

Ecliptis

Chapter 1 - The Drop Off

From the POV of: An Unfortunate Soul

My head is pounding, my hands and feet are bound, and I'm blindfolded. Sounds like a situation fit for someone that owes a local gang \$20. The ground is soft, at least. Feels like sand. The wind is picking up, which makes me kinda glad I have this cheap cloth over my eyes. I should probably try to get it off.

The cloth dangles below my nose as I struggle to sit up. Lucky for me, I'm not gagged. I use the thing that got me into this situation in the first place. My mouth. I draw the loose fabric in with a few awkward tongue motions and tug until I get the gritty cloth down the bridge of my nose. As my eyes try their hardest to focus after the dramatic change in light and pressure, I realize how hopeless my situation is.

“Tanikah... they abandoned me on Tanikah.”

After sighing until my lungs are empty, I look out as far as my tired eyes can peer and all I see is sand, plateaus, and the underside of the floating continent above, Ohmnesis. I guess I should be glad they didn't leave me on that shell. They were probably too scared to go to that weird place. A void beast would've eaten me before I regained consciousness. Enough of that thought. I wiggle my body to focus. Now, to get out of these archaic ropes.

“This is the last time I convince a gangster to get me drunk. Wait... If I'm on Tanikah, that means The Stadium is somewhere out here. I'm sure they didn't travel too far from the telestation to toss me out.”

I scoot and roll over to look behind me to realize my intuition is correct. There it is! Standing tall and wide. I've never been so happy to see that bloody mess of a place. It looks like it's about two kilometers away. Not too bad. I'm in good enough shape to make it there before passing out from this

heat. These ropes are giving me the hardest of times though. The dude that tied me up must've been a fisherman or something.

“There! Finally... Who still uses ropes?” I say. I’m not usually one to complain but damn that was a serious hassle. “Kinda effective though. Well, I guess I should start moving.”

This trek will not be a pleasant one. Tanikah is known to be one of the hottest places on Ecliptis. The most intense heat waves pass through the center of the planet and that’s why this shell is mostly uninhabited. Hopefully Ohmnesis floats over me a little longer. I could use the shade.

“Gotta make the best outta this mess!” I use my complimentary blinder as a face mask and make my way toward the only bit of civilization on this dusty plane. Another thing on my prayer list is for there to be someone stationed at the gates. The Stadium isn't in use often. Going straight to the telestation won't help since I'm broke but it may be temporary shelter. I have to hope for a kind soul to be there as well. Luckily, they're in the same direction. Both options are unclear but it's either take a chance or pray to Akasha for an easy death.

While walking, I try my best to get the sand out of my jeans and flats without getting more in them. I take my red and black flannel shirt off and wrap it around my waist. The white tee I’m wearing won't isn't as hot and restricting so it can stay. I’m still sweating pretty badly though. After nearly ten minutes, I can barely make out what appears to be a caravan of vehicles approaching the stadium. They're driving from the direction where the telestation is. Time to pick up my pace to try to arrive at the same time with the caravan! While doing so, I gradually am able differentiate the sound of the turbulent wind from the roaring of a crowd.

“Is there something going on today?” I ask myself. “That's perfect! To get in is the next step.”

I risk it all by running the remainder of the way to the giant colosseum. My breathing is labored and I look a mess. I slump over and rest my hands on my knees as I reach The Stadium. My slick, curly hair lays on my head looking as tired as I am. Some of it gets wiped when I run my hand across my forehead. Some of the black strands stay on my tanned but not yet burnt face. I succeed in reaching my destination just before the caravan of all black, exotic cars and vans. They gather at the entrance in line

where a small crowd has gathered near the driveway. The group of about twenty people seem to be waiting on something or someone. Some of them have their phones out and are aiming the cameras at the cars. I slowly walk up to a trashcan and remove my white tee. I think to wring it out but decide to dump it instead. These tan lines are going to be on me for weeks. I slip on my flannel and try to act as normal as possible.

I slip into the crowd by ducking around some oversized potted plants. I'm sweaty, so staying downwind is the best plan. Once I get to the front and center of the crowd, I gain the attention of one of the onlookers. "Is something supposed to happen, buddy?"

A slim male with a cybernetic right arm squeals in a high pitched, giddy voice, "Lady Luna!"

As the doors on the centermost car glide open, the overly excited cyborg moans and faints. I do my best to catch him, although he's flailing everywhere. At the same time, I try to keep an eye on the shadowy opening of the car that has the crowd's unbroken attention.

The first thing that escapes the dark inside of the vehicle is a slender, light blue leg, peeking ever so quaintly through what appears to be the slit of a long, elegant dress. Her heels hit the pavement softly, almost not even making a sound. They are white as well and are encrusted with gem stones that match her dress' colors. Gasps, 'oohs' and 'ahs' are sputtered around the crowd as the remainder of the subject of everyone's attention fully lifts herself from the low riding car. Lady Luna, Queen of the Unborn, stands boldly before the crowd.

Being created in a lab is cheating when you can design how attractive one will come out but Master Zero did a fine job with her. A few more members of my temporary entourage fall over at the sight of this beautiful queen. Her curves are screaming through the seams of her white and green dress, and my eyes are drinking in all of her glory. A quiet "wow" slips from my lips as I snap out of my lustful glare.

A commanding female voice demands the attention of Lady Luna's audience. It pierces the crowd from behind us. "It's about time, Bluna. You're late." Just past the gate, waiting on the stairs leading into the Stadium, another woman can be seen with her arms folded. She's accompanied by what appears to be her bodyguards. Two large bodies that make her scary to approach. Not to say that she's not already

intimidating herself. Lady Bianca, Queen of the Hominids, dressed in her combat gear for some reason glares over us to Lady Luna. She's sporting a dark blue trench coat decorated with gold buttons and medals from what I'm guessing are years of service. Her boots look like they'd cause some serious damage and her white blouse is ornate but held tightly under a blue vest.

“You told me we were riding together, Bianca!” Luna says, sounding bothered.

“Yeah, well... something came up.” Bianca's eyes shift to the left. “Forget about it. You've already missed the first few matches. You'll never get good picks if you don't hurry your little blue ass up. C'mon!” I always felt their relationship was a little rough around the edges, but I guess sharing a shell would birth that type of interaction. It makes you wonder if the other queens that share shells behave like this.

Luna sighs and closes her hazel eyes. One of her guards approaches her with a gesture to assist her approach to the stadium, but she politely dismisses his kind gesture and proceeds towards her “shellmate“ hehe... Her two guards clear the crowd in her path, and it's at this moment I realize I'm still holding the fainted cyborg. He missed all of what he came here for. Get your shit together guy...

It's also at this moment I realize that this is an opportune moment to slip his wallet. As Luna passes us, I lay the cyborg down and act like I'm straightening his clothes. I run my hands down his waist and bump into a card strap on his belt. I slip the strap off with my left hand and use my right to wipe his face with the ever so helpful cloth that the gangster gave me. After wiping the nonexistent sweat from his face, I drop the cloth into my other hand and pocket both the strap and my new favorite piece of fabric.

While getting back to my feet, my eyes scan the crowd to ensure that I wasn't spotted. I look up the large set of stairs to see the queens entering the stadium. They are greeted by some more guys in suits. That's Stadium security. The most useless bunch of temp workers the world has ever known.

I make my way to the entrance as well to get out of the area of my latest heist. I think aloud as I climb the massive staircase. “You know what? Today isn't turning out as bad as I thought it would. Things are looking up for a little guy named Ashton!”