

This is where this arc really takes off. And personally I felt the quality of this story was miles better than its previous story Mud Fight.

Reading a lore file, [Two Clusters] [Lore] [Liberty captains], will help understanding this story slightly better.

I am also warning you that this story has extreme violence and gore.

[Ashuta arc] [3] [Hunt and hunted] [9600]

Rev 1.1 (Created on 2007 Jan 3 | Modified on 2015 Dec 22)

Year 9600, March 3rd.

A cruiser was docked at one of stations at Jupiter. The assault station was off limit to liberty captains.

The Jupiter assault station was composed of the assault station which was basically a large station full of heavy weaponries and other smaller stations for support. The whole structure was gigantic and the combined mass was one third of Moon.

Crewmen were unloading cargo by hands. It was obvious that the vessel had seen numerous battles by its scars on its hull. None of it seemed to be serious enough to warrant immediate attention however.

"So far so good, captain." A crewman who was overseeing the operation said to a captain. It was Xing who was a liberty captain.

Liberty captains were employed by United Sol. They were a part of United Sol military on paper at least. However, liberty captains were not strictly tied to duties for United Sol. As their title suggested, they were free to roam. They were free to

go anywhere - within Sol system and neutral zone -. They were hunted down by Andromeda union.

After unloading trade goods, they started uploading food and essential daily products before they depart for the Freedom colony. For some reasons, they had been picked on by pirates restlessly until they docked at the station.

Xing believed he had done nothing wrong to earn pirates' ire. He traced his memories. If there was anything that wasn't a part of his daily routine was that he let a passenger aboard.

"Ashuta..., wasn't it?" He said to himself in the captain's quarter. He looked up on his name in the database and found a wanted posting directed at him.

He picked up Ashuta at Moon. He had no choice on the matter. While he did not know why Ashuta was on run, he was asked by a good friend, so he let him aboard.

He called Ashuta to his quarter. He also brought in two guards. When Ashuta entered the captain's quarter, he noticed the guards who were clearly armed and seemed hostile toward him.

"So, you've found out," He said as if he was expecting this.

"So, you know who you are," Xing replied.

Ashuta slowly forwarded both of his hands, waiting to be seized.

"I am not arresting you. I am a liberty captain. I am the law in this ship."

"May I ask why you summoned me here then?"

"The wanted post says you are a terrorist. What is your story? I take that this description has been exaggerated." Having said that, Xing scoffed and said, "Only fools would believe what those on top tell you, damned bureaucrats."

"I am not a terrorist," Ashuta exclaimed. "I never was."

"Very well, tell me the whole story then."

Ashuta told Xing that he was originally hired by Nalen who was one of the major president candidates for United Sol. When Gvew assaulted his opponents suddenly during the grace period, Nalen was his main target to get rid of. Nalen was able to escape. Ashuta was unable to escape in time and was basically stuck on Moon until Xing took him in.

"So, it was a lie that you needed to see a relative urgently at Freedom colony?"

"Yes, it was a lie, but I do need to go to the Freedom colony though for my own sake."

Xing was silent for few moments. He was obviously considering his options.

"But that does not explain why you are being chased by pirates," Xing said.

"I am not sure if I am the one who's attracting the pirates. I really have nothing to do with them," Ashuta added, "Would it be possible that Gvew hired them to finish me off? But I am just a small fish compared to, let's say, Nalen. I was just a bodyguard."

Xing became silent again. He knew the event well as well. He also knew that his fellow liberty captains assisted letting those who were unfairly affected by the event escape. From what Ashuta told him, Ashuta was indeed a small fish compared to others. Ashuta was correct that he wasn't worthy enough for pirates to chase him.

Watching Xing in thoughts, Ashuta himself recalled his time shortly after his escape from Earth.

“Master!” He rushed into the Bitch Star. “Help me out!” He could care less of customers who were present.

“Kid? What has happened to you?”

“I need to talk to you right now.”

Looking at Ashuta’s deeply troubled face, he pointed back. “Come on.”

Ashuta explained what happened at the Ark and that he was on run.

“Oh, God, that doesn’t bode well for you. You need to escape from Sol.”

“Help me out, master. I have little credits.”

“No, no, I wouldn’t charge you at a time like this now. This is about survival. Stay here, stay low until I find you some way out of Moon.”

“Thanks, master, I owe you big time.”

His thoughts were disturbed by Xing’s calling.

“Ashuta, wasn’t it?” Xing asked.

“Yes...”

His face was slightly disturbed, and he was glaring at Ashuta. Perhaps, he did not like what Ashuta said, or perhaps he was agreeing with him on Gvew hiring the pirates to finish off Ashuta and that he was disgusted by that.

Either way, he was silent.

"You are not a terrorist. Anyone with some degree of perception and wisdom should be able to determine that. Of course, that is if you told me truth."

"I did tell you truth," Ashuta answered firmly.

"Fair enough, but you also lied to me. Your truth has less creditability therefore."

Xing was right, and Ashuta could not argue his point. Silence was struck in the quarter until Xing received a comm. signal.

"From Oraekyn?" He sounded unexpected.

Oraekyn was a famous liberty captain. He was well known for being an extremely skilled captain who often took helm control himself. He was a legendary figure among others.

"Alright, be a guest on this ship," Xing emphasized, "For now."

It seemed almost as if Xing wanted to get rid of Ashuta for the moment in order to communicate with Oraekyn.

After Ashuta left, Xing spoke to his comm. "Bud, what can I do for you?"

Ashuta was sent back to his quarter and he noticed that his access to the exit was restricted. In other words, he was confined. He didn't have many problems with that however. He needed to escape by any means necessary.

Pillowling his arms on a bed, he continued to recall how he escaped from Moon.

He hid in the Bitch Star pub for some weeks until the master informed him that he may have found a way to get out of the planet.

"A liberty captain whose name is Xing is passing by here in a day or two," He told Ashuta who had been stuck in the backroom of his pub. According to him, Xing was a regular customer who visited the pub whenever he docked on Moon. Xing was reluctant to take Ashuta board, but he didn't seem to have a choice as if he owed him a favor. And, so, Ashuta was finally able to get off Moon.

Just as he and Xing were about to leave the pub, he realized that this could well be the last time ever to be in the pub. Turning around, he dashed toward the master and grabbed his hands.

“Thanks, master. I owe you my life. I really do.”

The master beamed a gentle grin at him. “Kiddo, survive. You don’t deserve to die. I’ve known you ever since you came into the back alley. You and Anesita never turned to crimes even when times were rough as hell.”

Ashuta started to have tears in his eyes.

“Kiddo, I’ve seen thousands of orphans pass through here who eventually succumbed to crimes to make their ends meet. You and Anesita never did. And for that, I am proud of you two. If someone like you has to die like this, no one in this fucking world deserves to live.”

The master tabbed sobbing Ashuta and skillfully inserted a cash card into his pocket which Ashuta didn’t realize at the moment but Xing saw it.

“Captain, take this kid to safety. I demand it.”

Just thinking about the moment made his eyes teary. He wanted a change of mood and turned on TV.

“Hello, hello-!”

A classy voice suddenly rocked the room. The volume was at its highest. He quickly toned it down.

“Geez, I almost had a heart attack!” Ashuta told himself. He positioned a holographic screen on ceiling as he laid down again.

“Welcome to today’s MMD!”

Ashuta changed the channel immediately and said to himself, “Wrong channel.” He wasn’t someone who watched MMD (MakeMyDay) and he wasn’t certainly in mood to watch it, either.

Xing’s vessel sailed smoothly until they passed Mars. He was urgently called to the bridge.

“What is the situation?” Xing demanded as he rushed into the bridge.

“Hostiles, captain.”

“Hostiles?” Xing was confused after all they were passing through a safe area.

“We are not at war with Mars.”

“I think they are pirates, sir. I can detect no signatures from the vessels.”

As Xing rushed to sit in his captain’s chair, he quickly brought up a situation report. It said: Six cruiser class unidentified vessels.

They were most likely pirates. They could also be Mars ships disguised as pirates. In other words, black ops ships. However, it was highly unlikely.

“They are chasing us. Your orders?”

Xing had plenty of outnumbered combat experiences under his belt and was confident he could take them. However, not knowing what their motives were, he chose not to engage and run.

“Speed up. Let’s see if we can shake them off.”

Xing’s ship was a heavily modified version of United Sol navy cruiser, USF Courage. It was modified beyond imaginations that its spec exceeded that of a normal cruiser. The modifications were works of boredom where crew members had to

do something while they had absolutely nothing to do. Xing's ship easily lost them by simply speeding up.

"Change the course," Xing commanded. "So that they can't predict our path. Head toward Jupiter for now. Again, don't go straight. We are going to resupply there."

"Aye, captain."

Until they reached Jupiter assault station, they were constantly bothered. One pirate group and then another, they were constantly tackled.

"Are you sure, Oraekyn?" Xing raised his voice.

"Yes, I am pretty positive at this point. There is even an entry on ENN channel. You should check on it."

"This is ridiculous and you know that. We, the liberty captains, would never do that."

"I know you won't. I know I won't," Oraekyn spoke, "But I can't say that to others. As it stands now, there is very little moral among the remaining liberty captains. They need to make a living in a way or another."

"True, which is fucking why we do trading."

"Trading is not for everyone, you know, Xing."

Xing fell silent.

What Oraekyn had informed Xing was that ENN brought news regarding some liberty captains who were found imposing as pirates on trade routes. Since they would have an access to secured channels, picking on right routes at the right time was much easier.

“What do you do for living now, Oraekyn? You haven’t contacted me for almost four years.”

“I do trading part-time. And I take on privateering mostly.” Xing heard a short laugh over the channel. “I don’t enjoy trading,” Oraekyn said, “But trading makes a healthy profit.”

Frowning and sighing deeply, Xing replied, “How far have we fallen...”

“Indeed.”

Liberty captains were those who wanted to sail warships but did not want to be bound by military codes. In other words, liberty captains were ship-manias who wanted more than just staring at ships and drool at them.

At least, that was what liberty captains were all about in the current era.

Xing himself applied to be a liberty captain about 50 years ago. He was a wealthy businessman who was a big fan of ships. After retiring from his business, he chose to become a liberty captain.

He enjoyed every moment of his early life as a captain of a fine cruiser.

“So, Bud. I assume you contacted me for a reason?”

“Yes, I’ve been contacting liberty captains I can trust and gather them at Freedom colony to hunt them down.”

“On our own, I suppose?”

“Would you rather leave this matter to the bureaucrats on Earth then?”

Grinning, Xing replied, “I see your point.”

“Speaking of which, you may be attacked by some random pirates on your way here. The criminals have apparently hired some thugs to track down and destroy liberty captains.”

Xing laughed casually. “That explains why I’ve been tackled. But why?”

And he heard Oraekyn’s sigh over the comm.

“I suppose they felt that we would track them down. They do have the credits to hire the thugs and they can buy off bureaucrats but not us probably.”

“And you sound disappointed.” Xing pointed out.

“The hunt itself excites me. But as you said, how far we’ve fallen worries me.”

Xing fell silent again.

“I feel this conversation has run its course,” Oraekyn continued, “I will see you at Freedom colony.”

“See you soon, bud.”

Coming out of his captain’s quarter which was located within the bridge, he quickly set himself in his captain’s chair without a word and turned main screen into TV. A selection of numerous channels was displayed on screen.

“Captain? Going to watch TV on big screen?” A crew joked.

Xing didn’t respond and continued; he selected ENN evening news channel and a long list of news entry displayed. He put in a search for ‘liberty captains’, and a single entry was found. It was titled: “Corruptions and the liberty captains”

“What a title,” Another crew muttered.

Selecting the entry displayed a video clip. A finely dressed female announcer spoke of the incident calmly.

“Four liberty captains were arrested today. They were found pirating traders. Apparently, they have been using inside sources to track down wealthy trading ships and have been raiding them one after another. Loss exceeds five hundred million credits-”

“Fuck,” A crew blurted. “That’s shitload of credits.”

“At the moment, three more suspected liberty captains are on loose. We advise traders to be extremely cautious and hire proper amount of escorts.”

“This is so gonna be on MMD (MakeMyDay channel),” A crew said.

Xing finally spoke, “So, this explains the reason that we’ve been tackled so far. I guess we owe our guest an apology.”

“Want me to bring him here?”

“Bring him to the captain’s quarter. I will speak to him in there.”

“Aye, captain.”

Ashuta was escorted to the captain’s quarter where Xing was silently waiting.

“I guess it worked out somehow?” Ashuta said as soon as he entered the quarter.

“Why would you say that?”

“The glares were gone. I was treated rather nicely on my way here.”

“Hmph, yes, it has worked out. At least we now know that you aren’t the cause of the attacks.”

“So, what was it?”

“See for yourself.” Having said so, he activated a holographic screen above his desk and made it face Ashuta. And he selected ENN evening news and selected the news article.

After watching the news, Ashuta let out of a sigh. "I see."

"Why sigh? It's none of your problems really. I am a liberty captain. You are not."

"Well, true, but I've always had respects for the liberty captains. People like us view the liberty captains as lone wolf type heroes, you know, dignity and all."

'People like us', people who had to dip their hands into the shadow of the society, those who dreamt of living on the brighter side of the society. To them, the liberty captains were viewed as birds that were free to roam, free to do whatever they liked.

After a moment of silence, Xing spoke earnestly, "On behalf of the liberty captains, I apologize."

Xing's cruiser was sailing smoothly toward Freedom colony. They had two more days until they would reach protected zone provided by the colony. It was quite unexpected that they weren't bothered by any further pirates, but Xing for one didn't like that.

"I hate peace before storm kind of thingy," He explained later.

Xing was taking a nap on sofa in his quarter when alarm went off. As soon as he rushed into the bridge, a crewman by sensory station informed him urgently.

"Catpain! Fifty two ships on sensor, heading directly toward us!"

"Friend or foe?"

"Pirates, sir."

Rushing toward his captain's chair, he exclaimed, "Code red! All hands to battle stations!"

A crew after another, they made a series of reports.

“Activating turrets and shields, captain.”

“Sending SOS signal to all available frequencies.”

“All systems green, captain.”

“Reactor output at 92%, captain. ACM is stable, sir.”

“Tactics, sir?”

Clearing throat, Xing commanded, “Evasive maneuvers, set turrets to point to point mode. Do not fire at them. I want turrets to counter their attacks.”

There was no point in battling them, he thought. He aimed to get past them.

“Set reactor output to 105%.”

“Aye, captain.”

“And overload the main engine. I want speed.”

“Aye aye, sir.”

“Give me manual control of thrusters.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Give me ETA.”

“279 seconds until in range for firing, sir.”

“Any response to SOS?”

“None, yet, sir.”

Xing’s cruiser did not alter its course and headed straight toward them.

“In range, sir!”

The fifty or so pirate ships fired at Xing's cruiser at will. Shield absorbed majority of attacks. Turrets managed to counter incoming lasers with its point-to-point mode but it was largely ineffective due to being massively overwhelmed.

"Shield strength down to 91%, sir. We won't last 10 minutes if this keep up."

Xing's cruiser was simply at its full speed. By time, the ship was hit for the third round, the ship was at point blank range of the pirate group.

"Down to 69%, sir."

Xing's cruiser, at this point, was having very erratic movements. Xing was intentionally managing thrusters to make his ship harder to hit. At such a close range, however, it was largely ineffective.

The bridge quaked violently as ship's shield went down below 50% where shield integrity started to weaken.

"A beam went through, captain. It hit deck 14. No major damage, sir. It's just a scratch."

"Overload the engine, 120%. Overload the reactor accordingly. Turn off non-essential services," Xing commanded, "Put extra juice toward the shield."

Xing's cruiser accelerated past the group of pirates while erratically shifting left and right constantly. The erratic movements did its job by making few laser beams miss as they created a favorable distance.

"Captain, I think they are starting to overload their engines as well."

"Are we out of their firing range yet?"

"We are still within their firing range. They may be able to keep us in their firing range if they overload their engines like us and keep up with us."

Groaning, Xing felt he had to come up with an idea to shake them off.

"Overload the engine, 150%."

“That’s dangerous, captain.”

“They can blow up the engine as long as we can be out of their firing range. But do set the direction toward the colony. We don’t want to be lost in middle of nowhere with our primary engine gone.”

“As you wish, captain.”

Xing’s cruiser accelerated even faster, surprising the pirates. They continued firing but at one point the distance was too great for the laser beams to be effective as a weapon. The beams still reached his cruiser but the beams were no longer focused enough to actually impact any damage.

“Captain, engineers are reporting that the engine is currently operating at 168%.”

Xing whistled in awe. “Damn good engineers.”

“Good news is that it’s not blown yet, but they are reporting that reactor is turning unstable.”

“And ACM?”

“ACM itself is stable, sir.”

“We are out of firing range, no?”

“Yes, sir, but not far much. If we slow down, they will catch up with us quickly.”

Xing made a pause before he gave out his command. “Time to save even more power then. Turn off life support. Turn off turrets. Power down shield. We need to ease pressure on the reactor.”

Even without life support, a cruiser would be fine for days for the most part.

Standing up, he looked around the bridge and crewmen. “And go get your coats just in case!” He shouted. Tell others the same! I am not wasting any power with comm.!”

Oxygen in a big ship like a cruiser would last up to 24 hours even with crew of seventy. In Xing's case, his ship had crew of thirty two. Therefore, theoretically they would be able to last without life support for days. However, temperature would become unbearable. Life support also included artificial gravity.

“We've gone through worse before! Let's survive this one as well!”

“The story of our lives, captain,” A crew joked.

The pirates didn't dare overloading their engines further and the distance between Xing's cruiser and the pirates became wider and wider.

“We are out of their firing range, but we need to maintain this speed, captain.”

“Agreed. ETA to the colony at this speed?”

“I don't think we can keep this up for the whole time, but at this speed, less than a day, probably 22 hours or so.”

“Let's keep this up as long as we can. Do tell the engineers to push on.”

They weren't using any comm. in effort to save powers, so a crew flew out of the bridge to rely the message.

Space is quiet, sometimes too quiet for sanity.

It had been hours since they turned off life support and all other non-essential services. The temperature had already dropped to near zero and most importantly it had been completely silent for hours.

Xing was holding himself firm in his captain's chair. He had his eyes closed. Anyone might mistake him for sleeping, but he was tapping his index finger on his arm chair.

Other bridge crews were floating idly. Some appeared to be sleeping. The only active bridge crew was a sensory officer who had tied himself to his station, watching the radar constantly to ensure that there were no surprises.

At one point, there was a weak jolt. Only Xing and the sensory officer felt it since they were the only ones attached on the ground.

Opening his eyes, Xing inquired a crew. "What was that?"

"What was what, sir?" A nearby floating crew responded.

"Did anyone feel a jolt?"

"I did, sir," The sensory officer responded.

"Someone head over to the engineering and find out."

It turned out that the reactor caught fire, but it wasn't serious. Xing was informed by a messenger.

"The engineers said they had to bring down the engine to 130% in order to save the reactor."

"They may not even notice that we slowed down, sir," The sensory officer overheard and responded. "Even at 130%, we are still slightly faster than them and we are quite away from them now."

"And yet they are still chasing us. They really want us dead, don't they?" Xing replied casually.

"It's probably too late for them now, provided that we can keep going like this."

"Let's keep this up just to be safe... But man... this is cold," Xing said.

The temperature was below minus 20 degree Celsius at this point. Crewmen had thick coats on them which weren't helping much.

Sensory officer's loud voice woke some of crews up along with Xing who had involuntarily fallen asleep.

"Captain! Three ships on sensors, ahead of us! ETA twenty minutes until verifiable range!"

Xing was startled by his voice and took off from his chair without realizing that artificial gravity wasn't there. He flew into a wall. Groaning slightly, he spoke out.

"Only three? Hostile?"

"We can't know, sir. Not yet."

Xing had two choices. One was slow down, power up the ship again and battle them. Since it was only three ships, Xing might have a chance. However, if their purpose was to slow him down, they might avoid direct combat. His second choice was keeping on course and run past them like before, but with no shields, it was too risky. A right shot on a wrong place could cause more problems that Xing wanted to imagine without shield.

"How far are we away from the pirate group?"

"Provided that we stop and fight them, at their current speed, they will be here in thirty minutes. We should wait until they are verifiable range before slowing down, captain."

"Agreed. Keep on."

"Yes, sir."

A very uncomfortable twenty or so minutes passed.

"Reading the ship signatures... LC... Silverhawk, it's Oraekyn!"

Bridge crews cheered as they heard.

“Power up the ship. Slow down. Bring up life support, turrets, and shield on,” Xing commanded at once.

“Incoming message, captain, voice only.”

“Put it through, gladly.”

Oraekyn’s voice sounded in the bridge. “Bud, I see you’ve had more troubles than expected.”

“No kidding,” Xing replied, laughing weakly.

“Join the formation, bud, and we will show the pirates hell.”

On paper, it was four versus fifty two. But they felt that they could take them on because Oraekyn was with them.

Once Xing’s cruiser joined the formation, Oraekyn linked up the comm. among the captains and put them on one video channel.

“Xing, let me introduce these two fellow liberty captains. Guys, introduce yourselves.”

A middle-age man with stubble casually saluted, “Liberty captain Dieter greets you, sir.”

Another middle-age man with a clean face saluted firmly, “Liberty captain Neumel hails you.”

Saluting at them, Xing asked Oraekyn, “Bud, don’t tell me we are the only ones you can trust?”

“There are few more, but they are unable to make it in time.”

Whether that was true or not, Xing wasn’t certain, but he was still saddened by the fact that there were only “few more”.

Oraekyn began his tactical briefing.

“Our tactics will be simple. I will be on front line. You three will support me. That is pretty much it.”

Oraekyn didn't speak of retreat and everyone knew why. Considering the distance to Freedom colony and also considering how much outnumbered they were, if a ship was damaged beyond repair, there wasn't any place to retreat. It would be death.

The pirate group was unfazed by addition of three more opponents and approached them at full speed.

“Time to flyyyyyy -!” Oraekyn roared over comm. as he piloted his ship into the pirate group. Despite of being a cruiser, Oraekyn's ship maneuvered like a small fighter craft. His ship was nimble and skillful, dodging enemy lasers. His turrets also showed surreally high accuracy despite of erratic maneuver.

“Oh, Gods, I could never fly like that,” Xing uttered. His ship was having a hard time simply following Oraekyn's vassal. “He should rename his ship to Mad Fly.”

Few crews snickered, reacting to his ill joke.

Whatever tactical plan the pirates had, if they actually had any, was thrown out of window by Oraekyn's completely unexpected approach. They couldn't chase Oraekyn and when they turned their attention off him, he stroke back. Despite of being overwhelmingly outnumbered, in an hour, the pirate group had been reduced to thirty five ships with no loss to Oraekyn's side.

At this point, the pirate group started to retreat.

“We are not chasing them,” Oraekyn declared. “They aren't our real targets anyway. Let us head back to the colony.”

“That was amazing, sir. I've heard of your tales, but never have I expected such tales to actually be true,” Captain Dieter spoke in awe.

“Hah, Oraekyn, you've gotten better or worse, not sure how to put it correctly,” Captain Neumel said, “Regardless, you are awesome as before.”

Xing finally felt relaxed. "Thank you, Oraekyn. You saved our hides."

"No problem, Bud."

After the comm. was closed, Xing let out of a long relaxed breath and told the bridge crews, "Guys, we can relax now. I will be in my quarter to get some rest."

Meanwhile...

"Awe, Gosh..., this has been one heck of a ride..."

Ashuta had rolled around in the quarter few times during the battle. Being a hyper human, he didn't get any bruises and bumps however. He even thought, for a period, that his fate was over.

After sensing that, the situation stabilized, he decided to visit cafeteria which he had no idea of where exactly.

"Guidelight."

His request was immediately responded by ship's computer. "Access denied."

Shrugging, Ashuta said out loud, "Figures!"

Aimlessly wandering around the ship might brand him as a spy, he feared. He had just gotten off a false accusation. He wasn't going to involve himself into another. Therefore, he simply went back to his guest quarter. The quarter had a dummy food and energy pill dispensers. He just wasn't a big fan of dummy foods and he had enough of it for recent weeks. It was about time he had some decent solid food, I thought.

Alas, he had no choice.

The rest of journey was smooth and there was no further surprise. After Xing's vassal docked at Freedom colony, Ashuta was free to go.

Xing saw him off personally on that day.

“You are free to go.” After coming to the guest quarter, he confronted Ashuta who was getting ready to leave at the moment of his arrival.

“It’s been one heck of a ride, I must say,” Ashuta sarcastically responded, dusting off his suit to remind Xing of the recent space battle.

“Well, at least you survived with your limbs intact.”

“True dat.”

Xing returned to the bridge, contacting Oraekyn shortly after.

“What’s your next plan, bud?”

“Two more fellow liberty captains are on their ways. We will wait for them.”

“Do we even have a lead as to where the crooks are?”

“I do not, but I think I know someone who does.”

“Who would that be?”

“Ever heard of the gypsies?”

Xing was surprised, not because he brought up the gypsies, but because Oraekyn thought of using them.

“Will they even help us?” Xing was highly skeptical. United Sol’s standing with the gypsies was bad. And personally he had never directly dealt with them.

“I know what you are thinking, bud. United Sol has always treated them like crap, but I’ve done my share of favors for them. I’ve even got to meet Sslien in person. They will assist us, I am sure.”

“Woah, woah, bud. You even meet Sslien in person? You must be kidding!”

Oraekyn chuckled. “I am not, bud. So, trust me on this.”

As much as Xing wanted to leave his ship for few days and relax, he chose not to because none of the liberty captains took off their ships. There was invisible tension that the matter was serious enough to warrant isolation.

While waiting for Oraekyn to make a breakthrough, Xing paid a visit to the engine deck and praised his engineers for their recent achievement.

“168%, guys, 168%. It has got to be a record!”

It wasn't a record. Still, it was a good one nevertheless.

After few days of slacking, Oraekyn finally called for a video conference. Oraekyn was on main screen and the two other captains were on smaller screens on left and right of main screen.

“Alright, I've managed to obtain a reply from a gypsy. It's positive,” Oraekyn repeated, “It's positive but you may not like what you are about to hear.”

“Spill it out already,” Captain Dieter muttered.

Oraekyn made a short pause before he announced. “They said they are here.”

A moment of clueless silence struck.

“Here? What do you mean here?” Neumel questioned awkwardly.

Oraekyn pointed his thumb down. “Here, on Freedom colony.”

“I will be damned,” Xing uttered. “But I guess it does make sense. This is a lawless zone after all.”

“Yeah, I guess. I mean even we gathered here to free ourselves from United Sol's intervention,” Dieter responded.

“Still I am shocked. They are right here. Who knows? Their ships might be right next to ours in the dock,” Neumel joked with a nervous laugh. “God, I hope I am wrong on this.”

“They are gathering more information, but they are positive that the crooks are here. Where exactly, they don’t know yet,” Oraekyn said.

“Bud,” Xing spoke out. “I’ve got a question.”

“Shoot.”

“Do you intent to kill them in space or on this station? I am asking this because personally I want to see them dead in space.”

“Agree with you on killing them in space. That’d be the proper way of punishing them as liberty captains,” Dieter said.

Neumel was quiet on the issue. He could care less where they were killed as long as they were dead, but seeing the opinions leaning toward killing them via a space battle, he chose to shut his mouth on the matter.

“I do also favor killing them in space. Personally, I’d love a fair space battle against them, but you all know that it ain’t gonna happen,” Oraekyn said.

Xing replied right away, “So, you are saying...”

“I am saying that, as long as we see them dead, method shouldn’t matter,” Oraekyn argued firmly.

Everyone became quiet for a moment. Eventually, Dieter spoke out to break the silence.

“I suppose we can’t be picky. If we hesitate, they might flee to the Nebula or something. I’d love to shoot them myself though.”

Sighing and shrugging, Xing responded, “Beggars can’t be choosers, I suppose.”

Neumel was once again silent on the matter and Oraekyn noticed it.

“Captain Neumel, your opinion?”

Neumel made a bitter face as if he didn’t want to speak out. “I personally don’t care either way. I just want them dead. How are we going to kill them anyway? It’s

not like the colony security is just going to let us kill them and leave here without a fuss.”

“That,” Oraekyn exclaimed and then quickly toned down, “can be arranged actually. I know Reed personally.”

Reed was one of top officials that ran Freedom colony. His rank was right below Lila who was unofficially the highest rank officer. Aedy Freedom, the founder of the colony, was regarded as the one with absolute powers but he hadn't been seen for hundreds of years. Rumors floated that Aedy may be long dead already.

“Bud..., dude, you got some connections,” Xing said, smiling.

Reed had already promised Oraekyn to turn blind eyes on the killing as long as they took the matters as silent as possible without harming any other innocent citizens of the colony which Oraekyn duly accepted.

All they needed to know was where they were hiding, if they were in fact hiding even. The last piece of info they needed was taking time, and Xing finally ran out of patience and decided to leave the ship for a bit. He also gave his crew permission to take a break from the ship until further notice.

As Xing stepped down from his cruiser, a very spacious docking bay came to his view. He had been to this colony hundreds of times previously, even before he became a liberty captain.

Freedom colony had hundreds of docking bays due to massive traffic they receive. In addition, some people preferred living in their ship which acted like a mobile home. Therefore, the colony needed numerous spacious docking bays.

Even though it was just a docking bay, there were roads, traffic signals and constant traffics. It was literally a city; just replace houses with space vassals.

Xing knew where to go: his favorite bar. It was a five-star bar called Seaside retreat which was the most famed nightclub on the colony. The bar was actually made of

two parts. It had a portion of its bar restricted, membership only. Xing actually have a membership. He was a successful businessman in his prime. While he did not have political connections like Oraekyn, he did have his share of connections.

Xing approached a fat man who had two stunning women in each of his arm. There were two more beautiful women on sofa, serving him in any way they could.

Approaching the man, Xing hailed him casually, "Hello, friend. You haven't changed one bit, fatman."

He looked highly offended by the hailing at first, but after taking a look at Xing, his face loosened immediately.

"Your timing is impeccable!" He shouted.

"Ah?"

"I think I know why you are here." He let go of a woman in his right arm leave and gestured Xing to take a seat. "Seen MMD?"

"No, that channel is laughable."

The fatman laughed out loud. "Indeed! But they are a fun bunch. But it's hard to see two liberty captains together and I hear there are four of them here right now! Can't be a coincidence, can it?"

Xing shrugged. "I see your point. So, I assume MMD made fun of the news, eh?"

"Poorly done, but aye."

"Since you know that much, I suppose I can't hide. Yes, we are here to hunt them down."

The fatman laughed out loud again, this time content of whatever he had in his mouth spilled all over. “Unlucky them, I say! I mean Oraekyn is after them! The legendary Oraekyn!”

“Yeah, no kidding. He has some high quality connections.”

“Your drinks are on me tonight, friend,” The fatman assured, “Drink as much as you want.”

That was unexpected. Xing felt there had to be a catch. “For real? You’ve never given me free drinks before.”

“Real entertainment is hard to come by nowadays and you’ve brought one!”

“Can I call some friends then?”

“Yeppers! You can have some girls if you want.”

In Seaside retreat member-only area, all waitresses were ready to strip at their customers’ command. They would even have intercourse right on spot if asked.

Xing called Dieter and Neumel. Oraekyn was, as expected, unavailable. When they arrived, they were shocked to find that they were invited into the member only area.

Drooling over the gorgeous waitresses who were wearing all kind of different costumes, Dieter spoke to Xing in awe.

“Bud, when you called us out, we figured it was just the public area of Seaside retreat. We, in a million years, never thought we were being invited into the membership only area!”

Neumel’s eyes were fixed on a specific waitress. “Good god, that chick is, well, something.”

“Two more liberty captains!” The fatman laughed pleasantly. “Good day, today it is.”

“Excuse us now, we’d like a rather quiet atmosphere, if you know what I mean,” Xing said.

The fatman repeatedly nodded. “Yes, yes, of course. Enjoy your time.”

Xing took Dieter and Neumel to an available room where two half-naked gorgeous waitresses were busy preparing a dining table. They didn’t mind the men’s presence and continued on preparing the dining table.

Dieter caressed one of the waitress backside skillfully as he took a seat. The waitress didn’t respond and simply continued on preparing dishes.

“You may leave us alone, girls,” Xing talked to them. “The food isn’t important. Just get us good drinks.”

Nodding, the waitresses quietly left the room.

“Fucking hell, the girls here are all too gorgeous,” Dieter remarked while flapping his hand toward his face. “I am all getting worked out before even taking a dip at drinks, bud.”

Shrugging, Xing commented. “I am three hundred years old. You’d figure, at such an age, you wouldn’t get turned on, but yes, they are really hard to resist.”

“I heard you can pick and sleep with any girls here, true, Xing?” Neumel asked rather calmly.

“True. I’ve seen members having intercourse right on their seats before.”

“Good god!” Dieter uttered in awe.

“Doesn’t sound like you’ve done that though, Xing,” Neumel said.

Xing grinned and gazed vacantly. “I usually came here for business related matters. I was a businessman before I became a captain. This bar is quite secure. Nothing you will say in here will get out.”

“I see,” Nodding weakly, Neumel responded. “I see what you mean.”

The two waitresses came back with a whole bunch of drinks on a cartwheel. The waitress that Dieter touched her butt sat next to him gently and started serving him drinks, and Dieter was turning up all red.

“Bud, you aren’t a kid, you know,” Neumel laughed, watching the scene. “You don’t need to mind us. If you want her, go for it.”

“Uhhh, um, no,” Dieter was clearly having a hard time retaining himself, “Well, not right now at least. I don’t enjoy having sex in front of others.” Having said that, he held her firmly by waist.

Meanwhile, Nemuel signaled the other waitress and she sat next to him.

Xing was content with not having a girl next to him. It wasn’t that he didn’t want the opposite gender. Rather, it was his habit from his former career; he always stayed as secured as possible in business meetings. He had seen too many men falling for girls and let out few important bits of info which ultimately bit them back.

Hours later, they were done. Dieter went elsewhere with the waitress. It was just Xing and Neumel who left the bar together.

“That was good drinks, thanks, bud,” Neumel said to Xing while having occasional hiccups, “And a nice chick, too.”

Xing smiled in response, “Yeah, you certainly had a good time with her.”

In fact, Neumel made out with her right on spot.

“It was once in a blue moon type of opportunity, bud. Chances are I am never gonna get into that type of bar in my whole life anyway.”

They were casually walking toward the docking bay where their ships were. But it was quite a distance by feet and they were eventually going to call cabs.

“What did you do prior the captaincy, Neumel?”

“Was a father of two. Good god, I was so sick of my bitch and I had to run.”

“Divorced?”

“Nay, still married. I still send them money seasonally. Each to their own, bud.”

“Yeah, I am not pointing any fingers at you for the past.”

Neumel stopped walking suddenly. “I am a father of two daughters. Thinking that my girls might end up there just gave me cold sweats on my back...”

Xing patted his back. “Hey, they aren’t slaves. There are there on their own accord. They make shitload of money. And believe or not, the fatman looks after his girls very well.”

“The fatman?”

“He’s the owner. You saw him with me.”

“Oh.”

“If any of his girls is abused, he will send a hitman after them.”

“Hah!” Neumel laughed, thinking Xing was joking.

“No joke, bud.” Xing assured.

“I..., uh..., didn’t abuse the girl, did I?”

Xing shook his head gently. “Nah, bud, she clearly gave you consent.”

“Now I am worried about Dieter.”

Xing laughed. “Don’t worry.” In fact, Xing felt that Dieter and the girl were attracted to each other. The reason was simple. He had never seen a waitress sitting next to a customer voluntarily prior being asked.

Snickering, Xing whispered to himself, “Love at the first sight maybe?”

Less than 24 hours after Xing returned to his ship, Oraekyn informed others that the “few more” liberty captains arrived. However, in truth, there was only one.

“What happened?” Oraekyn demanded over the comm. “Guys, this is a liberty captain Slize.”

Slize was in tears on screen. “We couldn’t get through, Oraekyn. There were three of us but only I barely managed to survive. My ship is in tatters.”

“Fuck,” Dieter muttered.

Xing felt he would have probably met the same fate if it wasn’t for Oraekyn’s timely rescue.

“Avenge us, Oraekyn. You are the only one we can count on. Avenge our lost comrades and restore our pride.”

“I will, bud. I swear to God that I will,” Oraekyn assured.

And then in less than few hours, Oraekyn called for a meeting over comm.

“I now know where they are,” He declared as soon as the comm. went live.

“You do?!” Slize who had now calmed down exclaimed.

“Yes, I had to use some extreme measures, but yes, I now know where they are.”

Xing could hardly imagine what kind of prices Oraekyn had to pay for the info and he figured “some extreme measures” wasn’t about money as well. He knew well, as a former businessman, that some info could never be bought with money.

“I bought a guide,” Oraekyn continued on, “She will lead us to them.”

“She?” Xing questioned.

“Yes, it is a she. She said they’ve purchased a safe passageway into the Nebula. They are to leave in just a couple of days. It’s now or never, she said.”

Oraekyn, then, looked at each of the captains. "Guys, let's go. Bring your gun or energy blade if you prefer that. I will meet you guys at the exit #133."

"Roger," Everyone responded.

Just as Xing descended down from his cruiser, he noticed Dieter coming down as well. It just so happened that Dieter's cruiser was docked right next to Xing's. What was surprising was that he saw a woman seeing him off and Xing recognized the girl; it was the waitress from Seaside retreat.

When questioned by Xing, Dieter blushed and answered, "Well, when I took her with me outside, I wasn't going to have sex with her. I took her to my ship and explained my upmost passion toward her and asked her to come with me."

It was literally a marriage he arranged.

Shrugging rather pleasantly, Xing responded with a smile. "You don't need to tell me any further. I saw the girl which means she accepted. That's that."

"Hah, yeah."

"Does the fatman know?"

"The fatman, what?"

"Nevermind."

As far as he knew, the fatman never stopped any of his girls from leaving on their own accord. He was sure that the fatman would have approved of the situation.

"Let's go, bud. We have a dirty business to take care of," Xing walked past Dieter, patting his shoulder in progress.

"Indeed, bud."

Xing and Dieter eventually ran into Neumel and Silze on their way to exit #133, and they ran into Oraekyn shortly after.

“All armed?” Oraekyn asked.

Everyone nodded.

“Alright, to exit 133.”

As they approached exit #133, there was a pre-teen girl was waving at them. She was mostly dressed in bright pink clothes, wearing a white tank top with a pink short jacket with rather provocative pink miniskirt to go with.

“Gods, don’t tell me that girl is our guide?” Neumel whispered.

“Heya, are you the gays I am to escort?”

“I beg your pardon?!” Oraekyn exclaimed.

“Oh? Hang on.” There was something being displayed on her left eye. “Sorry, mix-up.”

Clearing throat, Oraekyn introduced her to the others.

“Guys, this is our guide, Sae the little witch.”

“The cold-blooded assassin?!” Neumel uttered.

“Who escorts a bunch of gays?” Xing added.

“Well, duh! Sorry, pal! But I do a whole bunch of different tasks!” Sae shouted in her defense which wasn’t very convincing to begin with. “Reed gave me this task on such a short notice. I got confused a little, okay?”

“Still..., it doesn’t explain why someone like you has to escort gays to begin with?” Xing’s question was perfectly legitimate and pretty much the same thought went through the others’ minds as well.

Sae the little witch, she was the most infamous assassin in the clusters who'd kill anyone or destroy anything for the right price. She was known to be utterly ruthless and cunning, or so people said.

“Mind your own damn business! I am leaving if you keep questioning me like that!” Sae yelled. Pouting childishly, she scoffed after crossing her arms. Her immature behavior made the others wonder if she was the real one.

Regardless, they had no choice for the time being. Just as they passed through exit, an alarm went off and security guards immediately surrounded them.

“No weapons allowed in commercial district, ser,” One of the security guard claimed.

“It's fine, they are with me,” Sae said to them and they recognized her instantly.

“Ma'am!” They saluted at her at once. “At least we need to know the purpose of the weapons, ma'am, for the report, you know.”

Oraekyn and the others were obviously reluctant to tell them. Sae eventually spoke on their behalf. “They've got weapons to kill some gays.”

“Kill..., ma'am?”

“Yeppers, now let them through or I will kill you.”

Seeing cheerful smile withdrawing from her face, the security guard in charge turned pale in an instant. “O, of course, ma'am. Do not let us distract you!”

“Come on, guys, I've got a transport ready just over there.” Sae pointed further where there was an armored transport. “Hurry up. They will change their hideout tomorrow and it will be too late to track them down then.”

At this point, there was no doubt they were indeed dealing with the real Sae the little witch.

They promptly entered the armored transport. Sae was the last one to enter.

“Destination, ma'am?” The driver asked Sae.

“To the mansion of the gays.”

“Yes, ma’am.” The driver answered giggling.

Xing glanced at Oraekyn who looked back. Those two were the only ones who understood what was going on at the moment.

“The gays” were the codename for the crooks and that Sae had a task to escort “the gays” to elsewhere before they would depart the colony for good. “The gays” probably paid a big sum to the colony to secure their safety, and as a result they have been safe.

For whatever deals Oraekyn came up with, however, outweighed the crooks’ deal.

Neumel also came to such a realization after a moment, signaling Xing and Oraekyn with an eye contact.

The armored transport flew toward a two story villa built on in midair. It was actually built on a foundation that was attached to a wall. It was literally a floating villa.

The driver informed Sae. “Ma’am, the gays are asking us why we are here a day early.”

“Tell them that the liberty captains found out where they are hiding and that we are to relocate them ASAP.”

“They gave us a green light to land, ma’am.”

“Okay.”

Sae turned toward Oraekyn and the others.

“Ok, guys, listen. How do you want to kill them?”

Narrowing eyes, Oraekyn questioned back. “How do you mean?”

“Do you want to just rush in by yourselves and take them out? Or do you want me to do the sweep out?”

“How many are there?” Neumel asked.

“Fifteen mercenaries and the three gays.

Oraekyn looked at the others. “Your opinions?” He asked.

Xing was the first to make a statement. “I’d say let her do the sweep out. We are captains, not fighters.”

“I agree with Xing,” Dieter spoke.

“Agreed.” It was Neumel.

Slize was the only one who wanted to take them head on.

“I understand your ire, Slize, but there is no point for us to die even before reaching the crooks,” Oraekyn argued.

Dropping his head, Slize eventually agreed to let Sae to perform the sweep out.

Clapping once, Sae asked for their attention. “Alrighty, it seems the decision has been made. I will go down and blow the shits outta the mercs. And then I will corner the gays. You guys do the rest.”

The liberty captains nodded.

“Driver, opened the god damned door, I am going down!”

A hatch slid open. The transport was still a fair way away from the landing pad.

“Do promise me one thing, guys,” Standing on edge of the hatch, she looked back and told them, “Don’t rape them, will ya? Just kill them.”

Neumel shook his head, sighing. “We are not homosexuals!” He proclaimed.

On the other hand, Oraekyn beamed a grin at her. “We understand.”

Sae giggled back brightly and jumped off, yelling “TIME FOR BLOOD!”

There were two mercenaries armed with plasma rifles. They completely did not expect Sae to jump down. Even before they could react to the unexpected, Sae breezily ran toward the first mercenary and pierced her arm right into his left chest, taking out his heart at once.

The second mercenary screamed and set off an alarm. He, then, aimed his rifle at Sae and that was as far as he could do anything. She was already right in front of him. Performing a high kick, the mercenary's head was smashed to bits.

“Good God,” Dieter uttered, looking at the fight on the landing pad from a window. “They did not last two seconds.”

“I can see how she earned her nickname,” Xing added. “That was ruthless.”

Oraekyn asked for an attention and spoke, “Guys, about the ‘Don’t rape them and just kill them’ thing.”

“I thought it was just a joke,” Neumel replied, adding, “A sick joke I don’t appreciate.”

Oraekyn shook his head firmly, “No, I think she meant that she wants us to kill them swiftly rather than enjoying their last moments and torture them to death.”

Xing crossed his arms. “I see...”

“Well, that makes sense,” Dieter said.

Slize uttered in discontent, “Whatever.”

“Slize,’ Oraekyn called out, “While I understand your ire, we must not cross the line. We may be hunters right now, but we do not have the rights to cross the boundary.”

Slize was silent but Oraekyn had to make sure.

“Answer me or you are out of this hunt.”

Eventually, Slize spoke, “I understand.”

The transport was hovering and circling above the villa while waiting for Sae to do the sweep-out. After five minutes or so, Sae came back to the landing pad, soaked in blood, waved cheerfully as if nothing happened inside. Her whole figure was covered with blood, from her hair to her boots.

The transport swiftly descended and landed.

“I kinda don’t want to go in there now,” Dieter laughed nervously.

“Some iron nerve, she has,” Xing remarked.

Blood soaked Sae greeted them on the landing pad.

With a really bright smile on her face, she told them, “All done. All mercs to bits and the gays are cornered. One of them peed on his pants, just a warning.”

Everyone knew that pee on pants would be nothing compared to what they were about to see. Reluctantly but surely they proceeded into the villa.

“Oh, Gods, Oh, Gods,” Dieter uttered and started to vomit.

“Holy fuck...,” Neumel bellowed.

Covering nose, Xing resisted puking.

Oraekyn remained undeterred but he looked clearly disgusted.

Slize had his eyes wide-open and was at loss of words.

Human bits... were plastered all over the walls, floor, and ceilings. Eye balls were here and there, reeking intestines were spread out all over the floor. Crushed hearts were seen. Crude pieces of human flesh were among those. And strong disgusting odor didn’t certainly help the scene.

Overall, nothing that resembled the shape of a human being was present. A slaughterhouse probably was a better sight than this.

“That nickname she has...,” Oraekyn’s voice was shaking, “is a major understatement!”

“Are they even alive? The crooks?” Xing asked Oraekyn who was the only one holding firm enough to be able to answer anything. Everyone else was in severe shock.

“She wouldn’t break the deal,” Oraekyn responded while gritting his teeth. “I suppose they are upstairs.”

There was hardly any clean spot on floor. Thus, they were forced to walk over the bloody mess.

“Oh, God, an eyeball... looking right at me,” Dieter said, half-crying. “Is that thing... still beating?!” He pointed at a heart which was relatively in shape.

And indeed it was still beating weakly. Xing attempted to comfort him with little effect.

The group reluctantly went upstairs. Odor weakened and there was much less gore upstairs. The upstairs was just a large living room with luxury furniture. There were a pair of luxury sofa facing each other and there they were...

The crooks, they called, each of them were pinned on three different places. The first one was pinned onto one of the luxury sofas by... bones. He was laughing hypostatically, mumbling something.

The second one was pinned on a wall. His left leg was nowhere to be seen and blood was still pouring out to the floor. He was also missing all of fingers which it turned out that it was his finger bones that pinned him to the wall. He seemed conscious but only just.

The third was one on floor. His heavily deformed chest indicated that his lips were broken. In fact, there were several bones near him which were in fact his ribs.

There were also his bloody testicles between his legs, apparently ripped away by Sae.

The group stood still, looking at the gore scene where their targets were pretty much already taken care of. Unexpectedly, Slize was the first one to walk toward each of them and had a closer look. For a moment, he looked detached and disappointed. Eventually, he walked back to the group and faced Oraekyn.

“The... justice is done,” He told Oraekyn with a very low tone. “This... is worse than death. I am not shooting them.”

Oraekyn inhaled a deep breath and pulled out his pistol. He approached the one pinned onto a sofa.

“Bits...,” He was mumbling words after words, “Blood..., pain..., fear....”

With some hesitation, Oraekyn aimed his pistol at his head and pulled the trigger. He slowly fell to the sofa.

Gulping, Xing walked toward the one on the wall. “Are you there?” He asked rather gently.

“Yes..., I am here.” His voice was really husky. “I know why you are here.” He didn’t have any focus in his eyes, but his consciousness seemed to be intact.

Xing looked back at Oraekyn to which he answered to him, “He’s yours. Do whatever you want.”

“Why did you do it?” Xing asked. “Why?”

He laughed but soon his laugh seized and coughed blood instead. “Why the hell not?” He said while coughing blood, “None of you here would get your hands on the amount of credit we amassed.”

“It’s not all about money, you know,” Xing talked back. “Money is not why we became liberty captains.”

He coughed blood again. “Hah, open your eyes, idiot. Money drives the world. With money, you can do anything.”

“Yet you couldn’t buy your way out of here with all that fucking credit,” Neumel bellowed. “You should open your own eyes. Though I fear it’s too late for you.”

He became silent and spoke no further. Xing pulled out his pistol and place it on his forehead.

“Any last words?”

There was no response and Xing pulled the trigger. Few droplets of blood landed on his face.

“I am done,” Xing stated.

Neumel approached the last one on floor. He seemed to be unaware of what was going on and said out loud with heavily labored breath.

“Get... me out of here... I can pay you... 10 million credits if you get me out of here...”

Upon a closer inspection, his right lung was completely crushed and his right rib bones were pulled out by force. There was slight tint of blood coming out of his ears. Neumel didn’t want to imagine what Sae did in here; he really didn’t.

“His hearing is gone, Oraekyn,” Neumel said, “I am just gonna end him.”

Oraekyn nodded slowly.

Placing a pistol on his forehead, Neumel pulled the trigger without much hesitation.

“So, this is it...,” Xing said vacantly. “It was ... a surprisingly hollow experience.”

“They probably would have wanted to die in a space battle, I bet,” Dieter said, “if they knew they were going to die like this.”

“They went through real Hell,” Slize remarked. “I feel that the justice has been done. She did a good job. I have no further regrets.”

Sae was waiting at the transport when the group left the villa. She was still covered with blood.

“Not many would believe she is capable of such gore considering her small figure and cheerful behavior,” Oraekyn remarked as they walked toward the landing pad.

“Sae the little witch, the most cold-blooded assassin,” Xing added.

“Which is a major, a major, understatement, Oraekyn said.

“More like a slaughter than an assassin,” Neumel remarked.

They became silent as they approached the transport.

“Done badmouthing me?” Giggling, Sae told them cheerfully.

Dieter almost panicked.

“No fears, I don’t kill people without a valid and solid reason,” Sae said, “And the amount of gore is depended on the weight of their sins.”

Closing eyes, Slize beamed a smile, “I so agree with you there. Good job, by the way.”

“Why, thank you.”

Xing was originally going to invite everyone to Seaside retreat after it was over. However, after the “hollow” experience at the villa, he simply did not feel like having any parties.

Yes, perhaps the justice was done but it certainly left an overly bitter feeling in his mouth. He was also skeptical of what kind deals Oraekyn had to arrange in order to null such a big deal that the crooks had come up with.

In the end, though, he simply chose not to think too hard about it.

Everyone, except for Dieter who was in honeymoon mood, left Freedom colony on that day.

- Fin