a valid warrant though."

The letter was a demand without any sort of warrant. But it did bear the emblem of the council. In addition, the lawyer knew something that neither Tacitus nor Razarl was aware of. It was that the council had powers to seize properties without a valid reason. However, he was not about to tell them. What he was

going to do was refer them to someone else with some political powers to dig into the matter.

He referred them to Wemer, the leader of the Knights.

"Who is that?" Razarl asked cluelessly.

"He is the leader of the Knights," The lawyer explained, "He is a pretty powerful guy politically speaking. He's certainly a lot more powerful than any of us here."

The lawyer warned as he picked up his communication device. He called the Knights HQ and an hour later, an agent had arrived at the company. The agent was Sevn.

Before the lawyer let Tacitus and Razarl meet up with Sevn, he warned, "These guys have the powers to shut down this company. Act with respect please."

Tacitus shrugged with a frown. "Even without a warrant? You know, we haven't done anything wrong here."

"True, I am just telling you to be careful," The lawyer said.

"I can hardly believe we have to go through this," Razarl growled in agreement with Tacitus.

Ignoring Razarl's complaint, he led them to Sevn.

Sevn spent few minutes reading the letter while Tacius and Razarl patiently waited. He made a faint groaning as he seemed to be at the end of the letter.

“It is probably legit,” He said in conclusion.

“You are not sure?” Razarl raised his voice. “Are you ki-” But Tacitus stopped him by holding his shoulder.

Sevn glanced at Razarl who was forced to calm down by Tacitus. “I do understand your concern. But misuse of the council’s emblem is treated as treason, meaning capital punishment. You don’t even get a trial. You get locked up and get killed eventually in jail. Therefore, no one is likely going to send you a fake council letter.”

Sighing, Tacitus responded, “Very well. What do you suggest that we do?”

“Nothing at this point. This letter has no case number which probably means a random council drafted this on his own and simply sent it to you.”

Looking mildly amused, Tacitus asked, “Why would someone even do that to us?”

“That is something I will need to find out. I will let you know once I find something. Should I contact your lawyer or contact you directly?”

Tacitus handed over his business card. “That’s my direct line.”

Although Sevn did not tell them, he had a good hunch of who might have been behind such a ridiculous demand. And instead of going straight to the council to find out, he went back to the Knights association HQ to meet Wemer.

After being briefed on the situation Wemer responded, “Must be Juron.”

“Exactly,” Sevn said. “The guy has been pulling all sort of tricks to gather fund for his war.”

Juron’s 20-year war funding plan was nearing its conclusion and he had been tirelessly working to raise further fund in order to meet the target earlier. His methods had been largely questionable, seizing criminals’ properties and making up schemes to raise credits. Regardless, his methods didn’t cross the line until this case.

“What’s the value of the company?”

Sevn pulled out his datapad and clicked few times on the screen. “It’s a fairly young company. It’s about 20 years old. Their value had been steadily increasing over the last decade and their recent product launch has tripped their value to about 7 billion credits.”

“What kind of company is it?”

“It’s a toy company.”

“Are you serious? He must have a reason going after this company.”

Sevn looked more and nodded few times with narrowed eyes. “I think I see why.” He placed the datapad down on Wemer’s antique desk.

“Nano circulation unit...?” Wemer read as he looked down to read it. “And so...?”

“With minor modifications, this could be used to enhance an average soldier’s abilities.”

Wemer gave it a thought and agreed. "I see. I must say this guy is quite literally full of tricks. Is he going to sell this or what?"

Sevn spoke with a firm voice. "Whether he is a councilor or not, he cannot simply take someone's properties away. He simply cannot."

"But he did send the letter of intent, no?"

Sevn let out a disgruntled groan and responded shortly after. "The council session is going to be held soon. I will attend it. He will probably bring it up in the session."

In a council session few days later, Juron did bring up the matter by first introducing a possibility that average humans could take advantage of ESP's powers, thus enhancing their effectiveness. He, then, introduced the Nano deck and its company profile.

"I propose that we seize the company and secure the blueprints," He declared.

Sevn was shocked that Juron would blatantly propose to seize a company just like that. And, as if sharing his shock, a council member spoke out promptly.

"You cannot seize a company just like that. We are not communists."

"True," Juron responded right away with a crooked grin. "So, we forage a reason."

Sevn scoffed at this point in his guest seat.

The councilor who asked the question seemed skeptical as well. “Councilor Juron, the company you are talking about is known to us. We were going to make an approach but a formal approach, unlike your savage hostile takeover.”

“I strongly suggest that we simply take it and prevent others from developing this technology. It should remain exclusive to us,” Juron insisted.

“That can certainly be arranged,” The councilor talked back. “But it doesn’t happen to go like you are suggesting.”

The two started to argue and this was when Sevn simply left the council chamber. He had heard enough; Juron’s intention was clear and that was all he needed to know.

He consulted with Wemer and it didn’t take them long enough to reach a conclusion. The company needed to relocate. They needed to move out of Andromeda union’s jurisdiction. Once the conclusion was made, Sevn summoned Tacitus and Razarl to the Knights association HQ and briefed them about the situation as well as a solution.

Tacitus and Razarl, the two men were, for a moment, speechless.

“Seriously, what the hell have we done wrong here?” Unable to contain his discontent, he blurted loudly. “We run a toy company for fuck’s sake.”

Tacitus would normally stop him from speaking his mind too bluntly. However, even he found hard to accept the current situation as well.

“You have not done anything wrong,” Sevn explained, “But unfortunately a councilor wants to seize your company and its Intellectual properties but we are on your side. We, the Knights, will help you.”

Sighing and shaking head at the same time, Tacitus responded, “How are you going to help us?”

“You need to relocate your company out of the nation. I believe Freedom colony is an ideal location.”

Razarl’s face became mangled; he was clearly not pleased. “What the hell.” He raised his voice. “You can’t be serious?”

Sevn pointed out. “If you stay here, you will lose your company. Unless that is what you want.”

Tacitus seemed to have made up his mind and spoke with a firm voice. “Fine, tell us what you need to do.”

“First of all, you two will go through an express immigration and migrate to Freedom colony. Do you have a family?”

Tacitus responded with a nod. “I have a wife and two kids. My partner, Razarl, here is single.”

Sevn nodded as he took a deep breath. “Okay, sir, call your family here. You or your family will live here from now on until we get you to Freedom colony.”

“Woah, wait a second here.” Razarl raised his voice quickly. “What’s going on? Why shouldn’t we leave here?”

“The councilor who wants to seize your company is known for his ruthlessness. There is a good chance that he will attempt to kill both of you, thus making it easier for him to dissolve the company. From what I heard, he wants just the IPs.”

“IPs? What for?” Tacitus asked.

“For military purposes.”

Tacitus groaned as he crossed his arms. “There has been ... an informal approach regarding that before... I don’t believe it was from the council though.”

Razarl smashed his fist onto his palm. “Right, there was an approach before. We said no and that was it though.”

“Either way,” Sevn spoke. “Get your family here. We will take care of the rest.”

Sighing, Tacitus nodded. “Very well. Little choice, we have.”

Ashuta was in his boxer while watching a TV show in his living room. He was lazily scratching his butt as he let out a pleasant laughter at the TV.

His life had been alright. He knew it could have certainly been much, much, worse. Therefore, he had very little complaints on how his life had been.

Today was his day off. He was allowed to have two day offs per a season which wasn't a lot. A regular employee at a normal company would have five times more day offs than he would. But he understood the nature of his career which was often very urgent. During his work days, he would need to sit in front of a console for pretty much all day to respond inquiries and make necessary arrangements in case of a mix up.

He had his day offs cancelled before due to emergencies and when his comm. implant in his ear notified him that he had an urgent call waiting, he wasn't too surprised.

Voluming down his TV, he touched a spot under his right ear. He had a memory implant on his left ear.

"Yes, Ms. Lila. I am here."

He nodded along for a while and responded.

"Yes, ma'am. Right away."

Then he stood up, grabbed his clothes from a wall, dressed up, and left his apartment as soon as he could.

When he arrived at a detention room, he spotted a small crowd. He saw Lila and Reed and then there were about half a dozen of people who couldn't recognize.

"You are quick," Lila commented as she looked at Ashuta. "Let me brief you on the situation quickly."

According to Lila, the crowd he couldn't recognize were Tacitus, his family, and Razarl. They were led by Sevn, a member of the Knights.

"The Knights?" He had no idea about the Knights. He had never been to Andromeda union after all.

"Highly privileged members of a special force," Sevn explained even before Lila could. "Under direct command of the emperor."

Clearing her throat, Lila continued with her briefing. Sevn had apparently led them to Freedom colony for express immigrations. He had already complied necessary paper works.

Ashuta nodded along. Express immigration was mostly Reed and his department. Lila was more of an overseer.

"And this is Ashuta." Lila finally introduced him to the others. "He is one of the core members here."

Sevn and Ashuta exchanged a handshake and Lila left the detention room.

"Alright," Reed, who was reading through the documents, proceeded to hand them over to Ashuta. "Read it over. I am done with it."

Taking the documents off Reed, he asked, "Anything I should be aware of?"

They were speaking boldly in front of Sevn and others.

"This is a high profile case," Reed answered and Ashuta responded back with a grin. "Meaning paper works don't really matter."

Ashuta giggled and confirmed. "You've got it."

Nevertheless, the documents were properly done.

“So, the sum is 8 billion,” Ashuta said to himself as he read through the documents. “And transferring their company’s IPs ...” Then he looked over Tacitus and Razarl. “Well, since the owners are right here, this should be easy.”

“Too easy,” Reed added, “Too suspiciously easy. What aren’t you telling us, Mr. Knight?”

Sevn was calm as if he expected such a reaction. He explained truthfully in front of Tacitus and Razarl. “To sum it up, they are going to require top class protection for a while.”

“Juron, huh. I’ve heard of that guy and what I’ve heard isn’t pretty,” Reed remarked. “He’s a trouble and these people will bring us troubles.”

Ashuta hadn’t heard too much of Juron unlike Reed. The reason being was that Reed took missions while Ashuta stayed on the colony all the time.

“For what is worth,” Sevn added, “A decade is what I think how long they will require protections.”

“How did you come up with that number?” Reed questioned with a suspicious look.

Sevn wasn’t going to tell them that Andromeda union was planning to launch an invasion on United Sol in next few years. It was extra top secret info.

“You will just have to trust me on that. I cannot say more than that.”

Placing a hand on his hip, Reed sighed. The whole deal smelled fishy. “Ashuta, what do you think?” He didn’t want to go ahead with the deal despite of the fact that it would bring a significant benefit to the colony.

“So, Tacitus and Razarl, yes?” Looking past Sevn, Ashuta moved his attention on the small crowd of half a dozen.

“Yes,” Tacitus reluctantly responded after glancing at Sevn who was facing away from them. Ashuta could feel their situation, for he had been a rather similar situation before. He was wanted by United Sol for crimes he never committed. Tacitus and Razarl were about to face similar fate.

“Are you really going with this?” He gently inquired them and Sevn slowly turned around to lay his eyes on them.

Noticing Sevn’s silent signals, Tacitus and Razarl glanced sideways at each other.

“Mr. Knight,” Reed called out. “Let them speak what they have in their mind. Or the deal is off.”

Shrugging, Sevn took a step back.

“We don’t really have a choice in the matter,” Tacitus spoke as soon as he saw Sevn taking a step back. “We will likely end up dead.”

“Do you want to immigrate though?” Ashuta asked once more.

It took a moment for Tacitus to answer. “We don’t. But we have to.”

“We don’t,” Razarl repeated. “But like my pal said just now, we do this or we will end up dead on streets in one way or another. To be frank, this whole situation is

so fucked up. I used to think our nation was fairer than United Sol. I don't think so now."

Ashuta nodded weakly a few times. "I see. You should know that we take one third of total value of your assets in express immigration."

"Wha-" Razarl exclaimed but didn't finish his sentence because Tacitus stopped him.

"But," And Ashuta continued. "Seeing this is a unique case, we will simply take a billion. Of course, since this is a company and its IPs, we will take an equal value in shares. Is that acceptable?"

Reed was a higher ranking officer than Ashuta. However, Ashuta had proven to be a fairer diplomat than Reed who always preferred forcing things through.

Therefore, Lila had granted decision powers in situations where diplomacy was required. This was such a case where Ashuta had the decision power and it was exactly why she called him despite of him being on a day off. Lila could have been present in the scene but chose to utilize Ashuta. Her reason was simple; with her aging over a thousand year old, she needed to ensure that her successors were trained.

"Excuse us for a moment," Tacitus called for a time-out with Razarl. They discussed in whispers away from Ashuta and Reed and came back half a minute later. They made two counter offers. One was giving them two billion value of the

toys which they could resell for whatever price they desired. The second option was half a billion in shares and a billion in goods. They were clearly reluctant to sell the shares.

Tacitus and Razarl had reasons. They were fully confident that their company would see even more success if they relocated to Freedom colony because they would then target both United Sol and Andromeda union. Their target market would double and the company value could double or even triple. A billion value in shares could easily increase accordingly.

Meanwhile, for Ashuta, he didn't think as deep as Tacitus and Razarl but his experience in express immigration taught him that intangible goods could go up in values a lot while tangible goods had a fixed value to them. Lila also taught him to take intangible goods over tangible goods if possible. Tangible goods also had an issue of safe transportation and handling as well as requiring manpower to handle them.

“No, sir,” Ashuta replied firmly. “I've already given a special treatment and slashed the amount we take. I believe the offer is fair.”

Tacitus and Razarl looked disappointed but knew there was little they could resist.

“Then promise us one thing,” Tacitus said to which Ashuta responded with a nod. He continued, “You will never meddle in the company operation. And we want that in the writing, sighed. You will have shares but you won't have the powers as a shareholder.”

“That shall be done. It is never our intention to meddle in anyone else’s business,” Ashuta responded promptly.

“We are too busy to do that anyway,” Reed added jokingly although it was indeed truth.

Soon Ashuta sighed the papers and Reed sighed as a witness.

“With this, you and your family have officially left Andromeda union. Also, the company name and IPs have been transferred,” Ashuta declared.

Sevn said, “They’ve already erased all important data from their company systems. Even if the council wants to seize the company now, they will get nothing of value.”

“You know, you are standing against your own nation by doing this, no?” Reed pointed out. “And you call yourself a member of the Knights.”

Sevn gritted in silence. “I and the Knights are doing what is best for the humanity,” He answered with a clearly angered voice.

“What do you accomplish by doing this then?” Reed pressed on for an answer which Sevn refused a moment ago.

“Again, I cannot say.”

“Ok, fine.” Realizing he wouldn’t be able to make Sevn answer. He turned around and left the detention room. Ashuta had no reason to stop him since he did his part by signing as a witness.

Placing the documents on a scanner and scanning them right away, he told them, "Alright, sirs, I will quickly establish your new bank accounts and arrange a bridge loan. I will also have someone to show you a temporary villa to stay before the day is over."

The clock was ticking 11PM when he was finally done with the express immigration as well as a bridge loan of few billions to get them settled down. He was one of few left in the office and he was getting ready to leave as well. It was when Gid approached him and greeted him.

"Good evening," She greeted casually as she passed by his cubic workplace.

A very short hair and no makeup, Gid wasn't a tomboyish woman. Rather she simply did not care much for appearances.

"Coming in for work now?"

"Yes, it looks like you are about to leave though."

Shrugging with a mild grin, he replied, "Today was supposed to be my day off."

"Well..., it's not like this is your first time having your day off canceled."

Indeed.

"Well, I will talk to you later. I need a nap." Then he stood up and turned around to leave his cubic but Gid stood still at the exit, blocking him essentially. She gestured as if she was having a drink.

"You kidding? You just got here."

Gid placed both of her hands on her hip. "I am not an officer worker, you know. Even if I report in, all I do is just sit and do nothing."

"That does not entitle you skip your work, you know."

She shooed him away and walked away from the exit. "Fine, fine. Talk to you later."

Sighing, Ashuta proceed to leave the administrative building.

In a space colony like Freedom colony, the perception of day and night had little bearing in how people behaved. For the sake of day and night, days were bright and nights were dark, but that was as far as the different went. Some preferred working at day and some preferred working at night. Ashuta preferred the ordinary life style where one would be active during day and rest at night. Gid was opposite. She rested during day and was active at night. Neither life style had any positive or negative impact on careers.

The usual busy scene of the city was laid down before his eyes as he left the administrative building which had an appearance of a rundown, abandoned, structure. The administrative building was often considered a sore sight because it stood out from other structures. Formal complaints were filed before, all of which were blatantly ignored by Lila.

Ashuta believed she had a reason to ignore the complaints but chose not go ask. Actually, he didn't want to bother. It wasn't his business after all.

It was a routine process once he got back home. He took a shower, ate some dummy food along with required nutrition pills, watched some TV shows to blow off some steams, and he was eventually nodding off on the floor with the TV on.

Gid often commented that his life style was boring but he was content with his “boring” life style. He had no ambitions and had no clear goals in his life. Just tagging along was what he decided to do. If he had a family, he may had some goals but without a girlfriend, even that seemed to be a far-fetched dream.

When his eyes opened by the sudden shock of an incoming message, he saw the time was near dawn in 5AM. Blinking his eyes, he lazily touched a spot under his right ear.

“Yeah?”

The call was from Gid and it was an emergency. There was an intruder who teleported into the colony.

“Teleported in?” Rubbing his eyes, Ashuta raised his upper body off the floor. “But I thought Lila had locked the whole colony down from that shit.”

“She has. Still somebody broke it, meaning whoever it is, it’s a powerful ESP,” Gid answered. “I am sending you coordinates to where he was spotted. Prepare for a fight. Be armed. I am going there also. I’ve also called Reed.”

“Alright, on my way.”

He dressed up in rush and washed his face. Equipping a heavy duty belt which had his energy blade attached onto, he looked at himself in a mirror.

“I need to shave,” He said to himself but there was no time. “Oh well.” And he dashed off.

As he approached the coordinates given by Gid, he realized he recognized the neighborhood. He wasn't sure whether it was as coincidence but he escorted Tacius, his family and Razarl to a temporary residence not long ago. And when he was almost to the coordinates, he encountered Reed and Gid who were using scanners to scan the area.

“Any idea who the intruder is?” Ashuta inquired as he made a final dash to reach them.

“Not sure yet, but likely a class S ESP or class A with some sort of specialization,” Reed responded while poking his scanner in the air. Then there was an explosion nearby.

“Looks like we know where he is now,” Gid said as she levitated.

Where they ended up was the temporary villa for Tacitus and Razarl.

“Crap,” Ashuta blurted as he saw the villa with all of its windows shattered. There was also a downed child by the front entrance who was in a small pool of blood.

“The kid is dead, no heartbeat,” Gid said in the air. And Reed quickly drew out his energy blade. So did Ashuta shortly afterwards. Reed dashed forward and jumped through a shattered window, and Ashuta followed in quickly.

“Hello? Mr. Tacitus?” Ashuta shouted while Reed was on high alert. Aside from the shattered windows, the inside of the villa seemed surprisingly undamaged.

“There are people upstairs,” Reed informed while having his scanner upwards.

“Five people.”

“If the intruder is alone, that sounds about right,” Ashuta responded.

“Alright, let’s go.”

When they reached upstairs, they saw the intruder and a gruesome scene where the intruder had a child in the air by telekinesis. Tacitus, his wife, and Razarl were confined in what appeared to be a sphere of a barrier. They were bashing against the barrier desperately to get out but with no success.

“Hah, I should have known...,” Reed growled. “Juron.”

Juron slowly turned his head and responded, “Reed. It’s been a while.”

“Put the child down!” Reed shouted. In response, Juron had a crooked grin and said, “No can do.” And then there was a loud cracking as the boy’s neck was twisted beyond recognition.

Tacitus and his wife were wailing and shouting but no sound seemed to be getting through.

Gritting, Reed dashed toward Juron and slashed at once which Juron responded by pushing a barrier out, basically pushing Reed's blade outward. At this point, Ashuta attempted to sneak his attack in but he was stopped by a strong gust and icy debris. Both of them were blown away.

"You two are no match for me. I am sure you realize that."

Quickly getting themselves up, Reed whispered to Ashuta, "Is Sae home?"

Ashuta whispered back, "No, sir, she's on a mission."

"God damn it," Reed muttered in a whispering tone. At this point, he dashed again but he had two sharp metal daggers in his hands instead. Juron responded by again pushing his barrier out to him but Reed dodged the barrier in the air by circling around and skillfully threw one of his daggers at Juron which glanced off his cheek and left a small cut wound. Juron responded by conjuring an ice whip and whipping him away.

Ashuta, meanwhile, approached the barrier and attempted to smash it. But he wasn't successful.

"No, no," Juron exclaimed gleefully as he whipped Ashuta away from the barrier.

At this moment, Reed was attached on a wall by a hook and drew out two pistols and started firing.

"Sword, daggers, and guns, you have quite a taste!" Juron exclaimed as his barrier blushed off the shots.

Ashuta, then, ran at Juron in an attempt to grab him.

“What a little bugger...!” Juron exclaimed with a growl and blew him away. After being blown into a wall, doubts started to creep into his face. He had heard of how powerful a class S ESP was but having experienced the prowess first-hand, he grew fear. He knew that, if Juron wanted to finish him off, he could have fairly easily. The only reason he didn’t was because of Reed who kept on attacking him on every break he could find.

“Gid, we are stuck. We need Lila,” Touching a spot under his right ear, he whispered. And having done so, he drew out his blade once more and dashed toward Juron.

Reed and Ashuta continued to have a go at Juron who were literally laughing off their attacks. It was obvious that they would not be able to defeat Juron. At this point, they were merely delaying the inevitable defeat.

After few minutes of bashing and being blown off numerous times, they were once again blown off to a wall. Moaning painfully, Reed complained, “I am gonna have a sore back...”

“Sir,” Ashuta whispered as he got himself off a wall. “Lila is here.”

Reed continued to moan loudly and shouted eventually. “I can’t take this anymore. I am going all out!”

It was his way of cue.

“Hah, do your worst,” Juron responded casually. Reed ran forward with a roar and Ashuta followed except he diverted to the barrier which had Tacitus, his wife, and Razarl locked up. Ashuta didn’t do anything to the barrier this time and simply

waited. Momentarily, the barrier had a bright yellow glow to it and then it started to crumble.

Juon sensed that his barrier had become nullified. “What the?!” He blurted as he turned away from Reed to stop Ashuta from rescuing his hostages.

“Hey, you are fighting me!” Reed shouted as he didn’t miss the chance and shoved a dagger into his back.

Juron’s face became mangled with both anger and pain. “You fucking...!” He shouted as he attempted to blow him away once more. However, this time, Reed wouldn’t get blown away. He had apparently anchored himself with wires somehow. And then he shoved another dagger into his chest.

The wounds itself did not concern Juron too much, but he realized the momentum he had was gone. With his hostages gone, prolonging the fight wasn’t wise. Thus, he simply teleported away.

Lila and Gid entered the scene afterwards.

“Thanks, lady, we wouldn’t have been able to fend him off without you,” Reed said while sweeping sweats off his forehead.

“I see that perhaps we need to keep Sae in the colony,” Lila remarked as her eyes became fixed at the child whose neck was twisted beyond normal. Tacitus and his wife crawled toward the child and started to cry over. And Razarl had his back leaned against a nearby wall and seemed to be in a trance as if he couldn’t believe he survived. Ashuta was also sitting and looked very beat.

“We barely made it, ma’am,” Ashuta commented which somehow irked Tacitus.

“You failed!” He aggressively shouted. “Both of my children are dead!”

“The important thing is that you and your wife made it through,” Reed responded indifferently. “We risked our lives, you know.”

“You weren’t good enough!” Tacitus shouted with a teary and hollow voice. He repeated, “You weren’t good enough! Weren’t good enough!” And then he burst into tears with his wife.

“Hey, listen, I under....” Reed was about to respond but noticed Lila shaking her head. Sagging his shoulders, he, Ashuta, and Gid quietly left the scene with Lila.

“Juron, wasn’t it,” Lila said as they were haplessly walking on a street.

“Yes, ma’am,” Reed responded, “I’ve run into him a few times during missions. He is a sick bastard.”

“Shouldn’t we look after them?” Ashuta wondered. “He could still be around.”

“No, I kicked him out. It took some efforts but he’s out of here,” Lila responded, quietly adding, “For now.”

“I am sorry that I wasn’t much of help,” Reed said with sagged shoulders.

“He was a class S ESP. So, actually you held on well. Even I wouldn’t have been able to fend him off in one on one situation,” Lila responded with a long sigh.

Lila was also a class S ESP but she was a support ESP. With her specialization, transmutation, she had an ability to turn almost any matters into something else,

which was exactly how she nullified Juron's barrier by turning the barrier into something else. And there was something else. She knew that her powers were degrading.

In other words, she was slowly dying. With being well over a thousand years old, in fact 1168 years old, she sort of expected her degradation which was how Juron was able to get past her barrier that protected the colony in the first place. At the moment, she was empowering herself to keep the barrier around the colony strong enough to prevent Juron from re-entering. She was sort of overexerting herself but in a subtle manner.

If she wasn't in charge of the colony, she would have left her position some years ago already. However, she needed to ensure that her successors were properly in place before she'd be gone for good. Therefore, she had been attempting to prolong, thus delay, her degradation as much as possible.

The sad truth was that she felt neither Reed nor Ashuta was truly fit. She felt that the colony needed at least one class S ESP or a hyper human. There was Sae but Lila never truly trusted Sae's allegiance.

Meanwhile, neither Tacitus nor Razarl filed a formal complaints and the express immigration went through without a hitch. Their banks accounts were successfully relocated which meant Andromeda union could no longer freeze their accounts, and ZzZ toys were swiftly moved to Freedom colony.

“Ma’am.” Reed entered Lila’s office. Her office was located on ceiling of the general work area of underground administrative division and with two walls being made from glass, she always had a good view on workers. In other words, slacking wasn’t allowed.

Lila was just finishing signing off few papers from her desk. “Yes,” She replied stoically.

“I came here to discuss something.”

There was a four seat sofa not far from her desk. She pointed at the sofa while sighing off more papers. “Have a seat and speak your mind.”

Reed entered and then turned around to make sure that no one was around. And then he even secured the door. Lila noticed his actions although she didn’t stop him. She placed her pen down on the desk and spoke.

“So, what is that you want to speak to me about?”

Reed sat down on the sofa and cleared her throat. “Ma’am, I’d like to talk about what you mentioned not long ago.”

“Which is...?”

“About Sae and her allegiance.”

Lila’s shoulders sagged slightly and she struck back into her chair. Vacantly staring into air, Lila spoke, “Reed, Sae isn’t someone who can truly be on our side.”

“How can you be so sure? I don’t think you have even talked to her yet, have you?” Reed argued.

“I have not,” Lila replied promptly and firmly, “Because I know the answer already.”

Reed shrugged. “Again, how can you be so sure?”

It wasn’t something she could easily explain. She simply knew Sae was a wanderer when she visited Freedom colony for the first time.

“I just know,” She answered weakly.

Seeing he wasn’t going to get a proper answer, he suggested, “Can I talk to her at least? She has stayed here for hundreds of years as far as I know.”

In fact, she had stayed on Freedom colony for over seven hundred years.

Being unable to clearly explain why she thought Sae wouldn’t stay, Lila decided to let Reed have a conversation with her when she got back.

After Reed left, Lila stood up from her chair with a groan and stood in front of one of the glass walls, staring down at the workers down below in their cubic workplaces. Crossing her arms, she recalled a random day when she spotted Sae for the first time.

She wasn’t sure what year it was although she was sure that it was some time in before the year hit 9000. Sae stood out from other passengers from a space ferry because of her overly hyperactive behaviors. When she was walking down from a

ferry, she rolled downwards aerobically and comically. Then she'd stood up at once and then started to run around, giggling and laughing. Docking bay crews mistook her as a lost child and that was how she came to meet Sae. Lila eventually realized that Sae was a class S hybrid. It wasn't hard to realize due to her threatening aura. Her engulfing aura eventually became tamed as years went by and it became harder to tell but that still did not change a fact that Sae was a very unstable and unpredictable person.

When Sae met Lila for the first time in a detention room, she immediately called Lila mom. Since then she kept on referring Lila as her mom. Whatever the true reasons were, Lila knew that her presence was the only element that was keeping her here. If she were to be gone, so would Sae.

It was one more reason to prolong her life.

When Sae eventually got back from her mission, Reed went to see her. She was dressed in her usual fluorescence pink mini skirt and tank top along with high heel latex thigh boots.

"Heya, kid," She casually greeted Reed at the workplace. He recalled how mad he was when Sae called him "kid" for the first time. Although after finding out how old she actually was, his ire quickly cooled off.

"Can we talk? In private."

Sae giggled. "Finally decided to have sex with me, eh?"

Reed giggled back although a bit awkwardly. “Nope, I did tell you that I am never going to sleep with you.”

In response, Sae placed her hands on her hip and ridiculed provocatively, “What, I am not good enough for you?”

“That is not what I meant...” Reed shook his head as he quickly realized that Sae was dragging him completely off track. “Listen, can we just talk in private? It’s important.”

“Are you trying to get me married to you or something? I said no.”

“Will you stop fooling around and just come with me? Damn it!” Grabbed her hand, Reed dragged her out of the workplace and led her to a street and then to a nearby park. Reed’s face was all red because he was embarrassed. Sae was screaming that Reed was going to rape her and whatnot while she was being dragged out of the workplace. But knowing how Sae usually was and how powerful she was, no worker paid any serious attention to her and, well, Reed.

“Okay,” Sae cheerfully said out loud as she jumped and landed on a bench. “What is it you want to talk about?” Her tone, this time, was sincere.

“Fuck..., give me a moment please.” Dealing with Sae was tiresome, he reminded of himself again. Soon enough, he explained the purpose of this occasion along with Juron’s recent intrusion.

“So, to sum it up, Lila claims that you won’t truly be on our side and I disagree. I want to ask you what you really think.”

Sae looked rather confused and asked innocently, “Since when have I sided with you guys?”

“What? But you’ve been here for a very long time.”

“Well, yeah, I’ve been here for many years but that doesn’t mean I’ve sided with you guys? I am employed here and my mom’s here, so here I am.”

Reed narrowed his eyes. She had a point. At the same time, he realized what Lila meant.

“She is not a very good mom though!” Sae pouted. “Sending her daughter to such dangerous missions like that.”

Reed was loss of words for a moment while Sae complained. He realized that Lila was correct in her assessment. Sae was here only because of certain criteria she had set. He had no way of knowing the full list of criteria she had set up, but it seemed certain that Lila was a part of it.

“Yeah, well..., she is just being rough on you,” Reed carried on her joke to change the subject. “I can talk to her if you want.”

“Nah!” She shouted childishly. “Let’s see how long she roasts me.”

Reed had known that Sae was actually a very cunning and calculating person. But she fooled others by acting extremely careless and childish. He was absolutely certain that Sae was actually a pretty clever person although he did doubt her sanity at times.

He had to play along in order not to get her pissed, and it took hours before Sae would stop talking.

One day, Ashuta had brought a new prototype of Nano deck. ZzZ toys announced it “the Attaboy”. He equipped it on his right wrist and demonstrated it in front of others in the workplace. Lila was watching from her office from atop, and others were around him, including Reed and Sae. Gid wasn’t present for an obvious reason. She’d be sleeping in this hour.

“The Attaboy is basically version 3,” Ashuta explained briefly before activating it. On surface, the new Nano deck had an appearance of an oversized bracelet. “It’s 50% smaller than the previous version.”

Upon activation, bright mist particles surrounded him and created what looked like an ESP’s barrier. It had rainbow colors and was impressive visually.

“Not bad,” Reed remarked. “The effect is over the top but it’s for kids anyway.”

And Sae was drooling over the effects.

“Let me show you something else,” Ashuta said while clicking few buttons on the bracelet. Soon, the mist particles withdrew into a hole on the bracelet. He then gestured throwing a punch in the air toward Reed.

“Fireball!” He exclaimed and what appeared to be a fireball came out of the bracelet toward Reed. He startled in response but did not budge, taking the fireball in the face in the end.

“Heh.” Reed chuckled. “That’s pretty cool. It’s warm.”

“At me! At me!” Sae waved repeatedly toward Ashuta who, in response, cast the fireball at her.

“Kids will love that,” Reed remarked as he observed Sae going nuts over the effects. “How much is that thing?”

Ashuta announced, “Preorder now for 12,500ci. Retail price is going to be 15,000ci.”

“Are you trying to sell it to us?” One of workers questioned suspiciously.

“Yes, if you have kids, these will make the perfect gift! Preorder now and save!”

Freedom colony had a billion worth of shares in ZzZ toys. Therefore, the better the company did, the more dividends for the colony administration although Ashuta wasn't thinking that deep. Tacitus simply gave him a prototype and told him to advertise.

“So, how are they doing now?”

Reed and Ashuta was by a vending machine in a rest hall. They popped coke cans.

“Tacitus's wife is pregnant,” Ashuta replied. “So, I am assuming that they are doing fine. About Razarl, I don't know. He seems to be doing okay on surface but I think his personality changed a little.”

“Well, they were almost killed. I wouldn't be surprised.”

“I used to think class S people were just a little more powerful than class A. Boy, was I so wrong,” Ashuta said with a sigh.

“I am pretty sure Crimson wizard is far stronger than Juron,” Reed said as he dipped his coke. Then he chuckled, “And I am also pretty sure that Sae is stronger than Juron.”

“So, who’s stronger, the Crimson wizard and Sae?”

Reed pouted and looked up. “I don’t know. My money is on Crimson wizard though. I’ve heard that the wizard was her mentor actually.”

“For real?”

“For real.”

Ashuta muttered, “That’s too much powers for just one person.”

“Probably...”

Staring at the coke can in his hand, Reed recalled how his father, Gvew, was very vocal about his discontent toward Cecil and his ruthless way of executing plans. But, as a son who could also watch his father in shadows away from public eyes, Reed was fully aware of a fact that Gvew admired and was even envious of Cecil. While Gvew wasn’t a politician, he still had to watch and behave for the sake of public eyes and Reed knew that his father lamented the fact that he had to act all “goody goody”. Gvew had watched Cecil’s methods at the Ark and secretly he was envious of his ruthless way of doing things.

His father eventually attempted Cecil’s way and somehow successfully took over the presidency of United Sol. Of course, there was a price for his actions; he was

assassinated in the end although he died as a hero which was something Reed didn't expect.

"Well, I am going back to work," Said Reed as he threw away the empty coke can to a trash disposal unit.

"Alright," Ashuta responded as he glanced down at the Attaboy. "I am going to return this to Tacitus. I feel silly enough."

"Hah." Reed let out of a brief laughter. "It costs way more than your rent, you know."

Ashuta shrugged. "Rent is ass cheap on this colony anyway. I had no problem pre-paying for five years upfront."

"True enough, see you later, dude."

Reed wasn't horribly shocked when he first heard the news that his father was assassinated. He wasn't horribly sad, either, since he sort of loathed his father. He did wonder whether his sister, Devon, made out alive but he eventually got a word that she escaped safely to Venus which was rather bitter news although understandable. Fleeing to the planet ruled by nemesis would have been a rough choice to make but he felt that Venus was the most logical place to flee; it was close enough and, whether he liked or not, Venus was strong.

He took a deep breath and let out a long sigh as he walked down a hallway. The history recorded former President Mirren as a good president. However, keen

eyes may have noticed that his good period was when Cecil was involved. Once Cecil left, Mirren's leadership went downhill progressively.

And keen eyes may have also noticed how Venus quickly emerged as a strong nation once Cecil took over.

In other words, it wasn't Mirren who was a good leader. It was Cecil.

Or that was Reed's conclusion at least and he understood why his father had a secret admiration.

"... Life is a bitch," He said to himself.

Fin