

Ice Empire

Chapter I

Everything is ephemeral

The sun climbs the skies in the far-horizon, beyond the nothingness of snow, projecting its alluring cloak of luminous saffron rays that reflected against shards of ice like crystals from another world, projecting a transient embrace of calm and tranquility, a deceitful façade that hides the savagery of this desolate ice world.

However, a certain someone resisted the temptations of this façade with zeal and diligence, for in one of the many spires where the Omgerii erected their sprawling towns, the Garj Spire, this peculiar individual spends his morning not admiring the dawn's ever-faithful coming, but instead, drowning his transparent eyes over a myriad of files and reports that he access through his terminal.

With an exhausted mind, troubled by quakes echoing in his head, the reverberations of a troublesome headache, the aftermath of a night spent without any slumber or rest whatsoever, did he dedicated his time to scrutinizing and reviewing countless reports, evidences and files concerning the latest criminal investigation.

The office he found himself in was confined in-between metallic walls of a somber blue, with metallic furniture and intricate electronic contraptions, and a window spreading widely behind him, allowing the sun to glisten its orange morning rays against the back of his neck, lighting up his translucent blue skin and organs.

Suddenly, his labour was interrupted by the automated opening of his open door. A tall silhouette entered in. This figure was much like the tired investigator: a hairless body with a translucent blue skin, thick daunting veins that outlined his body like mountains on the surface of a planet, visible organs and a pair of unsettling transparent eyes. This visitor displayed a sharp blue attire, embroidered by golden symbols which clearly illustrated he was part of some form of law enforcement institution, a criminal investigator, just like the figure he visited.

"Let me guess: Another one dead, right?" came the tired voice of the Omger reading through the reports.

His collocutor sighed. "Yes." he replied.

"Splendid! I grew tired of going home anyway!" he exclaimed. "Is it the same case or... something new?"

“The same case.” The other officer replied as he eyed a chair sitting next to his partner’s desk. He began to sit on it. “We found this one on Platform 3, in a back-alley that led to the market. Apart from that, everything was identical: the body was disposed almost intact, with all the organs having been extracted, including the yes. There was also a blue-coloured symbol resembling what appeared to be an eye on a nearby wall. Shortly afterwards, we received note that another such symbol was found in the residential district of Platform 2, right in the victim’s apartment.” he said.

“Where was the last place the victim was sighted as, Eto?”

“The neighbours claimed to have seen it at home a few hours before his death, Jorj.” Eto replied.

“Like in previous cases...” Jorj muttered. “They indicate the places the victim was abducted from, and where he was disposed. But I fail to understand something...”

“What exactly?” Eto asked curiously.

“All these murders...” Jorj said, pointing out towards the stacks of reports spread over his desk. “Last week we had an unemployed individual disappear from the streets, only to find his body two days afterwards, in the sewage system, perfectly disemboweled of all his organs. One month before him, a mother, a person who had a family, Eto, disappeared only to be found in her own home by her family when they returned from the Security where they stated her disappearance. Few days before that, one of the senators disappeared, you know him, Garaj Lib, from the bathroom of the senatorial palace, without the senatorial guard noticing, only to have his body appear on Platform 5, in a random person’s apartment without any organs left.”

“And where are you trying to get at?” Eto asked.

“That these crimes are entirely random! Observe!” Jorj shouted. “It is like people randomly disappear off the streets, only to have their bodies disposed of after some time. Not only that but these disappearances occur at irregular moments of time. Apart from the blue symbol and their complete disembowelment, there is no other pattern!”

Silence engulfed the room as the two stared into each other’s transparent, gooey eyes.

“So, who is doing this?” Jorj broke the silence, addressing this inquiry.

“Cannibals?” Eto wondered.

“No... Cannibals are a prominent problem, they have always been so, and will always be. But I have never seen one act in such a manner.” Jorj replied.

Indeed, cannibalism was a common occurrence inside the countless spires that adorn this planet. Upon other worlds, the target of delinquent, criminal behaviour, was often the pursuit of valuable items another individual possessed, however, upon this wretched world where every living being seeks to consume one another in a desperate attempt to escape the

devouring grasp of the freezing cold, where food is scarce, there are those who fail to resist their animalistic urges, and in a drive to assure their survival, commit acts most unspeakable.

“I mean...” Jorj continued. “Would you think a cannibal would be so wasteful and leave the body without eating it as well?”

“N-no...” Eto replied.

“And we cannot speak of assassination either...” Jorj mumbled. “It could be a mindless serial killer...” he muttered, sinking his forehead into his palms. “It could be a serial killer who just wants to toy with us, as if the planet killing us was not enough...”

Jorj shook his head inside his palms, trying to contemplate the nature of these utterly bizarre crimes that broke out in the Spire a few months ago. An individual dedicated to his job with admirable conviction, he joined Security as a criminal investigator twenty cycles before, and he plans to live a long-lasting career, especially since an Omger can live as long as three hundred cycles before succumbing to natural causes, while Jorj barely scrapes the age of sixty. Like many others, he knew of the dangers of the planet, and he vowed to try and give his fellow citizens a sense of protection. In all his years however, he only had to deal with thieves, trespassers, people who killed out of necessity, be it hunger or other desperation, or savage cannibals. Never has he seen such well contrived and mysterious murders.

Jorj glanced over his palms, his eyes flickering with light as the lamp on the ceiling reflected its light into their transparency. He noticed Eto peeking out of the office door in a rather curious manner, with his chin raised upwards. At that moment, Jorj was intrigued to see his partner’s heart beat vigorously, as if he was nervous of something.

“Are you even paying attention?” he said in a rather irritated tone that managed to grab his partner’s attention.

“Ummm...Yes, yes. I was just looking... for her.” Eto replied.

“For who?” Jorj asked, puzzled.

“For Aua. You know, my friend, I grew to rather like her, especially with that little yellow star mark on her forehead. She just looks so fragile and precious, just like a new dawn.”

Aua was a rather new member amidst the Security’s “Investigative Bureau of Criminal Behaviour” but nonetheless, she was a person Eto grew infatuated over as he found her compassionate personality most endearing, not to mention that the yellow star mark on her forehead made him associate her with the beauty of the morning sun. It was a common thing, amidst the Omgerii, to adorn their bodies with marks, paintings, tattoos, and so on, since they all looked very similar and indistinguishable. The personalized markings therefore, would add a unique flavour of individuality. There was, however, a notable difference between male and females, besides the obvious anatomical differences every sensible person would expect: While males were completely hairless and bald, females would possess blue scaly crests on

their heads in various shapes and forms. Aua had two such crests, starting from the tip of her forehead, and coursing down towards her neck.

“We have these crimes to look into and you think about love?” Jorj reproached.

“Well, you know, Jorj... Life is short and fleeting, and it can be very desolate if we do not fill it with love or passion.”

“Everything is fleeting.” Jorj added in an attempt to lecture his partner.

“And is that not one more reason to take the opportunity while you can still grasp it? To treasure something while you can still have it?”

Jorj rolled his eyes subtly. He then sank them into the terminal.

“How many disappearances have we recorded this past month?” he asked.

Suddenly changing the subject was Jorj’s undoubtedly courteous way of telling his conversation partner that he has a point. Truthfully, however, this was Jorj’s tactic to avoid getting his ego scathed, though it was so evident and blunt that he could have simply conceded instead, and Eto knew that.

Eto smirked, recognizing his victory. “Hm, besides these crimes, last month we had twenty-eight disappearances. And we sighted seventeen such symbols. That means...”

“...That there were either seventeen disappearances under these circumstances or that we’ve only found seventeen symbols so far...” Jorj interrupted him.

Unexpectedly, the terminal started to unleash strident beeping noises signaling that a message of utmost urgency was being sent. Jorj’s attention pounced at the terminal, opening the message.

The next moment, he got up under the perplexed eyes of his partner, and with a harsh, rushing voice, he said:

“Come! They found another body!”