

[Shell of Pluto] [1] [Shell] [9614]

Rev 1.3 (Last updated April 8 2018)

Related stories (Not required but those three stories are the foundation of this new arc)

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

[Ashuta arc] [2] [Mud Fight] [9600]

[Shattered union] [2] [Karin Bau] [9603]

Stories in parallel

[Juron arc] [3] [The Grand Agenda] [9614]

[Kain and Suu arc] [4] [Rise] [9614]

Prerequisite story

[Milky way arc] [4] [An end to many] [9613]

A petite woman was holding what appeared to be a ceremonial dagger in her right hand. The dagger was pointed inwards at her left chest, or to be more precise, she was pointing the dagger at her heart.

She was standing on a rocky barren field with nothing on it and the sky above her was dark with glimmering stars which was an indication that she was on a planet with a thin atmosphere.

Pointing the dagger toward her heart, she screamed desperately.

“I am here!”

But there was no answer or anything. She took few deep breaths as if she was preparing for something.

“I, Shell of Pluto, am here and I demand a miracle!”

A moment after her declaration, she shoved the dagger into her left chest and immediately tumbled onto the ground. Even with her heart pierced, as an ESP, she was able to hang onto life although her vision was quickly going.

Her life was quickly withdrawing from her body and her vision was quickly hazed. Still, she was able to see a figure ahead.

She was unable to speak any words but was able to smile before her consciousness faded away.

Shell ...

Shell

“Shell!”

“Bah?!” Shell startled by the voice and woke up from her nap. “Oh, geez, you ... scared the crap out of me!”

The man beamed a smile at her. “It’s noon. Let’s get ready. Customers should show up soon.”

Wiping out her drool, she quickly stood up from a chair and checked up on her dagger sheath attached on back of her belt.

“Is something wrong?”

“No, no, I ... just had a strange dream. That’s all.”

Her name was Shell. It was a nickname rather than her real name. She was found unconscious on this planet, Pluto, by John, an owner of a small inn.

Pluto was more or less an abandoned planet. Legally, the planet was under protection of United Sol, but the planet remained pretty much lawless. The planet was essentially similar as the planet Dawn in Andromeda cluster. However, Pluto had slightly better security because there was Pluto police which was a local authority. The police was small in numbers and funding was almost non-existent but it was certainly better than nothing.

Pluto had a single city which had no official name to it. The local residents called the only city “Clyde”. It was the name of the person who discovered the planet. On official documents, Clyde was referred as “Pluto colony Alpha”.

The gravity on the planet was 0.3 which wasn’t ideal but was better than zero gravity. The gravity deemed too low for pregnancy and childbirth, and therefore, procreation was strongly discouraged on the planet.

John’s inn was located not far from Clyde and, while the inn wasn’t exactly popular, there were a small number of regulars. Shell had been working at the inn as a waitress. The inn had a small restaurant and that was how John’s inn was getting by. The inn business itself was pretty much dead, but restaurant part was semi-successful. The restaurant started to do better after Shell started to work there as well. She had plenty of experience as a waitress and had a cute and youthful appearance to go with it. She eventually became something of a mascot for the restaurant.

A group of three men entered the restaurant just as Shell was getting ready.

“Hey, Shell! Looking cute as usual!” One of them greeted her cheerfully.

“Hello, sirs, welcome.”

0.3 gravity meant that walking had to be different. Pluto inhabitants adapted a new form of walking which was basically dash forward once and let the body slowly float above the ground for a moment until it landed. Such a style meant that running was completely unnecessary on Pluto. And with a little creativity and practice, surreal ninja-like movements would be possible.

And Shell did exactly that. As the restaurant became busier, she had to be faster to take orders and deliver them accordingly. She was the only waitress and she had to literally fly around to keep up which became an attraction by itself.

And that helped to boost customer base as well. Why? Because her outfit was a maid dress. Whenever she flew, male customers could see her undies.

Additionally, she was an ESP specialized in manipulation of ice and occasionally she used her powers to create ice cubes when ice ran out at the restaurant. She was also able to fine-tune her control and create ice sculptures as well. She quickly became a popular figure in and out of Clyde.

“Phew, I am beat.”

After sending away the last customer of the day, Shell sat down on one of the chairs and loosened her body.

“Good job as usual,” John patted her head. “You really did live up this place. I can’t thank you enough.”

Shell giggled. “It’s the least I can for you. I will help you out for a while.”

She did not intend to stay on Pluto for too long. Ever since she left Moon, she had been drifting around Sol system to find something she wanted to do. She felt bad to leave someone she cared left behind on Moon however.

Shell was born and grew up on Moon. As an orphan, her childhood wasn’t exactly sweet. She did have a good companion who grew up together. She and he got along very well and she considered him to be an important person in her life. At

one point of her life however, she realized that her childhood friend was starting to see her as a woman but she could never see him as a future husband or anything like so. To her, he was like a brother. Anything beyond that grossed her out.

Therefore, she left without even letting him know. She went to Saturn afterwards and did part-time jobs to get by. She couldn't remember how it happened exactly but she lost consciousness when she picked up a strange dagger on Pluto. It was glowing mysteriously and she had to pick it up out of curiosity.

Being unconsciousness on Pluto was very dangerous. She could have been raped. But it was John who found her and brought her to his inn.

She decided to repay the favor by working as a waitress and that was how she ended up until this point.

“I am going to take a walk, do you mind?”

John was cleaning up tables and he gave her nod, adding, “Just be careful out there.”

“Yeah, be back soon.”

Outside of the only city, Clyde, it was wasteland. The reason it was called wasteland was because garbage, including toxic waste, were dumped illegally from orbit sometimes. With introduction of ACM reactor, garbage and human waste disposal cost went down dramatically. However, ships, especially freighters, still had to pay to depose excess garbage. Therefore, sometimes passing ships dumped their garbage onto the planet.

The residents did attempt to file complaints which went ignored. It was all that bad however. It was possible to scavenge useful items from the garbage, and Shell was a scavenger when she found the dagger.

In fact, pretty much every resident on Pluto was a scavenger. It was a way of life on this planet. They had to make do with what they had and scavenging was a part of it.

Shell was casually walking around in the wasteland. It was full of garbage dumps, and its content ranged from simple paper garbage to metal scraps. She explored her immediate area and made sure that no one was present. She climbed onto one of taller dumps and sat on top, slowly taking out her dagger.

The dagger had a gray matte surface and its edge wasn't sharp at all which was the reason that she believed it was a ceremonial dagger. When she picked it up for the first time, it was glowing in unpleasant dark red color. Since then it never glowed again.

"I wonder if this is worth anything?" She wondered. She needed money to get off Pluto. Planetary travels required a permit that they weren't cheap. She's been working for John for a while now and had enough credits to afford a trip off the planet but she would be flat-broke.

She rose the dagger, pointing at the dark sky.

"What good are ya?" She said to the dagger. Of course, she wasn't expecting a response.

One day, a woman entered the restaurant. She was dressed very neatly and it seemed clear that she wasn't from Pluto.

"I am sorry, we are not open yet," Shell told her who looked as if looking for someone.

"Is John here?" She asked rather desperately.

"I am sorry. We are not open. Please come back in two hours."

"I am looking for John. Is he here?"

It wasn't the first time that a woman was looking for him like this. Shell was usually able to send them back, but this woman was determined to see John.

“I am sorry. I don’t know where he is. But, if you come after when we are open, maybe...”

“I know he is here!” She exclaimed and proceeded deeper into the restaurant at which point Shell dashed in front of her to block her.

“Ma’am, please come back later,” Shell told her calmly.

The woman glared at her for a moment and then told her, “My name is Eder. Tell him that Eder is here. Tell him that this is urgent. I know he is here.”

Seeing no other way, Shell went inside and woke John up. When she told him that Eder was downstairs, he immediately got up and rushed downstairs. Shell followed him.

“Eder!” He dashed toward her and they exchanged a warm hug. “Long time no see! Have you come back just now?”

John was obviously glad to see her and so seemed Eder but her face was dark.

“John, I missed you, but this is no time for this.”

He noticed the mood as well. “What’s going on?” He demanded.

It turned out that John and Eder were married. And Eder had indeed brought damning news.

“War?! What do you mean war?!” John uttered.

Apparently, Andromeda union had declared war, and their fleet of over 10,000 cruisers was approaching Pluto in just few days.

“Clyde is in total panic and chaos,” Eder explained. “It is believed that the fleet is going to bombard the city.”

John wasn’t sure which was more shocking, that they had only few days of notice or that Pluto was going to be bombarded.

Andromeda union had apparently declared war on United Sol only when they were approaching Sol system when they should have declared a war when they were crossing their national border. Still, it was inexcusable that United Sol did not see such a big fleet coming until it was only few days away from Pluto.

“I know what you are thinking, how right?” Eder read John’s mind and spoke even before he’d ask.

She explained that the fleet commander was someone named Juron, a class S ESP, who climbed fast in the ranks. Juron was said to be cunning and brutal and it was his idea not to declare war on United Sol formally until they were close enough to Sol system.

As for United Sol’s lack of response, it was due to various factors. First of all, United Sol command structure was chaotic due to Milky way incident and the appointment of their new president Fraser caused all patrol fleets to withdraw momentarily in order to reform their ranks.

However, the truth was that United Sol never expected a war and they simply did not have any form of advanced alert system in place. Even so, informants from Freedom colony should have sent alerts, but Juron threatened Freedom colony and the colony blocked off all transmissions as a result.

“What now then?” John asked. “Evac?”

Eder’s silence meant that wasn’t an option.

“It’s Pluto.” It was Shell who broke the short silence. “United Sol doesn’t care.”

John gritted his teeth but agreed with Shell. “Let’s hope that only Clyde is bombarded,” He said. “Eder, we need to evacuate the city.”

“The police is on it. I actually came here because they asked me to. They’d like to use your inn as a temporary headquarter.”

“That’s fine. It’s not like I have a choice and anything to help out Plutonians.”

However, it turned out that evacuating the city was easier to be said than done. The city fell into total chaos and lack of respect for Pluto police meant that not many were willing to follow their orders to evacuate the city the way they wanted to.

In other words, inhabitants of Clyde fled in every direction to find shelters and the police had little control over who went where.

John's inn received only a little over ten evacuees and the police never made his inn their temporary HQ.

“Holy crap...,” John uttered.

John, Eder and Shell were looking up on the dark sky where they could see a swarm of cruisers.

Eder added, “So, they are really here...”

It was hard to really feel that they were at a war with Andromeda union. United Sol had plenty of internal conflicts but they never really had a full scale war in Sol system. They never had to worry about war ridden times and it came as a shock to many and many simply did not know how to react. Having no authority to guide them in such a difficult time didn't help the matter, either.

Rumors said the planet was going to be bombarded. However, instead of bombardment, the fleet sent out thousands of shuttles and released marines to occupy Clyde. And when they realized the city was virtually empty, the marines spread out and started to search the wasteland.

Since John's inn wasn't far from the city, soon enough tens of marines arrived at the inn and demanded everyone to come out with their hands in air and everyone did exactly so.

John, Eder, Shell, and others lined up with hands in air and one of the marines was carefully inspecting each of them with a plasma rifle pointed at them.

The marine eventually stopped at Shell and he beamed a smirk at her. She sensed his dirty intention. His rifle hovered around her waist and it eventually ended up chest at which point he poked her breasts with it few times. Shell frowned but there wasn't much she could do.

"You girl, come with me. Keep your hands up."

Everyone knew what was going on and Shell was clearly reluctant to follow his order.

"Are you fucking mute or what?!"

He violently grabbed her arm and attempted to drag her to come with him but she resisted. Some of other marines laughed at him which embarrassed him greatly. His face turned red due to anger and he shouted, "Come with me, bitch!"

The tension was quickly raising and Shell wasn't cooperating. Out of anger and perhaps heat of the moment, the marine accidentally discharged his rifle and a shot went right through her left shoulder. She screamed briefly before falling to the ground, and blood was pouring out of her shoulder. Seeing the ground drench with blood, the marine took few steps back and looked around.

"I...," He stammered badly as he tried to excuse his actions. "I ..., it, it wasn't my fault! She wouldn't, wouldn't, move!"

Meanwhile, Shell didn't move at all and blood was still pouring out of her left shoulder. Pain was already gone since she used her ESP to stop the nerve signals. Regardless, she stayed down and acted.

"Quit your yabbing, motherfucker! Treat her!" John shouted.

"Shut your mouth," Other marine was about to knock John out but he was blasted away by a strong wind. It was Eder who used her ESP and a fight broke out. John swiftly made a kick to a nearby marine and Eder moved in to cover him. Others started to run around.

"Kill them!" One of the marines shouted as they quickly positioned themselves to fire but John and Eder dashed into the inn.

“Call for backup! We will get them!”

There were around fifteen marines and none of them paid any attention to Shell who was bleeding badly but wasn't unconscious. As an ESP, she was capable of handling the wound on her own, but she stayed down to see how the situation would unfold.

The marines were calling for backup and started to barricade a position they picked. Shell's location was over ten feet away from them. Opening one of her eyes slightly as well as by scanning the area with her ESP, she assessed the overall situation. As far as she could tell, John and Eder were safe inside the building and the marines were calling for a reinforcement.

“This is unit #332. We need an immediate backup at our location. The beacon is on and you can find us here.”

The marine nodded few times and responded, “Yes, that's right. I see. We will be waiting.” He then turned around to communicate with other marines at which point he spotted ice forming around Shell's body.

“What the?!” He uttered. “Alert! The woman is an ESP!”

“What woman?”

“The one we shot!”

By time the marines realized Shell was very much alive and kicking, she had already formed thick ice barrier around her body. They subsequently fired at the ice barrier but their weapons weren't very effective and Shell soon attacked back with sharp ice fragments.

The sharp ice fragments pierced their body armors as if they were nothing and several marines went down with ice fragments stuck on their chests. The bodies soon became frozen solid.

“Keep firin-” The shout ended absurdly as John started to fire at them from second floor of the inn.

“We are pinned!” A marine shouted desperately and John had a good laugh at them.

“Did you hear that, Eder? They are panicking and claiming that they are pinned! Pinned by just three people!”

Eder was making sure John was protected with a barrier. She responded with a grin meanwhile.

The marine group was eventually killed, either by Shell’s ice or by John’s shots. Once the scene became quieted down, John and Eder rushed out to see Shell who was coming out of her icy barrier.

“Are you okay?!” John asked loudly as he approached her.

“Yeah, it’s nothing serious. I stopped the bleeding. I did lose quite a bit of blood though...”

“We need to get away from here ASAP,” Eder stated. “They called for a reinforcement, so another group of them will reach here soon.”

“Yeah,” John agreed with a nod. “Shell, do you think you can hang on?”

Shell responded with a firm nod but did frown as she tried to move her left arm. “I can hang on.”

“Alright, let’s get a move on,” John said.

“John,” Shell called him out while they were walking across a vast wasteland. They currently had no destination and was just walking in a random direction away from the inn.

“Yeah?”

“Do you mind telling me who you and Eder really are?”

John made a pause but, within a seconds, he resumed walking. He wouldn't speak for a moment before he let out a laugh.

"It's a long story," He said with a remorseful smile. "But I guess we have some time to kill."

John explained that he and Eder were Ark politicians. They had to flee when the former president Gvew took over by force. He explained that they ended up on this planet intentionally.

"Let's see... That was about..."

Eder answered for him. "14 years ago, give or take a season."

"It's been that long? Time flies, doesn't it."

Their original plan was plot a plan to take the government away from Gvew, but not long after they settled down on Pluto, they realized their plan wouldn't be possible.

"We were just too angry to think clearly at that time," John added. "A sad excuse, I know."

Shell knew little about Gvew's takeover. She simply couldn't care less about political cat battles at that time and even now.

"So long story short, that's how we've been living here. Eder occasionally visited Uranus outpost to gather fresh info."

Eder glared at John and told him, "Yes, I've been working my ass off but it seems you've been fooling around." She recalled how Shell became very protective of him when she wanted to meet John as if random women visiting him was a common occurrence.

"What?" John shrugged. "I am an innocent man, lady."

"Fine, let's say you are innocent. Are you faithful to me?"

John dodged eye contacts and that was an answer enough for Eder. Instead of getting angry, she sighed deeply and told him sorrowfully.

“I guess it couldn’t have been helped. I’ve been away for too often and too long.”

John shrugged again and apologized to her. “I am sorry. But yeah I have my needs and ..., yeah, I could hardly catch you.”

Shell was actually embarrassed by how the subject of the conversation changed. They were talking about their love life while they were fleeing from the inn. Lack of urgency from them amused her as if they went through far worse.

“I heard the President was assassinated,” Shell said as she attempted to bring the conversation back on track.

John and Eder, both of their faces darkened quickly.

“I can’t say I liked him. I mean how he overtook the Ark was inexcusable.” Sighing, John shook his head right after. “But the way he went down, I must say he did go down like a man.”

“I assume he knew he was going to be assassinated,” Eder added. “I’d be very surprised if he didn’t see that coming.”

Shell didn’t know much about Gvew’s regime or even how he “overtook the Ark”. Thus, she made no further comments.

They ventured further into the wasteland, and at one point, they spotted few shuttles hovering over them.

“Damn, we are caught,” John muttered. “Which isn’t too surprising since they can scan the surface for creatures.”

“What do we do now?” Shell exclaimed.

The shuttles descended quickly and landed.

John answered, “I don’t know. We will see how this goes and act accordingly, Eder?”

Eder gave him a nod.

To their surprise, it wasn't additional marines. Five people existed from two shuttles, and they could recognize none of them.

The group casually walked toward highly alerted John, Eder, and Shell.

"I assume you were the ones responsible for the little accident from a small establishment not far from here." One of them who seemed to be leading the group told them. He was a man with an average physique. He seemed pretty much ordinary in all aspects.

"And just who might you be?" John demanded.

"My name is Juron. You may have heard of me, John and I suppose one of the women is Eder."

Eder uttered in silence, "Juron?!"

Shell recalled Juron was the fleet commander.

"Is the petite one your daughter?" Juron inquired casually.

"It is none of your business, Mister," Eder talked back fiercely.

"So, you know who we are. What do you want from us? You must want something from us. Otherwise, you wouldn't have come down here," John stated.

Juron beamed a vague smile. "Indeed, I came here to recruit you."

It was an offer they expected. "Recruit us? What for?" John demanded.

"I want what you know about the Ark and United Sol. We've had spies but I want some first-hand experience in the matter," Juron explained. He lazily looked at each of them and added, "And I must tell you this. You have two choices. You can come with me or die here."

"Not in a million years!" John exclaimed. "I may have not seen eye to eye with the Ark but I am never going to expose vital info!"

"I see." Juron was surprisingly quick to reach a conclusion. "Then time to die." He turned back and told the four gentlemen, "Do it."

“You do know we are here to keep eyes on you, don’t you? We are not your dogs!” One of them told him aggressively.

They started to argue a little although it soon seemed to have settled. A man in a fine white suit stepped forward. He was breathtakingly handsome to Shell’s eyes and his manner of dressing literally made her think that he was a prince in a shining white armor except the reality wasn’t quite so.

“My name is Juun,” He declared calmly. “And I am afraid I have to kill all of you here.”

“Confident, are you? We are three,” John responded while preparing to attack with his rifle.

Juun said no more and readied his blade calmly. At this moment, Shell felt an overwhelming aura from him.

“We... can’t defeat him,” She whispered to Eder who was right next to her.

Eder gritted as she responded. “Even I can tell he is out of our league...”

Regardless, as soon as John fired his rifle, Juun vanished on spot and next thing John saw was his arms below elbows being sliced clean. He screamed in excruciating pain and surreal turn of event.

Neither Eder nor Shell could see Juun’s movements at all.

“Class S hyper human...,” Eder uttered. “So, Andromeda union has a class S in both ESP and hyper human...”

And United Sol had none.

Panting hard, John took some steps back. Realizing what had just happened, he laughed hopelessly. Eder and Shell rushed to him and tried to stop bleeding.

“Don’t bother. We are not getting out of here alive,” John told them.

Meanwhile, Juun was progressively posing again to strike and he vanished on spot. At the same time, knowing what was going to happen to John, Eder dashed in front of him.

Blood spattered as Juun's blade slashed Eder in half. His blade went from her right shoulder through her left waist. It was a powerful and clean slash and she was sliced in half. It was apparent that Eder did attempt to cast a barrier which was futile against Juun's powerful slash.

Eder coughed blood and screamed loudly with unbearable pain. John attempted to catch her upper body but with his arms gone, his attempt looked awkward and obviously didn't work. John quickly kneeled down and talked to Eder who continued to cough blood. Her intestine was spilling out of her body and her lower body was a short distance away from her upper body.

"Oh, Gods..., Oh, Gods..., " John cried out as he got down to Eder.

Juun stood peacefully a distance away from them. "I am sorry," He respectfully told them.

Shell's legs were shaking. Just as Eder said not long ago, Juun was completely out of their league. And knowing what was going to happen to her soon, she had every right to shake her legs and feel the fear.

Regardless, she slowly stood in front of John and Eder, taking out the ceremonial dagger and holding dearly with both of her hands. Her hands and legs were visibly shaking.

Juun looked at Shell for a moment. "That is very respectable, miss," He told her eventually.

"I don't have a choice, do I? If I am to die here, I'd rather at least try fighting for my life."

Juun nodded at her and told her, "Indeed. I shall not make it painful. That is the least I can do for you." And then he slowly posed to strike and Shell's shaking was getting worse.

The dream....

Shell slowly held the dagger backwards. She had nothing to lose either way and pointed the dagger at her left chest.

“What are you doing, miss?” Juun inquired calmly but he reached his own conclusion quickly. “Committing suicide wouldn’t be too bad, either, I admit.”

Panting for a short moment, Shell took a deep breath before she shouted.

“I, Anesita, am here!”

The dagger resonated once and emitted a faint shockwave. Juron narrowed his eyes as he felt the shockwave. He did not like it.

“Finish her quickly,” He told Juun who remained still posed to strike. “Did you not hear me? Kill her now!”

Shell shouted, “I am here and I demand a miracle in exchange of my life!” And the dagger resonated once more but with a stronger shockwave this time.

And taking another deep breath, Shell shoved the dagger into her heart with little hesitation. This was when Juun dashed toward her to behead her. It was to give her the quick painless death he promised to her.

However.

Just as his blade was slashing toward Shell’s neck, another blade clashed with his, creating a sharp and violent shockwave which ruptured John and Eder’s eardrums who were too close.

Juun was pleasantly surprised. No one had managed to stop his full slash so far. Those who managed all had their blades and arms broken if survived.

“Crap,” Juron growled.

John’s eyes were widened because it was a figure he was very familiar with.

“Cecil...!” He blurted. Eder was dying fast but she still managed to smile as she saw Cecil. As much as she hated Cecil as a politician, she knew he was there to help and she knew Cecil would never be defeated.

Cecil and Juun exchanged few blows and the more they fought, the brighter Juun’s face was becoming.

He was pleased.

He was very pleased to have run into an opponent whom he didn’t have to restrict his strength to fight with. Furthermore, he was extremely glad to have a fight that didn’t end in just two slashes.

When Juun jumped backwards to create a distance from Cecil, his face was full of a bright smile.

“Who might you be?” He asked merrily.

“That is the Crimson wizard,” Juron told him instead. “The mighty class S ESP, the most powerful ESP ever existed, the most brutal man ever existed.”

“I care not whether he is an ESP,” Juun responded promptly. “All I know is that I can use all my strength and my opponent doesn’t die.” He posed to strike and vanished on spot. Cecil vanished on spot as well and their blades clashed in air, creating yet another powerful shockwave.

“Welcome to the seventh sense.”

A voice welcomed Shell. She didn’t know where she was but she was on a waving grass field with deep blue sky above.

“Wind... feels nice,” Shell said. “The ... what?”

A person who looked identical to Cecil appeared in front of her and answered her in person this time.

“Welcome to the seventh sense.”

Shell narrowed her eyes; she was able to tell who it was in front of her.

“The Crimson wizard?”

“More or less, yes.”

“What is this place? Heaven? Or Hell? I killed myself, didn’t I?”

Ignoring Shell’s question, the figure spoke, “You seek harmony. You seek peace among chaos.”

Shell was confused. “What?”

“Alas, you do not have the powers to make it occur.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The seventh sense plane offers you knowledge, and thus, solutions.”

“You are not listening to me, are you?”

“The price is one’s life.”

Shell narrowed her eyes. She wasn’t sure what the figure was talking about but she was shocked that something’s price was one’s life.

“You’ve been warned. Come back here when you truly need a miracle.”

Cecil was standing in front of Shell, John, and Eder. Shell was collapsed on ground with her dagger shoved into her left chest but there was no blood and it wasn’t clear what was happening to her. Cecil would not speak any words and Juron felt it was enough.

His goal, whatever it was, was achieved at this point.

“Time for us to leave,” Juron told the others, including Juun.

Juun complied by withdrawing his blade. Turning around, he walked toward his group. But Juron walked toward Cecil, stopping at a fair distance from him still.

“I do have a question, Crimson wizard,” He said out loud. There was no reply from Cecil but he asked nonetheless. “What do you think a war is?”

Juron actually did not expect an answer from him but he did answer.

“Necessary evil and human history is nothing without it.”

A bright smile emerged from Juron. Nodding in agreement, he quietly retreated and his group followed.

When their shuttles were taking off, Cecil turned around to face John and Eder.

“You are John and Eder, correct?”

John was pleasantly surprised. “You know our names?” With even his eardrum ruptured, he was still able to hear albeit with some difficulty.

“Yes, I know what happened to Admiral Gabiro as well. He was a good man.”

John smiled with sorrow. “Yes, he was a good man. Cecil, I know a lot of people give you sticks but you should have taken over the presidency instead of Gvew. If you did, none of this should be happening.”

Cecil sighed faintly. He wasn’t sure whether John was aware but Eder was already dead in his arms.

“United Sol is too corrupted. The federation is in life support at the moment. It would take too much to root out the corruptions,” Cecil explained.

“So, you revolted and took Venus for yourself,” John guessed.

“The Bau must be destroyed if United Sol is to rejuvenate. Alas, at the moment, the Bau is United Sol.”

John seemed to say more but remained silent. He looked down and called out Eder but there was no response from her. Finally realizing that she was dead, he

sobbed for a short moment. Eventually, he looked up at Cecil with tear-soaked eyes.

“I have a favor to ask.”

Cecil nodded at him.

“Send the girl to safety. She is not dead, isn’t she.”

Cecil nodded again.

“She is a good girl. It seems she was never educated as an ESP. She needs a good teacher. I am not saying you should take her in but just send her to safety.”

“Worry not. That is why I’ve come here.” Cecil glanced at Shell and his attention went back to John. “Shall I end you?”

Perhaps a cruel statement, but John took it gladly.

“You read my mind... Thank you.”

“You will not feel anything.”

Cecil made a ticking sound from his left index finger and thumb and a circle of black fire emerged from the barren ground. It was progressively closing in; John and Eder were in middle.

John closed his eyes.

When Shell regained consciousness, she was in an unfamiliar environment. She was in a bed and was in a room. She slowly got herself out of the bed and looked through the only window in the room.

“Sand ... storm?”

There was apparently a raging sand storm outside and it looked as if she was on a floating island because she could see a city down below off an island.

“Where am I ...?”

And then she realized what happened on Pluto.

“John?? Eder??” She raised her voice. Opening the door, she rushed out. A long and silent hallway welcomed her.

“John?? Eder??” She repeated but only silence answered her.

After exploring her immediate surroundings, she came to a conclusion that she was on Mars and that she was currently inside of what was known as Kamtaka castle. Shell had never been to Mars but did read few things about it and Kamtaka floating island was a major landmark on the planet

She eventually ran into a roaming guard who took her to Masu’s office.

A wrinkled bald man with gray stubble and he was wearing a brown monk robe. Shell was immediately able to recognize the figure who was welcoming her.

“M, Masu the sage!” She exclaimed unintentionally.

“Yes, that’d be me, lass.” Beaming a gentle smile, Masu offered a hand for a handshake.

“I, I am deeply honored, sir!”

After the handshake and Shell had calmed down a little, Masu brought her back to the reality.

“Lass, you do recall what happened on Pluto, do you not?”

Narrowing her eyes, her focus was downcast. She thought it may have been some sort of a bad dream. Alas, it was not. Eder would have died. There was no chance that she could survive. John could have survived but her gut feeling told her that he joined Eder.

She looked into Masu’s light brown eyes. “They are dead, aren’t they.”

Masu gave her a weak nod.

“What happened...? I mean how did I get here?”

Masu placed Shell’s dagger on his desk.

“My dagger?” Shell quickly searched her belt and only then she realized it was missing.

“This dagger is Cecil’s creation,” He explained. “It’s rare but he does throw away his creations randomly in random places.”

He explained further that those who pick up Cecil’s creations would usually die on spot and his creation would shatter into pieces. And those who survive would be given an access to the seventh sense.

“What is the seventh sense?” Shell inquired. She felt she had a strange dream when she shoved the dagger into her heart but she couldn’t recall clearly. “I am pretty sure I should be dead.”

“I, too, have been to the seventh sense plane, and I can tell you one thing. You should stay away from it.”

Masu could not explain what it exactly was. He did, however, add his opinion that it was strictly Cecil’s creation and it was deemed dangerous.

“I am uncertain whether you remember, but the price for a wish granted is your life,” Masu said and Shell seemed to have remembered.

“Ah!” She blurted as she regained some of the memories.

“I assume Cecil was too bored when he created such a thing...” He told her but he told her in whisper that she was unable to hear him saying so. “Regardless,” He raised his voice. “It is your choice. If you want the dagger, take it. If not, I shall depose it properly.”

“You still haven’t answered my question though. How did I get here? I am on Mars, right?”

Masu nodded at her and explained that the moment she shoved the dagger into her heart, Cecil appeared and apparently saved her. And that she was apparently taken here.

“Cecil entrusted you to me. You are under my care unless you wish to leave.”

Shell didn’t really have any places to go and she certainly had no clear destination at the moment. With her life Pluto coming to a sudden end, she was truly lost in

what to do next. Originally, she was planning to visit Uranus outpost next but her mood had certainly shifted over the event.

“Yes, I’d like to stay here for a while if you don’t mind.”

What Shell failed to realize at this point, however, was that, by staying put on Mars, she would become a target by United Sol although the possibility of United Sol would bother going after her was highly questionable. She was, after all, an unknown figure at this point.

“Very well, I know it’s late but welcome to Mars. I shall teach you what I know.”

Fin