

[Alien arc] [12] [Allies] [12331]

Rev 1.3 (Last modified on Jan 7, 2021)

Two seasons (6 months) passed since Gallo and the others had returned to Cyan. Cyan's economy was just starting to get back to life. Local people, whether they were original settlers or they were drifters from outer space, started to get used to how things were running on Cyan.

Naliss had started an active campaign on Cyan's local residents that Gallo was their leader by placing ads on streets.

Majority of local residences were miners for that was the only available job for them.

Egna woke up meanwhile and started to get on her feet eventually. She no longer smiled though.

Gallo was on a patrol as usual. Naliss wanted to further improve public security. After losing Embrek and Karesinda as well as most of his original squad from Gray Mist, the children from the Osprey had come under his wing. Gallo no longer had skilled and loyal comrades such as Embrek and Karesinda.

When he reached Cyan food distribution center, it was where food was being given to local residents, he saw Calvin there.

"Gallo, it's been some time." He greeted him casually. "And a good timing also. I'd like to have a word with you."

Gallo nodded.

They went to back of the food distribution center.

"What is it?" Gallo asked. He wasn't curious however.

"Well, I will get to the topic right away. I'd like to retire."

Gallo didn't quite understand what he meant.

"Retire? What do you mean?"

Calvin scratched his head. "Well, I would like to retire and get married."

"To whom?"

"You know her, Erune."

"Ah..."

"I'd like to run the orphanage with her and want your permission as well as blessing on this matter."

He was truly glad for a reason that Calvin would not get killed by his mistake at least.

"Congratulations!" Gallo took Calvin hands by surprise. "Good for you and her."

Calvin beamed a smile at Gallo. "There won't be any parties. We all know that ..."

"No, we will have a party. Whether it is big or small, we will have one."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course!"

They had a small party at Erune's church on that day. There wasn't going to be a marriage ceremony because none of people there knew such existed. For them, marriage was a simple promise between a man and a woman.

As Calvin retired, Naliss suggested him to take on local militia, and he agreed.

Few weeks later Calvin's marriage and retirement, Naliss had requested a private meeting with Gallo.

"You wanted to talk?"

"Yes, have a seat."

"I prefer standing."

She cleared her throat. "Very well, I need you to do something."

"For you?" There was sarcasm in his voice. While he did not believe Naliss was up for no good, Gharyn's frequent reminders had somewhat rooted in his mind.

"No, for Cyan."

"What is it about?"

"As you've experienced, fighters are ineffective against the aliens. We need warships, and we can't build those."

"How come?"

"We don't have any blueprints for any of warship classes."

He narrowed his eyes and said, "Can't we use my warship to make a blueprint?"

She exhaled a deep breath and turned her chair around, facing the only window in the office.

"We cannot."

He took Naliss' refusal well and did not even ask the reason which made her believe that he may have known that it was not possible to begin with.

She remarked, "I suppose you may have known."

He laughed weakly. "I felt that the ship wasn't normal. It did hold against thousands of drones for an hour without breaking apart."

And there was what Gharyn told him about the ship.

"True, very true."

"So, what is it about the ship?"

"I do not know. I have done few researches on my own, but nothing informative came up."

Then she cleared her throat.

"You say, this Captain Cecilia repaired the ship?"

Gallo gave her a nod.

"You remember the Mystic was only able to preserve the ship's mainframe and its outer hull?"

He gave her a nod again.

"When this captain repaired your ship, she repaired your ship beyond how much the Mystic could repair. In other words, whoever this captain may be, she may be one of the best shipwrights in this era."

She turned her chair around to face him.

"Your ship has lots of mysteries, Gallo. I think it's a relic."

He couldn't care less and she knew that. Therefore, she changed the subject.

"We need allies, Gallo. We need allies...," She sighed deeply. "We can't do this alone."

"I will prepare to leave in few days. I will try to contact the Hope."

"... Thanks."

Gallo was about to leave the office but asked a question before that.

"You took six months to find out that the ship was repaired beyond the Mystic could?"

"The captain did not just repair the hull, Gallo."

He remained facing the door, waiting for further explanation.

He asked, "What else did she repair?"

"She repaired bad sectors in the ship's mainframe and backup frame." Then, she scoffed slightly. "You want to hear me out?"

"Go on."

"The memory chips on your ship are not standard memory chips. That's why Gharyn and the others could only maintain the ship's mainframe rather than repairing it. Standard memories can be repaired easily, but your ship's memory has a unique structure which could only be repaired by one who knew how it was created in the first place and understand how it works."

"Are you implying that the captain is the original shipwright of the vessel?"

"That is a possibility that I cannot overlook, or perhaps she knows who designed it." She shrugged softly with a crooked grin. "Either way, that is not important. Your task is to obtain blueprints for at least a corvette class warship and, if possible, frigate class as well. We really need those."

After the short meeting, Gallo visited Erune's church. The church was being repaired by Calvin and the children. Broken windows were replaced. Its main doors were fixed up. Painting was left to be done however. Either way, it was a lively scene.

"Hello!" Gallo had to shout because Calvin was hammering walls.

He greeted Gallo with a smile while sweeping sweats off his forehead. "Oi, look who is here!"

"Hello, Gallo." Erune approached him. She had a woven basket with her and beamed a gentle smile at him.

Seeing Calvin, Erune, and the children working in harmony gave Gallo a warm and fuzzy feeling inside. He could only smile brightly at the scene.

Gallo informed Calvin and Erune that he'd be going on a mission in few days. Obviously, he did not need to tell them. But, having so little friends he could talk to, Calvin was one of few who he could talk to with relative ease. The loss of Embrek and Karesindia did not help.

Apparently, what Erune had in her basket been lunch. They were having sandwiches with lager at a badly broken wooden table.

Calvin told Gallo with a careful tone. "That woman, Naliss..., wasn't it?"

Gallo nodded.

"Personally, I wouldn't trust her too much."

"Why would you say that?"

"She never told us why she was working for you and us. She is right that we need allies though."

"I guess..." Gallo looked up at the artificial sky. The dorm's ceiling had been fully repaired by Eгна and her engineering team. "Not everyone needs a reason to help someone."

"Maybe, but I can see that this is becoming too much for you."

He let out of a laugh. "You are damn right. I am getting tired of this."

"Embrek and Karesinda..., weren't they?"

"Yes," He replied with eyes downcast.

"Being a leader..., it isn't a funny job," Calvin said. "I've lost many men on missions as well. But those two..., they were your close friends, weren't they."

Once they were done eating their sandwiches, Erune took off after taking care of garbage. Calvin, on the other hand, laid down on the bare ground and shut his eyes.

"The old man once told me that a leader will advance through death of his comrades. Whether it is positively or negative, regardless a leader will advance, he told me."

"When did he tell you that?"

"When I was going through the same phase as you are going through, Gallo. That was ages ago, long before you arrived at the station."

"What was your answer?"

"I quit taking risky jobs since then. That was my answer."

Gallo stood up and dusted off his coat.

"I will see you later," He told Calvin.

"See you around."

When Gallo was about to leave, he was informed by Arnon that he had news which he wouldn't tell over communication, so he visited backyard of the inn where he found Arnon with an energy blade unexpectedly. He was s it around for an exercise.

"So, you've finally crafted one, huh."

"My first working one, Gallo!" He was excited, and he smelled pretty bad.

"When did you take a shower?"

"I forgot."

That explained it.

"Good work. May I?" Gallo stretched out his arm.

"Oh, sure." When Arnon handed the blade over to Gallo, he had few swings. To be absolutely honest, it sucked. Its weight was imbalanced and the blade's energy was unstable, but it worked. He wasn't sure for how long through.

"I want your honest opinion on it, Gallo."

"If you say so. It sucks."

"How so?"

"Well, its weight balance is wrong, and the energy blade is unstable and the color is distorting all over the edge."

"Can I see your blade?"

Gallo handed his blade, Alucasa, over Arnon. However, as he tried to hold on, the blade rejected him by violently vibrating and fell to the ground, making a small crater in progress.

"It is rejecting you," He told him as he picked it up from ground.

Arnon gulped and looked at the blade.

"It's a relic, Gallo."

"Yeah?" He couldn't care less.

"Yes, I do mean it. It has will of its own. You can't compare your blade with mine... Your blade is a masterpiece."

"The little witch reconstructed it from a broken blade."

"I see... So, it was her work."

As Gallo picked up Alucasa, its vibrating seized.

"But I suppose you do know much more about handling blades than me. I will try to balance its weight next time..., but I have no clue on how I should adjust its weight..."

"To know better, it is best for you to become a swordsman yourself. That is probably the only way for you to learn about the weight balance."

"That is ..." Arnon downcast his eyes. "True. We have no sword trainer, don't we."

"I think the Mystic knows basic swordsmanship. It's nothing advanced though."

"How about you?"

Gallo wasn't sure if he was a fine swordsman but he recalled that he had Yudai's book.

"I have a swordsmanship book. You can borrow it if you want."

Arnon seemed excited. "That'd be great! Thank you!"

Embrek and Karesinda ..., they were Gallo's closest friends. They weren't just a boss and followers. They had booze together and spent nights talking. They fought, and they laughed.

Losing such friends was a big impact on Gallo himself. It was something... he'd never recover and haunt him forever.

He never felt like moving on, but he had to. People around him did not allow him to stay on one spot. He was their leader, and he had to move on regardless what he really felt. And that pressure was slowly beginning to break him.

Gharyn and Sarbas were tagging along in this trip. Vaelmnal also decided to tag along and lead a fighter squadron. Overall, this was a significantly larger party.

The portal engine was installed as well as the new defense turrets given by Captain Cecilia. Enga had informed Gallo that they did not fully understand how the portal engine worked but nevertheless managed to manufacture the engine by simply following the blueprint.

As Gallo arrived at the bridge, he saw Ormvor and two other crews who were conversing as they prepared to take off.

Ormvor said, "We need to get out of the Nebula to initiate the engine."

A crew replied, "Yeah, look up for that coordinate and calculate fuel efficiency to our destination."

They were having a sort of discussion that Gallo failed to understand. He bypassed them and went to the captain's quarter.

There was an e-mail for him from Naliss. She tracked down Zafir. Apparently, he joined the Blackbirds after his sudden resignation with Gray Mist.

Gallo wasn't terribly concerned about Zafir at the moment. It wasn't like he knew anything important. After doing signings that needed to be taken care of, he went back to the bridge. By this time, the bridge was fully manned with twelve crew, Gharyn, and Ormvor.

"Gallo," Gharyn called him out. "Naliss wants to talk to you."

Again? He thought.

Naliss' office showed up on main screen, but she wasn't there.

"Where is she?" Gallo asked.

Even before anyone else could answer, she came back to screen.

"Sorry, alright, let me begin," She cleared her throat. "I've an incoming message from the Blackbirds."

"Huh?"

"They have apparently deployed probes through a path from them to here."

"Wait," Gharyn spoke. "If they are to do that, it must cost tens of thousands of probes."

Naliss nodded. "They did deploy that much. Long range sensor on the planet is detecting few hundreds at least."

"Gallo," Gharyn turned to Gallo. "It must be a really important message if they were determined to perform such an action."

"I am directing the incoming message to your ship's screen now. Remember, Gallo, we need allies."

The screen flashed few times and a familiar face showed up. It was Dacre.

He beamed a smile at Gallo as he greeted him. "Hello, Gallo, you seem to be doing well."

"Dacre?" Gallo was pleasantly surprised.

"That, I am. It's been a long time, eh?"

"Hah...," He laughed. It had been a long time since he met a friend, *a real friend*.

"What is your intention for deploying the probes?" Gharyn asked.

Dacre casually glanced at Gharyn briefly. "Identify yourself," He, then, demanded.

"Gharyn, the current leader of the Mystic."

"The Mystic..., I thought it was a sub-clan of the Nomads."

"We used to be."

"So, even the Mystic is with the Gray mist, huh. That just makes this more worthwhile then."

Shrugged, Gallo told Dacre, "Dude, what's going on here?"

"I am acting on behalf of the Blackbirds at the moment. They would like to form an alliance with Gray mist."

"An alliance...?" Gallo mumbled and spoke. "Why? What about your alliance with the Nomads?"

"The Blackbirds was never allied with the Nomads. We worked together once to fight CoR and that was it."

"That's what I'd call an alliance, Dacre."

Dacre was silence for a moment and replied. "Perhaps, it wasn't an alliance from our perspective though." He then looked at Gharyn. "Were you told that it was an alliance?"

"Yes, but we were also told that the alliance would not last long," Gharyn answered.

"True, and it did not last long."

"Why us now?" Gallo asked. "Gray Mist has never been a major clan."

"True, but it is now. Gray Mist has taken over the Osprey, the Mystic, and even the planet Cyan. Gray Mist has everything that a major clan has. Therefore, Gray Mist is one of four major clans in the Nebula now."

"Why alliance with us?" Gallo demanded, asking once again.

"The Blackbirds have been seeking a friend who would stand with us on the same level. The Nomads are large and they have tendency to look down on even allies. CoR are the same as the Nomads. I reckon that Gray Mist, however, won't."

"Why did you attack CoR?"

"The Blackbirds initiated an assault on CoR because we felt that they needed to be gotten rid of. CoR were originated from the original nebula pirates, 3Ra Syndicate. We wanted to get rid of the old."

Gallo quietly whispered to Gharyn. "What do you think?"

"He seems to be telling truth." He whispered back.

"Very well, what are your terms?"

"Military access and a permission to build a small outpost in Cyan's orbit."

"That is too much," Gharyn responded. "Too much that it is almost ridiculous."

"In return," Dance continued. "We give you military access to our territory and two trade routes."

"Gallo," Gharyn whispered. "Try to get rid of military access."

"Dacre," Gallo spoke. "Is it possible to do this without military access?"

"I don't know. Final decision is not up to me. However, I do know that military access is required due to the outpost we wish to build. Without military access, purpose of building an outpost in orbit is moot."

"What now, Gharyn?" Gallo whispered.

"What he says is true sadly. Without military access..., it's not like they are wanting to build a trade outpost..." Then, Gharyn seemed to have come up with an idea. "Yes..., a trade outpost. Rid of the military access and purpose the Blackbirds to build a trade outpost instead with limited military access. Limited military access for us as well. How limited will be agreed upon later."

Clearing throat, Gallo informed Dacre, "Dacre, how about a trade outpost with limited military access?"

"That... may or may not work. I suppose it would depend on how limited the access will be."

"And there is one more, but it is a request."

"What would it be?"

"Allow us to use the probe network."

"Good call, Gallo," Gharyn whispered.

"I suppose I should grant you the access as it is fairly easy to hack them anyway."

"I have a question that is unrelated to this discussion."

Dacre narrowed his eyes. "What would it be?"

"Is Zafir with you now?"

Dacre looked confused for a moment. "Zafir ...? Oh, him. No, we kicked him out."

"What happened?"

"He was a terrible pilot and a bad performer. He kept on making sexual assaults on our female members as well. He should be thankful that we did not kill him."

"I see."

"He also bragged about being an ex-leader in Gray mist. Is it true?"

"Yes, I promoted him to be 8th leader, but he left soon after."

"Why did he leave?"

"I am not entirely sure, but he did conflict with others."

"Figures." Dacre cleared his throat. "I will get back to you in few days with more detailed info. Farewell."

As the screen became blank, Naliss' image came right up.

"I was listening," She said. "You did okay. He sounded positive in the dealing."

"Glad you are pleased," Gallo said sarcastically. "We will go now."

"Alright, see you soon."

After four days of sailing, the ship had just left the nebula.

"Initiate the portal engine," Gharyn gave the order as he was the one who knew how it operated. "Our destination is..."

He spoke a set of codes which was simply way too complicated for Gallo. Soon enough, a beautiful wormhole was created in front of them. It was swirling into its center.

As the ship entered the wormhole, to Gallo's surprise, it reached its destination instantly literally.

"This is it?" Gallo was looking at different space environment. They did move.

Gharyn replied, "This is it. We just traveled two months worth of distance in mere seconds."

An identical wormhole was behind them. It was getting smaller by seconds and disappeared soon.

"Where are we exactly?" Gallo asked.

"We are in vicinity of a barren planet named SOL-60."

"SOL-60?"

"Well, that's the name we saw on the disk."

They were looking at a small barren planet on the screen.

"Anything unusual on sensors?" Gharyn asked.

"We are looking into it. The sensor is recalibrating at the moment."

"Traveling such a distance instantaneously... It's so surreal," Gallo said to himself.

"I am detecting lots, I mean a lot, of debris. I think there was a big battle here."

"How big of a battle are you talking about?" Gharyn asked while approaching him to look at his sensor readings.

"Thousands at least, look -"

"Do you think the Hope was destroyed here?"

"I don't know what class the Hope is, but if it's a battleship, yes, it's possible."

Suddenly, everyone was quiet.

Ormvor, shaking somewhat, pointed at main screen. "Everyone ..., look," He said.

Gallo was looking and he could not believe what he was looking at.

A gigantic, even the word was too weak to describe size of the vessel, ship appeared out of nowhere in front of Gallo's ship.

"What the hell is that... A ship?" Ormvor mumbled.

"I ... don't know." Even Gharyn was clueless. "I don't know..."

"It's... trying to contact us?"

"Put it through," Gallo's calm voice sounded on the bridge.

A woman's image appeared. She appeared to be on a bridge. They could see her bridge crew behind her. The bridge was gigantic as well.

"This is Captain Erika of the colony vessel Hope. You are not the aliens obviously. Who are you?"

The reality was that both sides were shocked to see each other. The colony vessel Hope was shocked to see another ship of their kind.

And Gallo's side was shocked to see such a gigantic vessel.

"I am Gallo of Gray Mist."

"Gray Mist?"

"We are the Nebula pirates."

Erika narrowed her eyes and twisted her head as if she didn't believe him.

"The Nebula pirates here? That's hard to believe considering the distance."

"We used the portal engine," Gallo answered indifferently.

"The what?"

"Portal engine."

"Gallo, let me explain it to them," Gharyn suggested.

"Go ahead."

Gharyn told Erika how they met captain Cecilia and how they obtained the engine which enabled to travel this far in a blink of an eye.

"Captain Cecilia, you say?"

Gharyn nodded.

Erika looked elsewhere and called out someone. "Alushana, search that name in the database."

Gallo narrowed his eyes as he heard the name, Alushana. It sounded strangely similar to "Alucasa".

"That is ... a big ship you have there," Gharyn said.

"This is a colony vessel. We have billions of people onboard."

"So, you are what is left of the Sol system?" Ormvor inquired.

There was a pause before Erika answered, "Yes."

"Alushana, is it?"

Gallo's sudden change of topic made everyone, including Erika, confused. Gallo repeated.

"Alushana, is it?"

"Yes, why?" Erika demanded.

"Does she have anything to do with Alucasa?"

It was that moment that Erika was literally pushed out of screen, and a young woman jumped in.

"I am Alushana. Do you know Alucasa?"

Gallo shook his head. "No, I didn't even know that it was a person's name."

"Then, how ..."

Gallo took out his deactivated blade. "The name of this blade is Alucasa."

Alushana didn't seem to understand. "That blade is Alucasa...?"

"The little witch crafted this blade and named it Alucasa ... Come to think of it, there was an intruder at Karma the 3rd's base..."

"Hold on a second." It was Erika who appeared on a separate screen on Gallo's bridge.

"The little witch? The little witch Sae?"

Gallo gave her a nod.

"She is alive?" Erika started to raise her voice. "That's bullshit! That'd make her thousands years old! Are you absolutely sure it was her? Someone could have been impersonating her."

"I saw her abilities." Gallo's voice was calm. "It was her, and look at this blade."

As Gallo activated the blade, Alucasa, it started to emit beautiful, yet powerful, red glow. In two seconds, it formed a shape of a blade. It was the same time that Alushana started to sob.

"That is it ... I can feel his thoughts...," She talked to herself, but everyone could hear her.

"And it seems this blade does have its own will," Gallo said, "You think an ordinary person could craft this kind of blade?"

Erika remained silent while Alushana was sobbing. Her sobbing ringed something in Gallo.

"We need to get to the topic," Gallo said as he minimized Alushana's screen. "Is it possible that you give us blueprints of a corvette and frigate class vessels?"

"May I ask why you need them, but yes, it is not a problem."

"We only have access to fighter crafts, and from our last battle with the aliens, fighters were useless against their drones."

She had no objection. The more people fighting the, the better. "Sending the data now."

"I will send the portal engine and an improved turret design to you."

"Speaking of the portal engine, could you show us how it works?"

Gallo twisted his head. "What do you mean?"

"Demonstrate the engine. Like, make a quick jump to behind our ship."

Gallo looked at Gharyn. He nodded back at Gallo.

"Alright, give me a sec. Communication must go off."

And it was only a matter of minutes before Gallo's vessel indicated the engine. A small swirling purple portal was created right in front of Gall's vessel. In mere seconds, the ship was behind the colony vessel.

"Unbelievable..." Erika had her tongue stick out after seeing the engine at work.

"Was that a wormhole?"

Gharyn shrugged. "I am sorry but much of this technology is unknown."

"We will analyze the data you've sent us. If the engine can work for such a large object like this colony vessel, this piece of technology will be proven invaluable," Erika said in awe.

Gharyn nodded. Erika was about to say something but she was called by a crew on her bridge. They talked a bit, and the crew gave her a holographic memo.

"We have some records regarding this captain Cecilia," Erika said while reading the holographic memo. "She is, or was, a commodore in SOL fleet."

"Commodore?" Gallo didn't know the word, and Gharyn noticed.

"Commodore is a rank originated from Earth. The rank is higher than captain but lower than admiral," He whispered to Gallo.

Erika continued meanwhile. "As you may have noticed, there was a large battle here. The Hope was being chased by the aliens, and we were facing inevitable death. However, the last remaining SOL fleet arrived and had their last battle here. They earned us time to flee, and the entire fleet was destroyed in the end. Not a single ship survived. Captain Cecilia was supposed to be in that fleet and supposed to be dead."

"So?" Gallo shrugged. "If it was a big battle, she could have survived," Gallo responded rather indifferently. He didn't care about it too much actually.

"We picked up no life signal," Erika responded gravely. "Sensors do not lie."

"Sensors do lie. Do not trust sensors too much." Gallo's respond was firm and strong as if he knew what he was talking about. And, indeed, as a nebula pirate, sensor reading was never absolute.

Erika realized they were starting to argue, so she quietly backed off. "Anyway, thank you for demonstrating the engine. We will have our engineers look at it."

Nodding, Gallo said, "We need allies. I am hoping that you will be our ally."

"I have no objection with that," Erika replied, "But we are unable to assist you in any way for a while."

Gallo was about to ask why, but Gharyn spoke. "Your colony vessel seems largely incomplete. Is that why?"

Erika looked at Gharyn and nodded. "Yes, we've been mining here to build modules. This vessel is not even at 10 percentage capacity. Besides, majority of turrets are offline."

"I see," Gallo sighed. "Still I am glad that I've found someone. Everyone has been dying here and there."

Gharyn glanced at Gallo.

Erika agreed. "Yes, I thought this colony vessel was the only thing left for mankind. I am glad that I was wrong." She assured. "You have no idea how glad I am to be wrong."

Then there was silence between them. It was Erika who broke the silence.

"If possible, I'd like you to speak in private," She said on the screen.

"In private?" Gallo twisted his head slightly. "How?"

"Do you have a captain's quarter?"

"Oh, yes, I do have one."

"Let us talk in there. Secure your channel. This matter is not to be shared with others." Erika's voice was grave.

As Gallo entered his quarter, he locked the room and put on the highest security as he received a call from the Hope.

A large screen appeared above the only desk in the quarter. "Is this room secured?"

Gallo sat in casually. "Yes, what is this about?"

"It is about the little witch. Are you absolutely, one hundred percent, sure that it was her?"

Gallo didn't know what to say. He didn't know what was making her so suspicious. Granted, the little witch would be thousands years old, but few ESPs lived beyond one thousand years in the past. He figured it might have been possible that select few could live even longer.

"Yes, I am sure. I saw her ability."

Erika was looking elsewhere, groaning and crossing her arms. It was as if she was hesitating to continue. Eventually though, she spoke.

"Our grand admiral, who perished in a battle against the aliens, believed that the Crimson wizard holds the key to repel them."

"Why would he think so?"

"He didn't tell me, but I am sure he had solid reasons for his brief."

"So, what are you trying to say?"

"If the witch is alive, then it is highly possible that the Crimson wizard is alive as well. We need to locate him at all cost."

Gallo shrugged. "It's easy to say. I just don't see how though."

"I agree. I don't really know how, either. You've met the witch. Can you find her?"

Gallo explained to Erika how the blade came to his possession, how he met her, and how she left.

"I see. There seems to be little doubt that someone was impersonating her then."

Erika inhaled deeply and sighed. "So, she is alive. It's good news, I suppose. Yet, I feel that it is somewhat... disturbing."

Erika promised that she'd assist if needed. However, for now, she'd prefer hiding, she said. After talking for a while, Gallo bade good-bye to her.

Gallo and Co left the Hope behind and was sailing towards now-empty SOL system.

"Let's have a look at SOL system before we head back home," Gallo said.

"Agreed. I'd like to see just how bad it is now," Gharyn agreed.

Sarbas had been quiet until they entered vicinity of Mercury.

"There is nothing here but debris," Gharyn said. "So, that debris are what is left of the planet."

Sarbas walked toward main screen which was displaying where Mercury was supposed to be.

"Do you feel it?" He said vacantly.

Crews on the bridge looked at him who was walking slowly toward main screen.

"I hear screaming of thousands..., no, even more..." He continued on as if he was possessed. "I sense something. I sense something ... small..."

Gharyn noticed that Sarbas may be referring to something. "Something small, child?"

"Something small... A small station."

"Check the sensors. Check throughout," Gharyn ordered bridge crew. "Something must be hidden."

However, after ten minutes of deep scanning, no distinctive result was made.

"There is nothing on the sensors," A crew said. "Perhaps, whatever it is may be too faint to be picked up."

"Sarbas, can you locate it?"

But he didn't seem to be listening to Gharyn. "Brave warriors passed through here led by a dark being, and chased by many angry spirits."

"Oh, shut it." It was Gallo. "Many perished, I get it. They died, I get it. So, shut it."

The bridge was hit by a long silence after Gallo's bluntness.

"Don't mention the obvious," Gallo continued. "I am tired of it. I am sick of it."

Everyone, including Sarbas, was shut up by his bluntness.

They returned to the edge of the nebula shortly after. Uneasiness had filled the bridge for a while after the blunt comments that Gallo gave out, but the bridge crews didn't mind too much because Gallo wasn't wrong. Many had perished indeed.

"We are now entering the Nebula," Gharyn declared. Four days of smooth sailing took them back to Cyan.

After receiving a warm welcome from Naliss, Gallo informed her of the achievements.

"Very good," Naliss responded. "Excellent. We now have two allies."

Her response indicated indirectly that the dealings with Dacre was positive.

Apparently, the Blackbirds had agreed upon a limited military access. Armed shuttle was the only military vessel that the Blackbirds was allowed to have within Gray Mist's influence.

Once the formalities were done, Gallo went to the inn to take a nap. However, his nap was soon disturbed by Naliss' call.

"What is it?" It was an angered voice. "Can't I get a nap?"

"I have a guest for you," Naliss said via a communicator.

"Yeah? Who the hell is it?"

"It is Ambassador Dacre."

"Ambassador? He is on a fast road, isn't he...," Gallo whispered to himself, finding ironic that he was sort of on a fast road as well.

"Pardon? Did you say something?"

"No, fine, I will see him."

Gallo was staying in Gray Mist Inn. The Inn was supposed to be a temporary base of operation, but it became the official base for Gray Mist. Naliss was staying in the castle which was previously owned by Karma the third. The Karma castle was becoming Naliss' base.

"He is going there. You will see him fairly soon."

And a knocking resounded in Gallo's room. "Fairly soon" was apparently really soon.

"Come in," Gallo said. He was taking a nap in his clothes, so it didn't matter.

Dacre was one of a few remaining friends for him, and for that, he was glad to see him.

"This place sucks," Dacre remarked with a grin. "This is where the leader of Gray Mist stays?"

Gallo chuckled. He didn't mean to however. It was just a spontaneous response.

"Welcome, Ambassador," Gallo said in a half-joking manner.

"Greetings," Dacre bowed. "The leader of Gray Mist."

And they shared a casual laugh together.

"What brings you here?"

Dacre had a bottle with him, a bottle of liquor. He placed the liquor on the small table next to Gallo's bed.

"I've come for a personal reason to be honest. I've come to see Yudai. I believe she is a squad leader?"

Gallo narrowed her eyes. "She was at the Gray Mist station..."

Dacre noticed that Gallo used a past tense. "I see." He realized that she was likely dead and sat down on the dusty floor. "Tell me what happened."

"Someone can tell you better probably."

Gallo called Ghahin, and the three went down to lounge of the inn. Ghahin told Dacre and Gallo what happened in full detail. He was the last person to see Yudai alive.

"I don't know whether she was truly killed in action or was killed in the explosion, for I was not there to see her end," Ghahin added as he concluded his speech.

"But she has passed away. That is for certain."

"I see." Dacre dropped his head a bit and made a bittersweet expression. "I see..."

The bottle Dacre had brought originally was already empty. It was too little for three adults. Gallo ordered ten more bottles. As they started to drink, Gallo asked, "I assume you knew her fairly well."

"I suppose so." Dacre let out of a long sigh. "I was her guide when she ventured into the Nebula."

He told Gallo and Ghahin the whole story, how he met her, how she came to the Nebula. He told them everything.

The ten bottles which Gallo ordered were empty, and there were additional bottles. Their table was already nearly full with bottles.

"She was a woman of misfortune," Dacre said sorrowfully. "She may have not had the most miserable life, but her life wasn't certainly pleasant. She was shadowed by her own father as well as by herself. I hope that she found her peace."

Then they became quiet. Dacre was silently moaning for Yudai's passing. Gallo was moaning deaths of his two friends, Embrek and Karesinda. Ghahin was moaning for the loss of the Old man.

Waran entered the lounge. "Oh, what are you guys up to?" He noticed Dacre. "I see a new face."

"This is Dacre, an Ambassador of the Blackbirds," Gallo introduced.

No members of the Mystic had encountered Dacre previously, so Waran did not know him, and he wasn't in a good mood on this particular day. In other words, he was more cranky than usual. And for some odd reason, he decided that he did not like Dacre.

"So, a spy from the mighty Blackbirds," Waran declared. His sarcasm was clearly delivered, and people in the pub knew that he was merely being himself. However, on this very particular day, Gallo wasn't in nice mood, either.

"Watch your mouth, Waran," Gallo warned.

Shrugging, Waran approached their table and said with a mocking voice, "What's the matter? Was I too blunt?" He, then, placed right hand on the table, staring at Dacre who was quietly having his bottle. "You are not welcome here," He said quietly to Dacre.

Dacre was quiet, minding his own business. He knew well what kind of position he was in. He was in no position to cause any slight troubles as an ambassador. Despite being quite drunk, he still had self-control.

Waran knew this also and was exploiting it. He continued to attack Dacre verbally until he was suddenly knocked away. He was apparently punched in the face by Gallo and he gave everything in that punch.

As a result, Waran was completely knocked down on the floor with broken nose. As if that wasn't enough, he jumped on unconscious Waran.

"Are you out of your mind, Gallo?! Stop!" Ghahin exclaimed as he tried to get him off Waran.

People in the pub realized what was going on and attempted to stop Gallo by dragging him off Waran. But Gallo continued on.

"Let go of me!" He shouted. "I am going to kill him!"

Struggling, Gallo attempted to break free. However, with five men were on him, he was unable to free himself. In a desperate attempt, Gallo bellowed. "Alucasa!"

Gallo's energy blade vanished from his belt hook and reappeared in air.

"Blade, roar!" Gallo uttered. "Kill him!"

The blade activated himself. Its red particles formed a blade soon. The formed blade was dripping its red particles which were vanishing as soon as it dripping. It appeared as if the blade was bleeding. It aimed itself at Waran.

It was happening too quickly for anyone in the pub to realize what was going on. All they were seeing was a blade was floating in the air and turned itself on.

However, meanwhile, Dacre knew what was exactly going on. He had experienced such a blade previously, a blade that had a will of its own.

"Gallo! Stop!" Dacre shouted. However, Gallo was in no condition to listen to anyone. In a desperate attempt, Dacre grabbed the blade. As he expected, the blade rejected him by stunning him, but he did not let it go. He grabbed the blade as hard as possible and attempted to dislocate it. A few people were dragging Waran off the scene, and the blade was tracking Waran's location.

"I can't stop it!" Dacre shouted to tell others.

The blade started to move toward Waran. It was starting to accelerate.

"Ghahin! Knock Gallo out!" Dacre said to Ghahin who was keeping Gallo off Waran.

"Do I have to?"

"That guy will die if you don't!"

Sighing, Ghahin struck Gallo's back head. As Gallo became unconscious, the blade deactivated itself and fell to the ground.

"Phew...", Dacre swept sweats off his forehead. "That was a close call."

Gallo was knocked out for a half a day. When he woke up, he was summoned by Naliss. He said as soon as he entered her office at the castle Karma. "I have done nothing wrong."

"Maybe," Naliss replied. "It is between you and Waran. That is not why I have called you though."

Gallo was silent.

"You are losing it, Gallo."

"Tell me something I don't know."

Naliss sighed. "I know it's hard for you, but you must hold on."

Gallo's face twitched and he raised his voice. "What would *-you-* know? You always stay here and look down on others' affairs as if you are playing chess of a massive scale." He approached Naliss slowly. "Come down to our level for once. Then, talk about what *-we-* are going through."

He turned around and left Naliss' office. As soon as he left, someone knocked already-open wooden door.

"May I come in?"

It was Gharyn who overheard their conversation. "I didn't mean to eavesdrop."

"Yes, come in," Naliss responded indifferently. "What can I do for you today?"

"Gallo is not losing the plot," Gharyn assured.

"To me, he is."

"No," Gharyn shook his head. "He is on a crossroad of either being a leader or being a coward."

Gharyn was a leader of the Mystic and was more than twice older than Naliss. He had obviously more experience in this matter.

"At the moment, he is losing to the guilty of his previous decisions which ultimately led to death of comrades and friends," He added. "If he chooses to run away, he will be a coward. If he manages to direct his hatred toward our enemy, he will lead us to victory."

"What if his anger is directed at us, which is what I think what is going on right now."

"His anger is well founded. Do you not think so? He has lost his close friends to this conflict. He was dragged in. None of this was by his own will. Rightfully so, he is angry."

While Naliss did not fully agree with Gharyn's points, she didn't have any better explanation to Gallo's behavior.

"What do you suggest that we do then?"

"Nothing. It is his problem. He has to deal with it even if he may take his time."

She was in deep thoughts, and Gharyn decided to leave her alone. However, as he was leaving, he realized he had forgotten what he had originally visited her for.

He turned around and said to her. "I see that you possess no agenda."

Her focus came back to her eyes. "What agenda?"

"Everyone believes that you are up for no good. They think that you are using us to achieve your own personal agenda."

"That is ridiculous."

"That may be true, but I could not blame them for thinking so, for I have thought so as well."

She narrowed her eyes. "And now?"

Gharyn beamed a gentle smile at her. "You are not indeed helping us, but you do not have any agenda against us, either. You are merely helping out Gallo."

He was right, and Naliss knew that she could not fool him. Therefore, she decided to be straightforward.

"True," She responded. "Do you have a problem with that?"

"I do not. If I were you though, I'd make sure that your intent is known. There are people who want to get rid of you. I've visited you warn you that. Now, excuse me."

Gallo visited Dacre who was aboard the station of the Osprey. He was to oversee the construction of a new outpost for the Blackbirds. Materials were being brought into docking bays by Blackbirds freighters which were painted in dark grey with a Blackbirds emblem painted on their hulls.

"I am sorry about what happened," Gallo apologized sincerely.

"Don't worry about it."

They were looking at Blackbirdss crews who were preparing to begin the construction.

"ETA is three months," Dacre informed.

Waran regained consciousness a day later. He had broken his nose as well as his jar from the fight. The wounds were, however, nothing serious as he was an ESP. It healed in hours.

Meanwhile, Gharyn visited Waran's quarter.

"How are you feeling?"

Waran was in his bed. "I feel like crap."

"I suppose you realize that you were at fault?"

It took Waran a few moments to answer, but he eventually acknowledged that he went too far. Additionally, Gharyn told Waran about Yudai and Dacre, and their relationship.

"They were moaning her passing," Gharyn added. "And you disturbed that. Gallo's anger was perfectly justified."

Waran attempted to say something, but no word was released from his tongue.

"You do not need to apologize to Gallo," As if he read Waran's mind, he spoke.

"However, whether you like or not, he is our leader now. I know your personality is not very nice though. Just try to keep your mood to yourself. You are an ESP after all."

"ESPs are not machines, sir," He responded fiercely as if it bothered him. "We, too, are entitled to our own feelings."

"True, however, if so, what differs ESPs from average humans? ESPs have superior mental control. Use it. Otherwise, we will be just the same as the rest of humans."

In the end, Waran did not in fact apologize to Gallo.

A season passed quietly. Gallo's ire had come down and it appeared that he was holding onto his fragile sanity. It was also time for Naliss to declare a plan. It was

the last step for Gray Mist before they would come forth as a major clan in the Nebula. It was to make a contact with Andromeda union.

Using frigate and corvette blueprints obtained from Erika of the Hope, Gray Mist was able to construct five frigates and one corvette. Anything larger than a corvette would have a hard time navigating through the Nebula due to rapid hull degrade.

The corvette vessel was only slightly smaller than Gallo's vessel, and its command was given to Gharyn. He named the corvette "Scarlet".

Commands of the five frigate vessels were given out to others as well.

Before a few days before their departure, Gallo decided to pay a visit to Calvin and Erune. When he visited them, he found Erune's belly enormous. In other words, she was pregnant.

"Congratulations!" Gallo exclaimed with joy. It was his first time seeing a pregnant woman also.

There had been numerous births on the planet, but all came from refugees from outer space. Erune's pregnancy was the first for an original resident of Cyan. It wasn't that people were taking extreme cautions when having an intercourse. It was that no one seemed to be interested in having an intercourse. It was a trend that had been spreading all over mankind. Men and women were becoming mere titles. Little men were attracted to women, and little women were attracted to

men sexually. Homosexuality was also almost nonexistent. Sexuality as a whole was slowly fading, and as a result, so did birthrate.

Gallo spread the news, and many members of Gray Mist paid Calvin a visit. Some did it purely as a favor, and some did it to gain Gallo's favor. Then, the day arrived, Gallo and his small fleet would venture out of the Nebula and attempt to make a contact with Andromeda union.

Naliss was on main screen on Gallo's bridge. She was briefing the mission to Gallo and the others.

"..., so basically make a contact. We are not even sure if Andromeda union is still in tact."

Gharyn was on a smaller screen by main screen. "We are still called pirates. It is unlikely that they are going to be very cooperative. However, we will see what we can do."

"Sir," A bridge officer called out to Gallo. "Ambassador Dacre is asking if there is anything he could do to aid us."

Dacre had been staying with Gray Mist ever since he arrived a season ago. Construction of the trade outpost was nearing completion.

"No," Gallo replied firmly. "Nothing he can do."

Ornvor was aboard the Hope. Sarbas and Waran, each of them was given a command of a frigate.

The fleet moved out and reached edge of the Nebula in a few days. As they left the Nebula, their sensors became operational.

"We head for Creg's," Ormvor declared.

Thank to the portal engine, it would take no more than ten minutes to reach Creg's. The fleet was equipped with new turrets as well.

"Calculating coordinates," Ormvor reported.

A small screen appeared in midair. Gharyn appeared on it.

"Gallo, when talking to them, please try to be as civil as possible," He said.

Gallo gazed into air. "I am not sure that they will be as civil as you think."

"Do what you can, Gallo."

Gallo gave him a nod lazily.

"Engaging the portal engine," Ormvor declared.

A swirling wormhole appeared in front of each vessel. Its size varied depending on size of vessels. Therefore, a wormhole for Gallo's vessel was the largest.

Gharyn had done some studying on the portal engine. He was neither an engineer nor a scientist, but he was an elderly ESP whose expert knowledge was beyond any ordinary ESP. He came to a conclusion that mankind would have eventually

invented the technology in the future. However, his prediction was a few hundred years in the future, granted that mankind survived through this dark era.

The portal engine was basically an inertia-less travel method. It achieved its inertia-less by entering subspace. Space was not empty. It had dark matters. Although, at first, mankind believed that space was inertia-less due to absence of gravity and visible matters, space was far from being empty.

This was proven when mankind attempted to achieve light speed travel. By their theory of space being complete void of matters, it would have only been a matter of achieving enough thrust powers to reach the speed. However, hulls of test vessels were torn apart as they were nearing light speed. It was that time mankind came to realize that there were invisible matters in space which were causing friction. These matters were named "Dark matters".

"Dark matters" caused virtually no friction under normal circumstance which led mankind to initially believe that space was empty. But, when an object in space was nearing speed of light, friction from dark matters became too great for objects to sustain pressure.

The portal engine was avoiding the friction from dark matters by using subspace. There was just one problem with the concept of the portal engine. Gharyn knew

that mankind had absolutely no way of opening a gate to subspace. Mankind had little knowledge in subspace furthermore. He realized that whoever designed this engine had far greater knowledge than mankind did. And he began to wonder if there was a civilization that was greater than mankind.

Mankind, humans, had always claimed to be the superior force of the universe. Until the aliens were discovered, no other beings with intelligence were found.

His thoughts were disturbed by sudden vibration, which was an indication that the ship had successfully reached its destination point.

Gallo's Hope, Gharyn's Scarlet, and five frigate vessels exited their own wormholes. Creg's was in their visual range. The planet had undergone many terraforming phases. Originally, domes were constructed to confine life in its early days. As the planet's economy developed, a full terraforming was gradually initiated. Though the terraforming project did not meet with any successful results until recently.

From Gallo's position, the planet had an ocean which was one of many marks of successful terraforming.

However, the continents retained desert-like texture.

"They are hailing us," Ormvor reported as he was overseeing stations. "Putting it through."

Ormvor, although he was a mere officer, had earned some authorities over time. It was mainly because he had been around long enough and knew Gallo well enough. Gallo himself did not object to Ormvor's decisions in trivial matters.

"Identify yourself!" A vigilant middle-aged man demanded. "Who are you?!"

Lazily, Gallo looked at Ormvor, literally asking him to respond.

Ormvor cleared his throat and responded, "We are Gray Mist."

"Gray mist? What the hell is that? I am glad that you are not the aliens though. You appeared out of nowhere!"

"We are the Nebula pirates," Ormvor stated calmly.

The vigilant middle-aged man seemed confused for a moment, and then he looked angered. "Pirates?!" He shouted. "Are you out of your mind, pirating at a time like this?!"

"We are not -" Ormvor was stopped by Gallo who decided to confront the vigilant man.

"Greetings, my name is Gallo. We are not pirates even though our title states otherwise. We are here for your cooperation," Gallo spoke with a noble tone.

"Would you mind telling us your name?"

"My name is none of your business!" The vigilant man uttered. "What matters is that you are pirates!"

Gharyn joined the conversation. "It is only our title. Gray mist has never pirated anyone."

"Then what are you here for?! Get out! This is a danger zone!"

Eventually, a civil conversation could begin.

The vigilant man's name was Krait who was in charge of the planet's defense. In other words, he was the admiral of the planet although he denied of having such a rank. Apparently, the real admiral and president of the planet fled long ago. He happened to be one of few captains who remained on the planet and defended.

"We've lost contact with New Earth. We haven't been able to contact them for a while now," He stated after calming down.

New Earth, it was the capital planet of Andromeda union.

Gharyn found his situation a little awkward and asked, "How have you been able to manage to defend the planet? You told us that many have fled. Do you still have a large enough fleet?"

Krait shook his head firmly in disgust. "No, there are only three hundred warships left for this planet."

"Then how were you able to defend this planet so far?"

"You may find this hard to believe, but we've been encountering only small numbers of the aliens, but every time we fight them, we've lost ships. Originally, there were over a thousand vessels. We cannot sustain this for much longer."

Gharyn requested a private meeting, and the conversation with Krait had come to a halt.

"We need to find out what has happened to New Earth," Gharyn told as Gallo established a secure channel.

Gallo didn't feel like doing so. However, he had to agree with him. "I suppose so," He replied indifferently.

Gallo resumed the channel with Krait. "We will check out New Earth," He told him.

Krait beamed a hopeful smile. "Would you? Thank you! We've been getting impatient."

Before their departure, Gallo explained Krait briefly about the portal engine and the modified turret technology and transferred him the data.

"We don't have any good engineers to make use of any of this, I am afraid," Krait responded with a long sigh.

"What's the population on Crag's?"

"Two billions."

Gallo's fleet wasted little time before departing the planet. Gharyn suggested not to use the portal engine to reach New Earth.

His reasoning was that it took tens of minutes to recharge enough energy to initiate the portal engine.

"I fear that the planet might have been destroyed. In case, they are staying there for an ambush, I suggest we get there manually and quickly warp out in the worst case," He explained.

And Gharyn's fear was well founded. As they approached, they started to receive strange sensor readings.

"Strange readings?" Gallo uttered. "What about it?"

A bridge officer was reading sensor readings currently. "A lot of ... unrecognizable readings. Identical to the readings we obtained from our battle with the aliens back at Freedom colony."

Gharyn's face appeared on a corner of main screen.

"Sensors indicate that the aliens are indeed there. The planet is not gone though."

"What do you purpose that we do?" Gallo asked.

"We should approach the planet with our portal engine activated and leave as soon as a trouble is foreseen."

"Agreed."

When the fleet entered a visual range for New Earth, they were shocked. The supposedly Earth-like planet was no more. The planet was dark gray.

"What the hell..."

"Oh, my God..."

Crews uttered.

Several new types alien vessels were spotted. Gray Mist had never encountered them previously. So far, they had dealt with drone-sized ones, but they were seeing much larger, even larger than a typical cruiser, alien vessels.

On a closer inspection, they realized that the planet was covered by some sort of gray field.

"Uh, oh," Ormvor and a few other crew were reading sensor readings. "Drones are coming this way."

Gallo stood up from his captain's chair and glared at they grayed out planet. It was supposed to be a blue planet with green ground. The planet was supposed to be the role model and the dream for many people in the Nebula.

"Initiate the portal engine!" Gallo bellowed out an order.

His fleet escaped without a trouble, but it left everyone a bitter feeling of defeat. Krait didn't seem too shocked to hear the news on the other hand. He smiled bitterly as he spoke to Gallo.

"I figured something like that happened. I feared the worst, and it's even worse than the worst..."

He said not many words later on. He said he would stay on Crag's until the last moment. And Gallo and Gharyn concluded that Andromeda union was effectively destroyed.

Gallo's fleet returned to Cyan and filed a report to Naliss.

"I see," Naliss let out of a deep sigh and said, "So, pretty much everything is going haywire."

She was on a screen when the report was made. Gallo and Gharyn were on their own bridges.

"We are pretty much on our own, it seems," Gharyn responded.

"It does seem so, but I think there are few hopes out there," She said, "Though for now, seeking allies is done for."

Gallo inquired, "What are we going to do now?"

"We develop Cyan now. It is time to fix up this shithole."

- Fin

