

This arc is about Eran Gro, one of the most powerful/skillful swordsmen in the era. Later, he will be known as the Black knight.

[The black knight arc] [1] [Eran Gro] [9605]

Rev 2.3

Prerequisite stories

Special note: The black knight arc is built upon Masu arc. Thus, full knowledge of Masu arc is required.

Minimum knowledge required is Marc arc 1 to 6.

Also [Shattered union arc] [1] [Revolts] [9599]

Related stories

[The Hammers arc] [1] [The ENN incident] [9600]

Year 9605

"Welcome to Mars."

Eran Gro was overjoyed to have been greeted by Masu the sage. Having raised on Earth by a small vassal clan under the Bau, he had heard plenty of epic stories about his accomplishments.

The Gro was a small clan of few thousands, just like how the Vues was. As a small minnow that had no stake in anything political, they were deeply overshadowed by the Bau's influence. Having literally been ignored and mistreated, the clan was forcefully relocated to a small island in middle of pacific.

Regardless, the clan was content in their situation because there was nothing they could do and they had no ambitions. Their primary objective was to stay low and survive.

However, their peace of mind was disturbed by birth of a class S hyper human. That boy was Eran Gro. The Gro trainers were astonished by his potential. They determined that he was better than anyone in Sol system.

His birth and his potential provided a deep concern for the small clan, for they did not want any unnecessary attention from the Bau.

The clan was, for a brief year, divided. Half of them wanted to harbor Eran. The other half wanted to tell the Bau and let them take him away and hopefully being rewarded in the progress.

The Bau's desire for class S people was well known. It was the only thing that clan was lacking and it was the only reason the clan failed to overthrow the O'ren previously. If the Gro was to, say, gift Eran Gro to the Bau, the clan would be rewarded, handsomely.

However, there was another possibility. To rewrite the history, the Bau might wipe the Gro out and make Eran appear as if he was born as a Bau. No one would care even if the Bau wiped them out.

Both choices had risks and both choices were tricky.

Eventually, the clan made a decision to keep Eran's existence in secret and let him escape Earth when he came of age. They believed it was the safest option and Eran was given a choice where to go.

Without any sort of hesitation, Eran declared that he'd go to Mars when he came of age. He wanted to work for the Dietrich, or more specifically Masu the sage.

Masu remained as a legend within the Bau especially among the underdogs such as the Gro whereas inner, so called elite, circles of the Bau tried hard to dismiss his status as a legend. The reality was that Masu's achievements in the clan was hard to overlook and he was not a Bau insider. In fact, he was a Bau only because of his marriage with Heather Bau. Many Bau insiders came to dislike the fact that one of the Bau's golden age was accomplished by a non-Bau; it was a matter of ego being hurt.

For Eran Gro, Masu was a real legend. Ever since his childhood, he looked upon Masu as a fine example of a hardened hero who went against odds and still emerged victorious every single time.

It wasn't just Eran. All vassal, small and mistreated, clans viewed Masu as a true legend to learn from.

He almost had tears in his eyes when he saw Masu in person. His arrival on Mars was expected as the Gro used an outside agency to contact the Dietrich about his arrival. The Dietrich was given only minimal information. On paper, Eran Gro was an illegitimate child of a Gro outsider who excelled in a navy academy and chose to work for the Dietrich. At least on paper, there was nothing suspicious. The Gro never kept any record of Eran. Therefore, even if someone wanted to dig more info, there was simply no more.

He bowed as deeply as he could toward Masu who was standing few feet away from him in Mars shuttle port. He was nobody, yet someone like Masu came to take him in person.

Tears in eyes, he said loudly and firmly while still in his bowing position, "I thank you for the welcome, sir!"

"Arise, sonny," Masu told him warmly. "Welcome to the red planet."

Eran Gro was only fifteen years old at this moment but he knew his situation well from as early as four and handled staying low exceptionally well. He bid his farewell to his parents and left without anything but the clothes he was wearing. He had a fake ID and had no bank account to his name. While his profile was definitely suspicious and that was why Masu himself came to see him.

"Yes, sir!"

"You probably gave up pretty much everything to come here," Masu said while offering a handshake. Eran's gaze was fixed at his very rough hand for a moment before they had a handshake.

"Since this is your first time on Mars, be very prepared. Once we go outside, you will know what I mean."

Eran Gro was wearing Gro traditional wardrobe which was pitch black suit plus a cloak of the same hue. The cloak was being held together with what appeared to be exquisite silvery chains. The chains showed great craftsmanship and it was suspicious that such a thing was given to "an illegitimate child" who the Gro wanted to get rid of. The wardrobe was in fact his father's which passed down for four generations if his claim was true. And Masu noticed that the chains bore the clan emblem of the Gro also. He wasn't someone who missed even smallest details. The wardrobe wasn't for someone ordinary. It was for someone very important.

He recalled Eran Gro's profile once more in his head. He was classified as a class A hyper human who graduated from Moon navy academy. He was an illegitimate son of a Gro outsider.

Or at least that was what his fake profile claimed.

As soon as they left the main entrance, they both were embraced by fierce sand storm and sand particles immediately started to hit them. Masu was used to it, but Eran was not. His face was tingling and his cloak was going haywire.

"Woah! Woah!" He attempted to control his cloak but it was no use. In the end, he had to take the cloak off and rolled it. "Good to go, sir!" He exclaimed enthusiastically.

"Is the clock important to you?" Masu asked him casually as they ventured into the sand storm to reach his shuttle.

"Very, very, important, sir. It is literally all I have."

"You seem to be taking the situation very well."

"Of course, sir, you are a legend among us. Working with you would mean so much for a lot of us," Eran said sincerely.

Masu didn't reply to his statement and continued to walk toward the shuttle slowly and when they got there and entered the shuttle, Eran asked for a bottle of water. Masu figured he wanted the water to cleanse his mouth since sand would have gotten into his mouth, but he was using the water to clean his clock. He seemed to care less about sand inside of his mouth. His careful handling of the folded cloak showed how much he cared.

Meanwhile, Masu's shuttle reached the Kamtaka castle in just minutes. It was currently levitating above the storm, therefore, the view was spectacular. The floating isle was above a giant red brown eye of storm. It looked almost surreal in the scenery.

"The Kamtaka castle...!" Eran uttered in awe.

The floating isle was just large and wide enough for a medieval style castle and a shuttle landing pad was on one of its towers. When the shuttle landed, two guards swiftly dashed toward the shuttle and stood guard as Masu and Eran exited.

"Sir!" The guards saluted at Masu.

Nodding along, he walked past them and Eran followed.

"I am taking you to Kan Dietrich. Allow me to brief you on our current situation," Masu said while walking through a grand hallway that was decorated royally.

He continued, "Mars lack officers. We have only one fleet captain to control our fleet, and we also lack crew to operate all the ships we have."

He made a short pause and continued.

"We have near three thousand warships. Only fifteen hundreds are currently in operation with bare minimum crew."

The situation was in fact dire. In simpler terms, Mars or the Dietrich clan in essence, was lacking bureaucrats. Overloaded bureaucrats meant a rotten organization. On the other hand, lack of bureaucrats meant lack of processing power as an organization. Masu had been doing his best to fill the gap along with Roon Dietrich, but there were only so much two people could do.

The addition of Eran Gro wasn't going to improve the situation much more since he was a hyper human. Still, one more fleet captain meant one less problem to deal with.

The independence had much to do with the lack of bureaucrats. The Dietrich clan depended on local Mars government for most of paper works. They never liked to be overshadowed by the clan and when Mars became independent, all workers at the government were sent off as a part of exchange for Masu's return.

The Dietrich did attempt to recruit their own bureaucrats but miners didn't make good bureaucrats.

"Who is the only fleet commander?" Eran asked, out of pure curiosity.

"He is a man named Tyron, a class A hyper human. A reject from Venus administration unfortunately."

Tyron was the man responsible for shooting down two ENN vessels five years ago. He was subsequently fired for his actions but was not charged for crime because it was the ENN vessels that initiated the aggression. He left Venus soon after and ended up on Mars.

Eran felt he heard of the name before but he couldn't recall where and when.

Soon enough, Eran was introduced to Kan Dietrich in his office. Kan was a man whose appearance was perhaps best described as an elegant warrior. He had a good physique but wasn't one of those overly muscular men.

Fingers crossed and supporting his chin on it, he beamed a grin at Eran.

"Welcome to Mars, Eran Gro."

Eran saluted. "Sir!"

And that concluded the end of the meeting which Eran felt awkward. It was simply too brief. They were walking in a hallway again and Masu told him casually as he was leading him to his own quarter.

“He is not much of a speaker,” Masu answered the lingering question Eran had in his mind.

“If you say so, sir.”

Masu changed the subject. “Do you have a blade?”

“Pardon?” Blinking eyes few times, Eran soon answered, “Oh, no, sir. I did have some training lessons with wooden blades but I haven’t had an energy blade, sir.”

“I suppose I should get you one.”

Grinning or perhaps frowning bitterly, he loosely answered, “I am not so sure...”

His reaction was because he broke every single blade he had his hands on. There had been, thus far, no exception. The Gro trainers did get him a good blade once which he broke in minutes. His trainers determined that Eran’s raw strength was simply too powerful and decided to teach him how to tone himself down. He was still having a hard time precisely controlling his raw strength although at this point he was breaking blades in months instead of minutes.

“I will get you one anyway and we will see how it goes.”

After Eran was introduced to his own quarter, Masu informed him that it was only temporary, explaining him that his place was above in space ultimately.

“Have you ever taken captaincy courses?”

“Aye.”

“What grades did you get?”

“C+, sir.” And that was a straight answer as if he wasn’t ashamed of such a low grade.

“Do you consider yourself a good captain?” And Masu asked as if his grade didn’t matter.

“I am just a teen, sir. My short answer is no. My long answer is I don’t know. I haven’t led anyone in my life. I do feel confident though.”

On surface, he looked like a grown man. His physique looked complete and his height was 1.88 meter. Even if he lied his age, it’d have worked.

“Alright, your job for now is settle down here and make yourself home. I hope you won’t get homesick.”

Placing down the folded black cloak on bed, he answered rather merrily. “I made my choice, sir. I was fully aware of the circumstances. There is no going back for me unless something dramatic occurs.”

“Such as?”

“Like the Bau falls and the Gro becomes independent.”

Which was quite frankly very, very, unlikely to happen at this point.

“How has the Bau treated the Gro?”

“They didn’t treat us at all. After kicking us out to some isle in middle of pacific some generations ago, they completely forgot about us which we didn’t mind. I am a Gro through and through. I wasn’t going to join the Bau.”

“Lad, you are telling me too much.”

Eran grinned. "I don't mind you telling me everything. A man of your caliber would know by now that my profile is as fake as it could get."

Masu had to grin because he was right. "No need to tell me. Everyone has secrets. Keep yours."

Eran nodded at him. "Will do."

He was given a few days of free time to get used to and then he was introduced to more members of the Dietrich setup.

He was introduced to Roon Dietrich who was, on paper, the daughter and the only child, of Kan Dietrich. And there was Dr. Anna who was the Dietrich family doctor. Lastly, there was Tyron who was introduced to Eran via a video communication instead since he was up in space. For the time being, Eran's role was a mere guard at the Kamtaka castle. He was told to study further on basic engineering and captaincy before taking up a cruiser.

And Masu brought up a discussion of wage a week later.

"I take that you have a fake ID," Masu said to which Eran nodded at him.

"We can't pay you if you don't have an authentic identification. Well, you could be paid in cash cards, but we are not going to. The Dietrich is a government."

"Sounds fair. What do you suggest that I do?"

"Getting you a proper ID is not the problem. The issue is the Bau which is why you came here in such a manner."

"Can't we just lie about my class? My class is A on the profile. Why can't we use that?"

They were in Masu's office which was surprisingly dull. Unlike Kan Dietrich's office which was more or less a royal chamber, Mau's office was literally a hut, interior wise. Plain walls, plain desk, plain chair. Nobody would believe that such an office was Masu the sage's.

"It can be done and it will probably have to be that way." Masu explained, "However, you being here, a Gro being here, could complicate issues for your clan on Earth. They could ask them questions why a Gro member was off their radar."

"That shouldn't be an issue. I don't think they even care about -" Masu stopped him from speaking further.

"I do know how it works for the Bau, trust me."

Indeed, he was on top of the Bau for two occasions. He continued, "They may not know you are here right now but they will dig around once they know you are here. No vassal clan members is allowed to leave Earth, isn't that right?"

Indeed.

"Then can't I just hide my last name from my new ID? I never existed on records."

Masu's face darkened and he glared at Eran. "You are proud to be a Gro. You care about your own clan. And yet you wish to hide your last name?"

Eran's eyes widened but soon narrowed. "Yes, my apologies. I won't speak about hiding my last name."

At his response, Masu's face loosened up and he beamed a grin at him. "Lad, you have a point. I will issue your new ID as Eran but you must keep in mind that you are Eran Gro. Never forget your root."

“Yes, sir.” Eran recalled the moment he received the cloak from his father. In fact, the cloak was given to him in the Gro family hall where all members of Gro was watching.

A class S hyper human.

It was both a gift and a curse. If the Gro was a little bit stronger, Eran could have led his clan to glories. The Gro never had ambitions because they always focused on survival. Therefore, when they were given a great chance, they had to pass, again for survival.

“You are our pride,” His father told him with teary eyes as he donned him with the pitch black cloak, the traditional garment of the Gro. And Eran caressed the silvery chains and its accessories around neck. “These silvery chains were crafted by hand by our finest craftsmen. I am sorry that this is all we can give you but know that we are not throwing you away in the wilderness because we want to.”

They did not have a choice.

His father placed his hands on Eran’s soldiers. Looking directly into his eyes, he told him firmly. “You are a Gro no matter what. If..., if an opportunity arises, go for it. Do not mind us here. Start over the clan afresh. We won’t mind. We are forever shackled here. But you won’t be. Wilderness is dangerous but, at the same time, there will be opportunities.”

Few members in the audience shed tears and bemoaned in silence.

His father's voice was close to tears. "You are my son. You may have to discard your last name for survival, but you are my son and you are a Gro no matter what." His voice became progressively louder and teary. "No matter what. No matter what."

No matter what...

Standing in front of Masu, he dropped his head. For a while, he had been overly excited to finally work with Masu the sage but his words made him realize again what was at the stake; his entire clan risked their lives so that he may have a chance to shine. The lives of the Gro was on his shoulders literally.

Masu gave him a moment before speaking further.

"There are rules and regulations. You should follow them just as you should follow orders given by me or something else whose rank is higher. However, there are always times that you just have to do what you have to do. I am not asking you to break and disobey rules, I am rather asking you to be flexible."

Eran nodded without saying anything.

Masu continued, "There are always two sides to a story. Sometimes, there are more than two. Do not be a fool and make a decision or judgement based on a single side."

Eran nodded again.

Finally, beaming a smile at him, Masu told him warmly, "Welcome to Mars, again."

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