

A sacrifice is usually considered a selfless act because one is giving up one's life.
However, would a sacrifice be selfish if it is to please oneself?

[Alien arc] [13] [Selfish Sacrifice] [12338]

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There was a legend, a story that ESPs could be granted of absolute powers for just few seconds... in exchange of their lives.

It was a form of ESP's overexertion. Overexertion occurred when an ESP's desire to accomplish something was so strong that one was willing to sacrifice everything for it. In computing, it was referred as overclocking. In mechanical terms, it was called burnout or overloading.

Although somewhat rare, death from overexertion wasn't uncommon.

However, this was different kind of overexertion. Overexertion provided an ESP with much more powers than one would be capable of.

"This" was different because it took away one's life no matter what, and in exchange, a miracle would be granted.

Symptoms were different as well. When an ESP overexerts, one would bleed from nose, ears, and eyes. In contrast, when this miracle would occur, one's heart would simply freeze and there would be no bleeding at all. Depending on

circumstances, an ESP would have up to, in general, 10 seconds of absolute powers; powers that they would not be capable of no matter what.

Quick death would follow afterwards.

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Naliss was reading through a piece of document explaining this "legend" on a holographic screen. She found this file in the Karma's database.

Seven years passed. Although highly unstable, peace was achieved for Gray mist as well as mankind.

The aliens had been fairly inactive against humans. They continued to occupy New Earth, but they showed no further signs of conquest.

Meanwhile, Gray mist had officially become one of the major powers in the Nebula. They were supported and backed up by the Blackbirds. Other clans had no choice but to accept Gray mist as a major player as a direct result.

The Claw of Ra had also formed an alliance with Gray mist as well, further reinforcing position of Gray mist. The Nomads remained hostile however, even refusing any communications with them.

Additionally, Gray mist had been in frequent contact with the Hope. About a year ago, the Hope announced that it had formed a nation within the ship and formerly the captain, Erika, had become the president of the Hope.

There had been various changes to Gray mist itself as well.

Sarbas had entered maturity and Gallo repeatedly announced that he would be his successor. Gharyn retired but still worked for Gallo as his personal advisor. Ormvor became the new clan headman of the Mystic.

In addition, Arnon became the chief trainer of all combat-capable people on Cyan. He was also in charge of Gallo's personal guardians. It was Naliss' idea to have Gallo's own, dedicated, guards.

Lastly, an ambitious project was currently being carried out by Gray mist. The clan was building its first outpost right outside of the Nebula which was approximately a few days away from Cyan by flight time. Waran was overseeing the construction. This project marked an important step for Gray mist. It was to be the first step for them to venture outside of the nebula. For the record, no other nebular pirate clans had done so.

Gallo was taking a rest in the backyard of the Calvin and Erune orphanage. He grew a habit of coming here when he wanted to take a break from his usual

political affairs. He had gotten used to such affairs, but it did not mean he had to like it.

Erune gave birth to a boy six years ago, and the couple named the boy Esperer. They had another child two years ago. It was a girl and she was named Esperie.

The Calvin and Erune orphanage was originally an ordinary orphanage, but as years passed, and Cyan became stabilized, number of orphans decreased significantly, and refugees needed a place to take care of their young children. Therefore, the orphanage turned into a multi-purpose kindergarten.

On surface, it acted as a kindergarten, but it featured a school and a training ground for children. The place was also a secret base for Gray mist.

Erune approached Gallo who was lying down on barren backyard. She was carrying Esperie on her back. Esperer grew up enough to play on his own along with other orphans and kids.

"You are here again," She said with a soft and gentle tone.

"I need a break. Too much politics," Gallo muttered. "Where is Calvin?"

"Out somewhere. A new wave of refugees arrived, apparently with lots of kids."

"I guess it ain't easy running this place, either, eh."

"Probably easier than being in your position," She said, grinning.

He responded with a deep groan and spoke no further.

He returned to his office which was located on the second floor of Gray mist inn. Gharyn was present in his office, meditating.

"How long have you been waiting?" Gallo asked.

"Since this morning."

And it was evening.

He sat in his chair hastily. "What brings you here?"

"I've brought patrol reports."

Gray mist had been sending out patrol fleets for Crag's. Gray mist had seven patrol fleets: each consisted of one cruiser and six frigates. Their primary task was basically scan the area for any alien activities and report back immediately if found any.

"You being here means that something has happened, I reckon?"

Gharyn beamed a grin at him. "Perhaps."

The reports were all positive regarding the security of Creg's. However, there was a separate report from a specific patrol fleet which had disobeyed their order and ventured into the vicinity of New Earth.

"What were they thinking when they did this?" Gallo muttered.

"They will be punished accordingly," Gharyn replied. "Meanwhile, they found out something strangely interesting. Read the report further down."

The report said that the alien at New Earth was surprisingly inactive, and they were able to approach the planet beyond a hundred clicks before they started to react to their presence.

(A click equals to one million kilometers.)

Seven years ago, when Gallo's fleet approached New Earth, they were spotted even from a thousand clicks away.

"And they managed to perform a deep scan on the planet, too. They brought some really valuable scan readings."

On bottom of the report, there was a conclusion of their deep scan on New Earth.

It said that billions of people were still living on the planet. It was unclear how they were living from the scan however. It also said that the planet was guarded by three mothership class alien vessels.

"The report does not explain why they were able to approach so close though," Gallo said.

"Indeed, and that is why I am here. I am here to file an official request to the patrol fleets to intentionally approach New Earth and scan them."

They both knew that it might be a very risky act. It might entice the aliens to retaliate which was something he did not want. However, sitting still and doing nothing wasn't Gallo's cup of tea, either.

"I suppose sitting back won't accomplish anything...", Gallo mumbled and spoke to Gharyn. "Do we even have enough force to fight them head on?"

Gharyn smiled and shook his head. "Not at this moment."

"Then is it really wise to make this move?"

"I would not know," Gharyn replied firmly. "But what I do know is that I see this as an opportunity."

"This might cost the lives on Creg's," Gallo said gravely.

"So be it then."

Gharyn was determined for this decision, and Gallo wasn't about to start an argument with the eldest and wisest ESP in the Mystic.

"Very well, have your way," Gallo said indifferently. He had no reason to object. In fact, he wanted to take some actions sooner or later.

"To defeat the enemy, we must know the enemy," Gharyn added and thanked him.

The presence of Gray mist was enlarging among human factions. It wasn't just in the Nebula. Words spread quickly through various smaller resistance forces and

remnant of people started to recognize Gray mist, this also allowed them to learn that they weren't alone out there.

Also, many of them claimed that they were saved by captain Cecilia in their critical moments. There wasn't much known information regarding the captain except that she led a small, but highly efficient, fleet that seemed to be invincible.

Naliss wanted more allies, and she wanted to know more about the captain. However, tracking her down proved to be fruitless for many years.

Meanwhile, finally Gray mist had a small outpost constructed right outside of the Nebula.

The outpost was nothing more than just a few blocks connected together with a docking module along with a few turrets for self-defense. In normal times, a small outpost like this would be laughed at. Not in these times though.

This small outpost was essentially a supply base for all patrol fleets. Waran was placed in charge of overseeing the outpost and patrolling. He was ordered by Ormvor, who was appointed to be the new leader of the Mystic, to upgrade sensor arrays on patrol ships and perform a full-sweep scan on New Earth.

He duly complied and upgraded sensor arrays of three patrol cruisers. He also concluded that this particular mission was important enough to warrant his own presence. He was going to lead the patrol fleet personally.

Two weeks had passed by and preparation was complete. Waran entered a bridge of a newly upgraded patrol cruiser and was greeted by its crew.

"The two other cruisers are coming here, sir," A crew informed him who was inspecting the ship's systems. The cruiser was currently docked with the outpost.

"Fair enough, do we have any idea how much time is going to be required for the full-sweep deep scan?"

Waran was explained that the full-sweep deep scan was consisted of two phases.

"We don't know how long it will take. We have to be there and see how the system responds to various variables."

The two other cruisers joined soon enough, and Waran's patrol fleet, consisted of three cruisers, departed and initiated their portal engines to New Earth.

The fleet appeared before grayed out New Earth ten thousand clicks away to insure a safe approach as well as a safe escape.

"We've exited safely," A bridge crew announced. "All green."

"Nothing on the sensors. All clear," Another crew reported.

Waran gave an order to approach the planet within one hundred clicks. "Let's go slow. We don't want to ruin this," He added.

The ships lowered their power usages to minimum in order to decrease their electrical signature. They approached slow, real slow, taking them hours just to reach their sweet spot to initiate scanning.

"Initiating phase 1 scanning, the system is reporting an estimated time of two hours," A crew reported.

New Earth was grayed out. It was simply gray as if it was painted so. Phase one scanning revealed that the gray color was a result of a heavy modular field.

"What is a modular field?" Waran inquired a bridge crew nearby.

There were two kinds of energy fields. One was a gravitational field, and the other was a modular field. A gravitational field was known as shields for ships in the past and was originally developed by Dr. Cezary. A modular field was developed hundreds years later. Those two fields were basically force shields used for space vessels. The major difference between them was each one had a different set of damage resistances.

A traditional gravitational field was strong against kinetic and explosive, basically brutal physical forces. A modular shield was more effective against energy-based forces, such as lasers and EM.

"So, the reason the planet is grayed out is due to the field?"

"It would appear so from the readings. We are going to need to analyze is further to know exactly what we are dealing with. Phase two scan will prove to be really interesting if we can get it done."

However -

"The system is stating that phase two will take four days full."

"Four days," Waran laughed nervously and repeated with a question mark. "Four days?"

"Yes, sir."

He looked around bridge. "Do any of you think we can stay here undetected for four days?"

No one replied him. The decision was up to him entirely. After a while of deep thoughts, he came up with an alternative solution.

"I want you to launch a probe to the planet," He said. "I want a video feed. Can it go through the field?"

"That'd greatly depend on what purpose the field has, but it's a modular field. We might be able to get a probe through if we use your ESP to enhance its inertia."

Basically, Warran would have to make the probe as if it was a cannon ball.

"I assume they will notice us if we get a probe in there."

"Obviously. They might notice us even before that."

Waran concluded that scanning for four days was out of question and decided that he wanted to look what was behind the gray modular field. While a probe was being modified for the task, he had some free time.

"Get me a close view of one of their ships," He commanded in his chair.

There were three large alien vessels in New Earth's orbit.

"I wonder if those vessels are powering the field...," He mumbled.

The alien ships had completely different ship design principles. Their ships resembled that of three giant long plates slapped together on top of each other. It had no navigational lights. In fact, there was nothing on its surface. There weren't even traces of weaponry.

"Ok, sir, we've installed a camera on the probe and added a few modifications for the job. We want you to help enhancing its signal so that we can maintain a healthy link to the probe."

The crewman took out a display device which was projecting a small holographic image of their spaceship.

"The probe is located about ... here."

Waran nodded. "Alright, locking my vision on it ... done."

"Alright, we will launch the probe soon."

Waran loaded the image of the probe in his head and closed his eyes slowly.

"Launching in 3..., 2..., 1..., launch."

A small probe flew rapidly toward New Earth.

"Zero percent packet loss, ninety eight clicks to go."

Ten minutes later.

"Sixty two clicks to go, currently getting two percent packet loss."

Thirteen minutes later.

"Twenty nine clicks to go, twelve percent packet loss, sir."

"12% is still acceptable. How are you holding, sir?"

Waran had few sweats on his forehead but overall he was doing fine.

A moment later...

"Less than ten clicks to go, reporting twenty percent packet loss."

As the probe hit the field, Waran recoiled in his chair. It was as if he had taken a heavy blow on his chest.

"The field is resisting the probe!"

Waran had his eyes closed and sweating heavily. He spoke in a heavy labored breath. "Hold on...!"

"Uh oh, they are releasing drones. They noticed us!"

He wasn't responding. Instead, after tens of seconds, he let out of a shout as he opened his eyes, jolting his upper body forward.

"The probe penetrated successfully, sir!"

"We are losing the link to the probe rapidly though!"

The link with the probe was deteriorating at an alarming rate and Waran was quite hopeless in the situation. His sweats were dripping like rain. He was at his limit and there was nothing more he could do.

"Packet loss exceeded fifty percent! We are losing signal!"

"The probe is descending through the atmosphere! We expect to have a video feed in less than 30 seconds, sir!"

"Sir, the drones are en route to our location. ETA two minutes! There are thousands of them!"

Waran growled and spoke, "Initiate the portal engine. Turn the ship around! Prepare to escape! But maintain the link! We might be able to get few seconds of video feed, and that's all we will need!"

Even with Waran's ESP assisting the integrity of the link to the probe, the link was experiencing over fifty percent of packet loss. They weren't able to communicate with the probe quite well. Latency was also too great.

"Portal engine powered up, sir. We can take off at any time we need to!"

"How's the probe?"

There was a short silence before a crewman answered.

"I think we lost it, sir. It's been a few seconds since its last response."

He growled in response. "Let's get the hell out of here."

"Yes, sir."

As the fleet engaged their portal engines, they received a faint signal from the probe. Packet loss had exceeded over ninety percent.

"We have a signal, sir! It's faint but we are definitely receiving it!"

"Do we have a video feed?"

"Yes, sir! Putting on the screen. It's low quality and it's only 6 seconds but it has to do!"

Main screen on the bridge blanked a few times before it was filled with static. Then, the screen showed something extraordinary. It showed a vigilant forest, very, very dense forest.

No crew on the bridge knew what it was at the immediate moment. It was Waran who was able to define what they were looking at.

"It is ... a forest. That's a forest."

In response, a crew blurted out, "That's the greens?"

Bridge crew murmured from the totally unexpected sight. Waran was utterly confused as well. For all he knew, he was expecting ruins of a civilization.

Another crew remarked, "That's so ... green."

The video-feed last mere six seconds before it was completely cut off. It was too short for some and long enough for few. Waran passed out soon after due to exhaustion.

"Gallo, I have some unexpected news." Gharyn entered Gallo's inn room where he was shaving. He was used to not having decent privacy. Therefore, he did not mind too much about Gharyn entering without knocking as well as a perhaps minor fact that he was completely naked in front of a washroom mirror.

Gray mist had no luxury to employ bathrobes, so Gallo donned his coat over his naked body.

"What can I do for you?"

Gharyn wasted no time and displayed the video feed obtained by Waran's team.

He, just like everyone else, was puzzled by such an unexpected outcome.

"What does this mean?" He asked, shrugging as he was completely lost.

Gharyn sighed in agreement to his reaction.

"I don't know what to make of this. No one does."

Gallo called for a meeting. All important figures were summoned, including Dacre. He joined the meeting as an ambassador for the Blackbirds.

He displayed the video feed in front of those who gathered. As expected, everyone was puzzled.

"Does anyone have any other opinion other than '*what does this mean?*' If you do, speak up. I am all ears."

Sarbas raised his hand. Gallo nodded at him, giving his permission to speak.

"I've sensed desperation from the feed," He spoke, "I think the aliens may be desperate."

"Desperate for what?" Gallo asked.

"That I don't know."

Sighing, he asked the others. "Did anyone feel what Sarbas felt?" Naliss, you are an ESP. Did you feel anything?"

Naliss answered after a brief silence. "I did feel something, but it's not quite what Sarbas felt. I sensed joy."

He looked at Gharyn and asked. "You must've also sensed something."

"I've sensed nothing. Perhaps, nothingness is what I felt."

Frustrated, he scratched his head. "Great, this is messed up," He muttered. "How about we try to take the planet back?"

He was proposing a war with the alien. Everyone was taken by surprise and thought he was just joking as he'd normally joke. However, as he started to explain his motive and plan, they realized he was not joking.

"I am not joking here," He assured. "We need to fight back. We've been suppressed for too long."

"But, Gallo, we are not ready. We are way too outnumbered," Gharyn said.

"Then we get ready," Gallo replied with determination.

"Gallo," Gharyn sighed deeply. "I do understand how you feel, but it's not that easy."

"Everything has to start somewhere. And we start now. We won't wait for some hundreds years just to get ready!" Gallo raised his tone and pressed for the notion to start a war.

There was a short silence in the room.

"I think we should prepare for all-out war."

Everyone's attention was being focused at the source of the voice. Naliss, it was.

"We can't wait forever. We have to act sooner or later. And the sooner, the better," She added.

Vaelmnaal was also present in the meeting. Although he took some time, he did agree with Naliss and Gallo.

"Perhaps, Gallo doesn't mean starting a war right now, but he means that we should start preparing now."

Actually, he did mean to start a war as soon as possible, but he decided to lower this tone since his suggestion was being met with great resistance.

Dacre spoke up, "Then I suppose you need to unite the Nebula under one ruler."

Gharyn sighed deeply and asked Gallo, "Are you absolutely sure about this?"

"How long are we going to wait anyway?" Gallo responded. "A hundred years? A thousand years? We have to act now."

Gharyn wasn't sure what was making Gallo press so hard and furthermore he wasn't sure that they could ever get ready to face the massive numbers that the aliens had. Regardless, he decided to support him for the time being.

Gallo's decision spread quickly through the Nebula. The Blackbirds were in favor of Gallo's decision. However, the Claw of the Ra did not send any responses, and the Nomadss was still hostile toward Gray mist.

This meant only one thing. Gray mist had to gain the full support from the rest of the Nebula pirates in one way or another.

Gallo was having a meeting with his close advisors, namely Naliss and Gharyn.

"CoR and The Nomadss did not send any responses," Gallo said. They were in Gallo's inn room.

“It was obvious that the Nomadss wasn’t going to be cooperative,” Naliss responded. “We will need to deal with CoR first.”

“Reasoning with CoR may work,” Gharyn spoke, “And I volunteer to visit CoR as an ambassador.”

After giving it some thoughts, Gallo declared, “I am going to go to CoR.”

“No, Gallo, you are not going.” Naliss was against the idea strongly while Gharyn remained content.

“I am going to meet them in person,” Gallo added, “I’ve met them before in person. And I think that they want to see me.”

Gharyn sensed that Gallo was rushing for some reason, but he considered that as a positive bonus.

“If you say so, Gallo, but I do want you to take someone with you. I want you to take Dacre with you.”

“Dacre? He has no place in this,” Naliss responded.

“True, but he represents the Blackbirds. If he does go, this will be a meeting between three major factions. It will mean something to the Nomads.”

Gharyn did have a good point and Naliss had to agree.

Dacre pointed at himself, surprised.

“Me? I am going, too?”

Gallo found Dacre at the inn. He was on the first floor where he was drinking beer. Gharyn and Naliss were also with Gallo at this time. Gharyn explained the situation to Dacre.

“Oh, I see. Clever, bullying the Nomads, eh.”

Dacre was essentially correct. There was one thing to be concerned of. The Nomads was a major faction, and no one knew clearly how they’d react to this. In the worst case, Gallo would have to battle the Nomads before the aliens.

“Would it be alright for me to tag along though? I do have some not-so-pleasant history with CoR,” Dacre said.

“Speaking of that,” Gallo said, “I never heard what really happened. What happened?”

Dacre pouted a little and groaned as if he didn’t want to tell, but letting out a moan, he seemed to have given up keeping it a secret.

“I didn’t do anything dirty. I just didn’t tell them that I was leaving, and subsequently they became suspicious of me.”

“Well, I don’t have a good history with them, either. After all, I killed off two wardens because of you.”

Indeed, Gallo was accused by CoR wardens and they attempted to seize him which he dully opposed and killed two wardens.

Gharyn had no idea that both of them had a bad history with CoR.

“Perhaps, I should go alone,” He said.

“No,” Gallo refused firmly. “It’s about time we come to a fully understanding with CoR. Sending just you won’t help that.”

Gharyn certainly felt that Gallo matured both as a leader and a man. Beaming a smile at him, he told him, “Very well, I shall see how you will manage this one.”

Gallo and Dacre both wasted no time and became ready to depart in just few hours. Gharyn felt that this mission needed to be classified and let no one know about their departure. They left on a simple transport that housed few fighter crafts. Gallo, Gharyn, Dacre and ten crews were aboard the vessel.

The transport had just left Cyan.

“Do you know the history of the Ra?” Gharyn asked Gallo who was having a drink with Dacre.

Gallo shook his head at once. “I have no idea.”

Gharyn turned his attention to Dacre, and he responded, “I know a little. The Ra created 3Ra Syndicate.” And he became silent which meant that it was all he knew.

Clearing throat, Gharyn spoke, “We are on a diplomatic mission with the Claw of the Ra. It would be wise to know a little about them.”

Gallo would normally reject being lectured, but he had few drinks in and was relaxed. He was willing to let Ghayn have his way.

Understanding Gallo's silence as a form of approval, he began.

"Dacre is correct that the Ra created 3Ra Syndicate, but the Claw of the Ra originates from Kakari Ra who became outlawed by the Ra family."

"Kakari Ra? I read that name from somewhere," Dacre said.

"Yes, she attempted to overthrow her own family but was exiled. She did come back, however, after hundreds of years with a fleet."

"Woah, is this a man or a woman?" Gallo asked despite of Gharyn clearing mentioning "she" in his explanation.

"A woman," Dacre responded. "I remember her name now: The mighty Valkyrie of Nebula, Kakari Ra."

"Yes," Gharyn nodded. "Afterwards, she ruled her regime with iron fist but she did reward those who were loyal handsomely," explained Gharyn.

"Why was it called '3Ra'?" Gallo asked.

"The Syndicate was ruled by three Ra families. That was why," Ghayrn answered his innocent question.

"Why did she try to overthrow her own family then? And why did she try so hard to come back again and eventually overthrew her own family's regime?" Gallo continued on with his questions. He was genuinely curious.

Gharyn was silent for a moment. "Nobody knows for certain," He responded eventually. "Historians argue various possibilities."

"Historians are as bad as politicians," Darcre remarked with a sarcastic tone.

Ghayn beamed a weak smile at him. He smiled as if he was smiling at his own child. It was warm, yet rigid.

“Gallo, everyone has their places and their ends. Not everyone is blessed to be able to choose such.” He made a pause, and when he spoke, his voice was heavy as if he was sentencing someone a capital punishment order. “Know where you stand. Know your limits and exploit your limits.”

“Ah,” Dacre chimed, “I believe I’ve heard of that phrase.”

Ghayn would have never expected Dacre to know. “You do?”

“Aye, I believe it was one of the crimson wizard’s favorite lines.”

Ghayn was really surprised. “I would have never guessed that you would be a type who’d read books.”

Dacre laughed pleasantly. “You are correct, sir. I am a type who doesn’t read books, but I have a functional set of ears and a memory of an average human. I’ve heard some stuff about him,” He added, “Another favorite line of his was ‘Don’t step on my path, else I will kill you.’ or something like that. Many idolize him, you see, for what he did and how he was able to get away.”

As he dipped into his drink, he whispered to himself, “Even now.”

The crimson wizard, the prime example of a controversial figure who stood everything against the norms of his time...

Many orphans, including Dacre himself, admired his tales from e-books simply because the crimson wizard seemed invincible. No governments were able to restrain him. No one was able to stop him from doing what he wanted and most importantly, he was able to get away with everything he had done.

It was something one would only read from fairy-tale type of stories. It was surreal, but historical records proved that it did indeed happen. Therefore, kids, even some adults, adore his stories.

Gallo also had read his own fair share of e-books regarding the crimson wizard. He admired him for what he did and his seemingly impossible deeds.

“Was this crazy lady, Kakari Ra, in the same era as the crimson wizard?”

“She’s a highly respected figure among CoR members. Don’t even say that, Gallo,” Gharyn lectured.

“I don’t care. Just answer my question.”

Gharyn was reluctant to reply but he did regardless. “Yes,” he answered.

“Then please tell me-.”

Gharyn was confused. “Regarding?”

“Why are we so damn weak now?”

Gallo’s question tackled many aspects of current mankind’s problems. Great decrease in number of high quality ESPs and Hyper-humans was one of them which he pointed out and asked.

“That...,” Gharyn hesitated to continue, “I do not know.”

“Do you think those crazy metallic things would have beaten us to near extinction if we had legendary figures like we did few thousand years ago?”

Neither Gharyn nor Dacre had an answer to that.

“The crimson wizard is-!” Gallo raised his voice dramatically and lowered his voice also dramatically as he spoke out the last part of his sentence. “Still alive.”

Gharyn and Dacre were both, rather, confused to hear that.

“I may be drunk, but I know what I am saying. The crimson wizard is still alive and kicking.”

Gallo’s statement wasn’t an ill-statement. He had experienced the first-hand previously. Although there was no evidence or whatsoever, his gut feelings told him that the old man was the crimson wizard. All events in the seventh day of fire pointed that way. Furthermore, he had experienced many dreams that involved the crimson wizard.

He did explain his encounter with Sae the little witch.

“Hard to believe,” Gharyn said cautiously. “Sae the witch-”

He was cut off by Gallo. “Little.”

“Pardon?”

“You forgot little, Sae the little witch.”

“Oh, yes...” Clearing his throat, Gharyn continued on, “Her age would be as old as the crimson wizard indeed.” He added however, “But there was no proof that who you met was in fact her.”

He had a point although Gallo was absolutely certain that the kid he encountered was in fact Sae the little witch. He just didn’t have any tangible proof.

“Wait, I think I have proof,” He blurted. “Take a look at this.”

He pulled out his energy blade. “She made this.” As he activated the blade, its beautiful red blade shot out from its tip.

Dacre’s eyes became flat as hollow as he saw the blade. He felt something strong from the blade; it was shockingly similar sensations he felt from the Moonlight blade that Yuudai’s father once owned.

Gharyn, meanwhile, felt something very sinister from the blade. It almost felt like great evil was lurking inside.

Neither of them chose to make a comment regarding the blade. Having received no positive feedback after drawing out his blade, Gallo became slightly pissed, partially due to alcohol, and turned around and walked out of the quarter.

“I am going to nap!” He shouted prior leaving.

His departure left the quarter silenced for a moment. Eventually, Gharyn inquired Dacre who was still going on with his drinks.

“That blade of his... Do you know how he acquired it?”

“No idea, sir. He had two close comrades. They would know but...”

But they were killed. Even Gharyn knew that.

“I see.”

When the transport entered probe network of CoR, they were immediately contacted.

“Turn back whoever you are,” A voice sounded through the transport’s speakers.

“Or we will fire.”

Gharyn quickly rushed to the cockpit and answered the call.

“This is Gharyn of Gray mist. We’ve come here on a diplomatic matter.”

There was a moment of silence before a reply was made.

“It does not matter. Leave or we will fire.”

By the moment, Gallo rushed into the cockpit. “This is Gallo of Gray mist. Get your shit together and let us pass.”

There was a short silence before a new voice resounded. “... You have a lot of guts for coming here without a fleet.”

“Gallo,” Gharyn whispered to him, “We are here on a diplomatic mission. Try to be friendly. We don’t need more enemies.”

Ignoring him, Gallo declared boldly, “I have more guts than you do. Even Dacre is aboard.”

A laughing was heard through the channel. "So, you've come to turn yourselves in?"

Gallo let out of a laugh in response as well. "Hah! No, I've come to set the records straight and form a formal alliance with you people, but I see you still have not changed at all from your last war. Fucking inbreds. This is why they never should inbreed."

"... You do realize where you are, do you not?" The voice was grave.

He let out of a momentary laugh and responded, "Do you even realize what situation the whole fucking clusters are in? Or is your ego so inflated that it needs a little kicking in the arse to see clearly?"

"Gallo!" Gharyn exclaimed.

Dacre was present in the cockpit as well. "I am detecting few squadrons of fighters closing in," He reported.

"Good, Dacre, get in your fighter. I will get in mine."

"Gallo, what are you trying to do?!" Gharyn demanded an answer. "We are obviously outnumbered. We must turn back!"

"Hell, no! I am going to show them!"

Only Gallo and Dacre went out in their fighters, meaning it was two versus unknown number of opposing fighters. Gharyn quickly scanned the area with ESP.

“I sense twenty seven fighters approaching,” He sent a message to Gallo and Dacre.

“Doesn’t matter!” Gallo uttered as he piloted his fighter right where enemy squadron was incoming. Dacre was silently following his six.

After few minutes they confronted CoR’s squadron, already more than six CoR fighters were shot down. Gharyn was pleasantly surprised. He knew Gallo was an ace pilot, but he had no idea that he would be this excellent.

Indeed, Gallo was an ace pilot. Even then fighting against so many at once was a challenge no doubt. What Gharyn did not know was that his continuous strange dreams and acquisition of his blade had enhanced his senses. No one was really aware that he was slowly reaching the rank of S which would be the first in the era.

He no longer heavily relied on sensors. He just knew where his targets were and skillfully maneuvered his fighter. Dacre was simply watching and guarding Gallo’s six.

“If they are so fucking stupid that they believe they should battle us, then so be it!” Gallo bellowed as he drowned yet another CoR fighter. “I don’t need such a stupid ally!”

Gharyn, this time, remained silent, for Gallo was essentially correct. The time was indeed not for internal fights. It was time to shake hands, unite, and fight back to regain what humanity had lost.

“Fucking idiots!” He continued on his rant on a channel, “Why are we even fighting here?! What for? If it’s for ego, then you don’t deserve to live! At least not in this era!”

When most of CoR’s squadron was shot down in a little over fifteen minutes, their remaining fighters retreated.

“Yeah! Run like cowards! You couldn’t even defeat me when I came here literally alone!”

At last, Dacre spoke through a public channel. “Quy, are you there?”

There was a long silence before a man answered. “Yes, I am here.”

“Do you think I betrayed CoR?”

There was another long silence before he answered, “No, I don’t think so. You left on your own accord and you even left a letter explaining why.”

“Quy, let us not fight. This is not the time for a meaningless fight. Let us enter and negotiate for an alliance.”

Quy didn’t sound convinced but agreed, “Very well, let’s hear it.”

“Green light from CoR,” Gharyn told Gallo and Dacre right after.

“Who is this Quy guy?” Gallo asked Dacre.

“One of the wardens. The most level-headed guy in their ranks. Highly respected as well. If he stands on our side, other wardens if any are still left will side with him.”

Then Gallo recalled that CoR had two wardens left.

“I forgot the name of the other warden,” He said.

“That’d be Emold.”

“And how is that Emold guy?”

“Not the easiest guy to deal with, but, if we can get Quy on our side, Emold will fold.”

By Gallo’s own demand, they just walked in without any guns. And there were just Gallo, Dacre, and Gharyn; they did not bring any guards obviously. Gallo was flanked by Dacre and Gharyn and faced a group of soldiers led by a man who looked refined.

The man was Quy who could pass as a scientist rather than a pirate. In fact, he was donning a light gray coat even. He looked up and down on Gallo and glanced at Dacre. Folding his arms, he told them, “Kindly follow me to a secured room.”

“Fine,” Gallo replied.

Once inside, another man was waiting who was Emold. He was a very barbaric looking man but dressed up finely in a clean dark navy blue uniform of some sort.

Quy began the talk as soon as he made sure that the area was secure.

“We don’t actually have an issue with forming a mutual alliance. But we do have an issue with working with the Blackbirds.”

“As you know,” Emold added, “They worked with the Nomads to attack us. How are we supposed to trust them? They could turn their back at any time and stab us or even you, Gray mist.”

His point was indeed valid. Alas, Gallo was having none of it.

“The circle must be broken somewhere. I am breaking it. I will just trust them,” He said out loudly with confidence.

Quy and Emold glanced at each other. They expected a logical answer but a blind promise or statement.

Gharyn was also aware of what they were thinking but he kept his mouth shut and let Gallo do whatever he wanted. After all, he was the leader and insisted to come.

“Blind trust will only get you killed,” Emold said to which Gallo replied.

“If they are stupid enough to backstab us in a time like this, man kind as whole does not deserve to survive. That is my take on it. I am not saying I don’t have doubts, but like I said, the circle must be broken somewhere by someone.”

Then he pointed at himself imposingly. “I am breaking it. Follow me.”

Quy and Emold glanced at each other again, and then there was a long silence afterwards.

When it was officially announced that Gray mist, CoR, and Blackbirds formed a formal alliance, the Nomads' reaction was none. They were dead silent and still refused any attempt to communicate.

Gallo, Dacre, and Gharyn were having a final discussion on what to do with the Nomads.

"No communication or whatsoever. I never like dead silence," Dacre said with his arms folded up.

Gallo casually told them, "What can they do now anyway? Let's leave them be. Have someone, like CoR, to watch them while we launch the attack on the aliens."

The meeting proved to be a short one because Gallo's idea was accepted. Gharyn did not want to further entice violence and felt it was also a better idea to leave them be. CoR was going to have close eyes on them, a role they accepted without requiring much persuasion.

Once the Nebula was loosely united, Gray Mist began assembling ships for an assault on New Earth. The bold idea was met with skepticisms as well as cheers. Some were excited by the idea of giving one back to the aliens. Some were concerned that it'd disturb a hornet's nest, so to speak.

Regardless, Gallo's mind was set.

Two years later, a fleet stood outside of Gray mist outpost. There were one hundred sixty six corvette class warships.

A corvette class ship was essentially a frigate on steroids. It had 2/3 firepower of a cruiser while having a slightly larger frame than a general frigate. It was an answer mankind had come up with diminishing resources in both crew and materials.

Both the Blackbirds and Gray mist mined non-stop to provide steady materials for smooth ship constructions. CoR's contribution was building fighters to further secure their strength within the Nebula.

By time the fleet was done, there were three thousand fighters between Gray mist, CoR, and the Blackbirds. The Nomads were no longer even a threat at this point. The alliance outgunned them vastly.

Regardless, 166 corvettes still weren't nowhere enough to take the aliens head on. Thus, Gallo's initial plan of waging a war altered, seeing it'd take hundreds of years just to assemble a fleet that was sizable enough.

Taking back New Earth became a new goal or at least find out what exactly happened to the planet. Unlike his initial goal, this new altered goal was actually supported by a good number of people because it was universally agreed that something had to be done for New Earth.

Gallo, having waited long enough, went on with the plan without further ado. The fleet engaged their portal engines and popped right at New Earth, 100 clicks away.

The planet was just like how it was pictured previously. It was covered by a dull gray substance. Unlike the last time however, there were activities in the vicinity.

From the distance they were at, it looked as if millions of tiny dots were gliding on the planet. Then the dots gathered on a spot and began to approach.

“Drones, lots of them!” A crew shouted urgently. “Thousands of hundreds! They are approaching!”

It occurred too fast. The moment they arrived, they were being assaulted as if they were expecting their arrival.

However -

“They are focusing only on us!”

The drones were attacking only the Hope, Gallo’s ship. The rest of the fleet, 165 corvettes attempted to break the assault. However, there were just too many drones to make a difference.

“Shield is going down rapidly, sir! We won’t be able to hold for more than few minutes!”

Although ship's sensor was overloaded by the amount of incoming info, bridge crews were able to make out that they were being attacked by apparently half a million drones. They focused their fire on his ship only as if they were out to get him.

There was no time to think about how they knew the timing of their attack. They had to get the hell out. Alas, the portal engine could not initiate due to power fluctuations.

Gallo snickered briefly. On surface, he looked carefree.

"I guess this is it then," He smiled as if he had no more regrets or lingering attachments, "Thanks for everything, guys."

Gharyn was trying to find a way to save Gallo, but he, too, was out of ideas. It was too sudden and too forceful.

As shields collapsed and the ship started taking fire directly to hull, small explosions occurred all over the ship.

"Reactor's hit! #12 turret is down!"

Gallo remained motionless in his chair. Gharyn who was standing next to him also remained still as well. It was as if they accepted their inevitable fate.

"Hey, Gharyn," He called out amid of explosions occurring on the bridge.

"Yes, Gallo?"

"I hope my life was fruitful."

Gharym smiled peacefully. "Oh, yes, it was."

"Good enough. I was getting too sick of it anyhow."

"Yes, I could tell."

They both started to laugh pleasantly.

"Fucking life," Gallo blurted. "I hated it."

As the ship's condition became critical, life support went offline and air was leaking. When the ship was losing its balance system, everything froze as if time had paused. Everything was in still motion, even sounds.

"What the...?" Gallo looked at Gharyn for an explanation, but he, too, was frozen.

"What's going on?"

For a moment, he felt as if he was floating and then everything came back to normal. Bridge crews became quiet as they were trying to realize what had just happened. Nothing was there. Sensor arrays were utterly destroyed. Thus, they had no reliable way of what exactly happened and what were even out there.

"Can anyone please tell me what just happened?" Gallo demanded but no one answered, not even Gharyn.

"What is our location?"

"We are trying to figure that out, sir."

It took a while, but it seemed that Gallo's vessel was somehow transported to a random spot near the Nebula.

"Gharyn, you must know something."

Gharyn narrowed his eyes. He had doubts but he had a guess.

"The only possibility comes to mind is teleportation by an ESP."

"So, you didn't do this?"

Gharyn exhaled deeply. "I could have, but I could have teleported only you. There is no way I could have teleported an entire vessel."

"Then who did this? And whoever did this saved us."

"That is what I am wondering also. Who would have such powers?"

When Gallo's lone vessel reached Gray mist outpost, he was contacted by Waran who informed him that his fleet was able to flee from the battle without any causality. He also informed that Naliss was found dead in her office.

Gallo wasn't sure which news was more shocking, but Gharyn was pale for some reason.

"Gallo..., I think I know who saved us."

"Huh?"

Gharyn said he couldn't be sure until he saw Naliss, and he teleported himself and Gallo to Cyan in a blink of eye.

Naliss died. Her body was still in her office. Her body was still in her chair in front of her desk. It seemed to have been a quick and painless death as she had a smile on her face.

Gharyn approached her body slowly. He tried to touch her body but he bounced back as if he was afraid.

"This is my first time... seeing such a case... in my whole life," He mumbled.

"Can you tell me what the fuck is going on?" Gallo demanded.

"Gallo..., it was her. Naliss saved us." His voice was shaking slightly. "It was her..."

Gharyn told Gallo that she sacrificed her life for a miracle. And that miracle was to teleport Gallo's ship to safety.

"For teleportation, even for me, I can barely teleport myself to such a distance. Probably, I'd pass out as soon as I make such teleportation. And she teleported an entire vessel, Gallo. That's not possible unless one was willing to sacrifice everything for it."

He added, "Even that may have not been enough. Even such a will to sacrifice everything may have not been enough. Her desire must have been special, it must have been far beyond a simple desire or will."

Even for Gallo who was a bit slow at understanding things, it came to him quite clear.

“Call everyone here.”

Unexpected by his sudden statement, Gharyn begged pardon.

“Tell everyone to come here right now!”

It took days for every important figure to gather as many of them were in the fleet. Gharyn did his best to preserve her body from decaying.

In front of everyone, Gallo pointed at Naliss who remained unchanged and undecayed thanks to Gharyn.

“Here is the bitch you fucking people told me not to trust,” He uttered with full of anger. “And this bitch right here sacrificed her own fucking life to save our sorry asses!”

Everyone was quiet or rather they had nothing to say.

"The whole fucking time you guys badmouthed her and the whole fucking time you guys disrespected her!"

He started to smash everything in his sight. Men tried to stop him, but Gharyn stopped them.

"Let him be," He said, shaking his head and slowly closing his eyes, "Let him be..."

As he smashed everything in his sight, tears flew down through his cheeks like waterfall.

“The whole fucking time! The whole god damn fucking time!”

One by one, they started to leave the office. Dacre, Egna, and Ghayn were the only ones left in the office after, who said not a word but simply watched Gallo destroying things.

Dacre stared at Naliss’ face. Her peaceful face, seeing that made him wonder if Yudai died the same way. He hoped so. He really did.

Gallo was panting hard and was bleeding from his fists. He was covered by sweats and his face was drenched with tears. His eyes were bloodshot.

“I can’t take this anymore,” He whispered and then shouted, “I CANNOT TAKE THIS ANYMORE!”

He ran out, and the three followed.

Naliss’ sacrifice came as a shock to many because she was perceived to have her own agenda. Many thought that she was using him as her stepping stone. A fact that she sacrificed her life to save others made them realize that they were wrong. But it was too late. The deed was done.

Meanwhile, Gallo was found digging holes out open.

“Gallo, please get a hold of yourself, what are you doing?” Dacre asked while trying to stop him but he shook him off.

“I am digging three god damn holes!” Gallo shouted as he violently dug the ground.

Dacre kept a short distance this round and told him, “Calm down, Gallo. We understand that you are angry, and your anger is perfectly justified, but this is not how you should solve this.”

“I am digging holes to bury them! Naliss, Finn, and Karesinda!”

Gallo didn't know the concept of graves. He was just doing what he felt like he had to do. The only one who knew that he was digging graves was Gharyn. Even then, he never made graves for his fallen allies. His knowledge of graves came from reading old text.

“What for?!” Dacre continued to calm Gallo down.

“What for?!” He exclaimed with sorrow and anger. “Why the fuck should I care?! What for?! You really ask me that?!”

“What for?!” He repeated angrily, “What for?? FUCK THAT!”

He let out of a long, lingering, sorrow howl and then he passed out in a hole he was digging.

“Interesting, you are the second one to step in here at will.”

Naliss appeared in middle of a waving green field under a vivid blue sky. She uttered as she looked around, “So, this is the greens.” Her attention was soon fixed at the only figure in the field. “And I suppose you are Crimson wizard if the legend speaks true.”

“Not quiet, but close, yes.”

The figure was wearing a white robe with red linings. With short light brown hair and light brown eyes, whoever it was, he looked clearly feminine.

“It doesn’t matter. I’ve come here for a request.”

“In exchange of your life, I assume.”

She answered firmly, nodding, “Yes.” There was no hesitation in her answer. She made her mind up a long time ago.

The figure smiled peacefully. “State your wish then.”

“I am sure that you can read my mind. I need you to get a certain group of people to absolute safety from a trouble.”

“It shall be done.” The figure readied a strange red blade as it responded which basically grew out of his right palm. “Would you like quick death or slow death?”

She gasped. She was prepared for this, but still she wasn’t fully ready.

“Slow death please.”

“If you don’t mind, may I ask why you’d like slow death?”

She gazed vacantly as she responded, “I want to see...”

The figure nodded weakly as if it understood her intention. It posed to attack and then she was pierced by the blade through her heart and then her throat was cut immediately after.

She fell hopelessly. Having her strength completely drained from the attack, she fell. There was no blood gushing out from her wounds however, and her consciousness was still intact.

In fact, she was looking at her body from above.

“Look.” The figure pointed elsewhere with its index finger.

Her spirit observed Gallo digging what appeared to be graves fanatically.

“Heh.” She laughed weakly as her consciousness began to fade. “I’ve done my part, Gallo. Over to you,” were her last words.

- Fin