

# [The black knight arc] [2] [Doubtless] [9609]

Rev 1.1

A small group of patrol fleet was sailing toward a one-sided fight between two freighters and a group of aggressors.

“Pirates, captain.”

A crew informed Eran Gro who was in his captain’s chair with legs crossed. As a part of his education, he had been given a small patrol fleet and he currently held a rank of cadet.

Within Inner Sol, Mars was the only planet that tolerated pirates somewhat. It was rumored that pirates even had a few bases in asteroid belts near Mars which was never confirmed. While not many weren’t aware of why pirates were rampant around Mars, Kan Dietrich and Masu knew exactly why.

It all had to do with the connection with the Ra or to be broader, the Nebula pirates. When Marcus Dietrich wedded Kakari Ra, an alliance was formed. A part of the deal was to let Nebula pirates settle down in the asteroid belts. The deal was known to only few, and for the rest of people, they simply knew Mars had unusually frequent pirate activities.

“Again?” Eran muttered. “This is seventh time we ran into them in the last six days.”

“They are withdrawing, captain.”

“And they are running away again,” Eran said with a sigh.

The deal would see the pirates settle down under the Dietrich's protection, and in return, they would not harm vessels belonging to the Dietrich. The pirates caused very little damages annually and the Ark on Earth never bothered to sweep them out while Mars was a part of United Sol.

"The merchant is asking us for assistance in repairs," A crew said.

Pouting and sighing, Eran inquired, "Do we have spares left? We've been helping a lot of these ever since we took the mission."

"We should have enough. The damage doesn't appear to be serious," Another crew responded.

Eran approved the repair. "So be it."

And that was supposed to be all there it was for Eran. The merchant should have received parts and repairs and he should have gone his way. However-

"Captain, crews at the docking bay are saying that the merchant is complaining after getting onto our ship," A crew reported as he shook his head weakly.

"Why is he on the ship even?"

"His ship's life support system was failing and he had to evacuate his freighter," The crew explained.

"Fine, I will go down there and see what he is complaining about."

"How dare you! Listen, you little-"

When Eran entered the docking bay, he heard a loud voice, apparently the merchant's. He was pointing aggressively at one of female docking crews. Other crews were clearly reluctant to restrain him.

Inhaling, Eran exclaimed promptly, “What is going on here?!” His loud voice echoed in the bay which stopped the merchant pointing further at the female crew. He quickly recognized Eran’s coat which was for captains and turned to face him as Eran walked toward him.

“Are you the captain of this ship?” He demanded an answer.

“I am the captain of this patrol fleet,” Eran replied in an instant, adding, “And get that fat finger of your off my crew.”

The merchant exclaimed in an instant, “Do you even know who I am?!”

“No, should I care, fat man?”

The merchant frowned and his breathing became louder. He was well dressed and was clearly obese which was somewhat rare in the era.

“I could get fired in an hour. You’ve better behave yourself!”

Eran sneered with a shrug. He was clearly not threatened.

A crew approached him quickly and whispered to him in his ear.

“Captain, we verified his ID. He is a Bau merchant. An outsider but seems to have good connections.”

“I see. Get everyone out of the bay.”

The crew became confused. “Captain, what are you trying to do?”

“I am going to knock some senses into him. Turn security camera feeds off as well. Leave no evidence.”

The crew, at first, looked utterly shocked and took a step back, but in an instant, he beamed a crooked grin at Eran and whispered to him as he walked away from him. “Got it, boss.”

The merchant’s feisty attitude saw a sudden halt when he noticed that the crews were silently leaving the deck.

“Hey! HEY!” He shouted at the departing crews. “Where are you going?!” And soon enough, there was only Eran left. The merchant did not like this situation and he found Eran who was looking at him with glaring eyes.

Feeling scared, he shouted as he turned around to head to his shuttle. “T, this is not the end! I am leaving!” And the next thing he realized was a dull impact on back of his head and he tumbled down with his face hitting the platform hard.

With a badly bleeding nose, he struggled to stand up. His obesity mixed with zero gravity certainly made the whole motion awkward and somewhat comical. By time he actually regained his balance and was standing up, Eran grabbed top of his hair and pushed his face down back to the platform with force, smearing his blood over the floor as a result.

“W, what are you doing?!” Desperately, the merchant exclaimed.

“I should ask you! What are you doing?!”

“I didn’t do anything!”

Eran released his hair but kicked him in his ass. Due to zero gravity and Eran’s raw strength as class S hyper human, the merchant flew high and bounced off ceiling before his magnetic boots attached itself finally on floor and he groaned painfully as he struggled to even move. Eran made a light jump and grabbed him down to the floor. He was only semiconscious at this point.

“What a weakling,” He scoffed.

The fun was over. For better or worse, the merchant got away with two broken ribs and a cracked pelvic bone. Neither of which was serious and treatment was completed in an hour and he was let go. The merchant wouldn’t say a word as he sailed away.

Eran’s eventual return to Mars saw him summoned down to surface. The call was made by Masu and he knew exactly why he was summoned.

“I hope you know why you were summoned,” Masu said indifferently.

“I do, sir. I know exactly why.”

Eran was in Masu’s office in the Kamtaka castle on the floating island. His office was more or less an empty room with a window and a desk in it.

“Very well.” Masu crossed his fingers. “Care to defend yourself?”

“It’s not exactly defending myself, sir, but merely stating why I did what I did.”

He explained that the merchant was pointing his finger at his crew. Thus, he evoked the rights of captain.

The rights of captain weren’t exactly legalized laws. Rather it was more or less a guidebook for captains in space. In a ship, its captain was the king. His words were rules. And, as such, captains were responsible for safety of his crews. If a captain felt that someone was threatening his crews, he had the right to repel the alien entity.

Which was what Eran did. The merchant threatened a crew of his, and thus, he punished the man although what he did was a little extreme and was borderline bullying.

Masu groaned as he closed his eyes for a moment. Upon opening his eyes again, he spoke.

“I do understand your hatred toward the Bau. However, do you realize that you’ve gone a little far?”

Eran replied firmly and promptly, “I do not regret what I’ve done, sir. If that is what you are asking.”

“Do you think you’ve gone too far?”

“No, sir.”

Eran’s replies were quick and firm as if he had absolutely no second thoughts.

“Do you realize what kind of trouble you got yourself into though?”

There was a tint of grin on Eran’s face as he replied, “I am fully aware of what I’ve done, sir. You need not to lecture me.”

Maus's intention wasn't to lecture him. He simply wanted Eran to realize where he stood. However, it seemed he knew where he stood.

"Very well," Masu said with a faint sigh. "You are dismissed."

"No punishment, sir?"

"Punishment is those for who actually have done something wrong. You did not break any rules and you don't believe you've done anything wrong. Would punishing you be the correct way? Would it even work?"

"You've summoned me here to punish me though, no?"

Masu crossed his fingers and supported his chin on them. "Well, if you want a punishment for the sake of being punished, I do have something in my mind."

The merchant did eventually make an inquiry to find out who was the person that "harassed" him, but his inquiry was blocked by Masu. The merchant pressed harder to get his answer but Masu was far, far, more politically powerful.

"Welcome, please excuse me for not paying attention. Have a seat and read over whatever are on the desk," was Roon's greeting when Eran entered her office. There were two other officers who were busily reading over files of documents.

This was Eran's punishment.

"Paper documents? I didn't know these were still used," He remarked as he sat down. Paper documents were still used but certainly not in such a scale as seen in Roon's office where there were literally mountains of files.

"We still use them. What we do here is read them over and scan them into the database for further processing," Roon explained while looking down on her desk, reading documents. Her eyes moved sideways swiftly.

Eran quickly skimmed over a document on a desk in front of him. It was a minor complaint from a miner. "It's a complaint. What do I do with it?"

“Read through and determine whether it is worth escalating. If it’s worth it, scan it and save it into the database where I will take a look later,” Roon replied indifferently.

He soon realized how excruciating the whole process was. The process itself wasn’t a hard task by any means. He simply needed to read documents and determine whether it’s worth keeping it or discard it. The issue was the amount; there were simply too many and there were only four people processing them.

Regardless, he kept his cool and continued on with his task until, at one point, Roon stood up and stretching with a loud moan. This was when the two others let go of papers in their hands and collapsed on their desks.

It meant the day was over for them.

“Alright, everyone. It is 2AM and our job is done for the day,” Roon declared after her long stretch. Eran recalled reporting in on 6PM. Checking on a process file he set aside revealed he processed about 120 cases and that was one third of a huge file.

And there were easily forty huge files in the office. He felt the method Roon was using was too inefficient but chose not to voice his opinions. After all, he had been working for just some years and ultimately it wasn’t his concern.

For next 6 days, Eran silently did his job in the office without a complaint. He read thousands of papers, made decisions to whether scan or discard them. Once his sentence was completed, he simply reported back to Masu.

And he looked half amused when Eran returned to his office to report.

“What have you learned from the punishment?” to which Eran answered promptly, “I learned that they are using horribly inefficient method to process the documents.” He added quickly, “And that they are lacking in manpower.”

Masu beamed a faint grin at Eran and said, “I’d agree with lack of manpower, but I disagree with the inefficient method.”

“If you say so, sir.”

Eran was, on surface at least, a dull person to deal with. He wasn't a socially active man. Additionally, when he stated his opinions on matters, he was clear and straightforward. An interesting trait he showed was that he could not be convinced by anyone once he made a decision. If he disagreed with something, that was it. He'd never change his opinion. But he did not argue. He would usually say “If you say so” or “So be it” and moved on.

Masu knew this too well; He had taught him for several years. The reason he looked somewhat amused was because Eran did well with the paper works. Roon pointed out a fact that he never complained and that he was efficient with the job. He didn't waste time and was on the job for the whole time, taking minimum breaks even. Roon remarked that she felt he was too mature for his age.

He could see where Eran's maturity came from. While not similar, he also had tough days in his youth. He didn't have the luxury of being a kid and neither did Eran. He had to mature quickly or it was his life. In Eran's case, he had to mature quickly or it was his clan's safety.

Still, he found Eran's unique traits amusing. He could see him becoming a crucial member of Mars setup in near future.

And so, per Masu's order, Eran went back to Tyron's fleet.

He saluted at Tyron who was scratching somewhere on his crotch in his captain's chair. Circling his chair to face Eran, he casually welcomed him back.

“Hey, kid. Finally got back from your first patrol, I see.”

Tyron was originally employed by Venus government before it became independent. He was actually fired by Illy O'ren after he gave an order to shoot down two ENN frigates back in 9599. Illy was fully aware of it wasn't Tyron's fault to shoot them down since the frigates broke the rules first but, due to public and media pressure, she was forced to fire him.

“Yes, sir.”

Snickering, Tyron asked, “How was the virgin ride?”

Eran was positive that he would have read the report. Regardless, he replied indifferently, “I may have screwed up a little.”

“Nobody’s perfect, dude,” Tyron said with a crooked smile. “Back to your station.”

“Aye, sir.”

Tyron was out of a job for only a short while before Illy referred him to Mars. It was Illy’s last act as the President of Venus. With her recommendation, Kan Dietrich trusted Tyron and eventually became the highest ranking captain within Mars fleet. But he wasn’t an admiral. In fact, there was no admiral yet.

“Alright, people, let’s resume patrolling,” Tyron barked his order and then went straight into his quarter.

Discipline was never Tyron’s forte and Illy didn’t mind his lack of discipline because he did his job. Masu cared about discipline but he didn’t have much choices which was why he was counting on Eran to become a crucial member soon.

Once their captain was gone, two crews silently approached Eran who was fiddling with his console in front of him.

“I heard you worked with Roon,” One of them whispered him.

“You lucky bastard,” The other added.

Eran knew what the deal was. Roon Dietrich was treated like an idol among Marians. It was considered an honor to see her on screen and being with her in real life would have been a moment to treasure for many.

“Yes, I did,” He replied stoically.

“You know, I’d kill for her bikini shot,” The crew said merrily.

And the other agreed, “Hell, no kiddin’.”

He failed to understand their urge to literally worship the woman. Actually, he did not like her personally. First of all, he did not like her voice that seemed to

penetrate one's mind. Secondly, he did not like her habit of looking into people's minds with her ESP to see whether one was lying or not. Although he had nothing to hide from her, it wasn't great feeling to have his mind inspected whenever conversing her.

Regardless, he wasn't going to voice his opinion and alienate himself. Therefore, he rode the trend.

Tyron's patrol fleet had the same purpose as Eran's patrol fleet but Tyron's fleet was much larger in numbers and he had more authorities than Eran did as a trainee cadet. Despite of being a much bigger fleet, however, their encounters weren't much different from Eran's patrol fleet. They ran into pirates and they fled once Tyron's fleet was in range. The fleet never chased pirates and that was it. Everything was business as usual.

Until they ran into something unusual.

"What the?" A crew uttered at his console. "Are you seeing what I am seeing?"

Eran looked down on his console. "I see a lone shuttle ... belonging to ENN?"

"Yeah, that's what I am seeing. What is it going here? This is Mars space."

The lone ENN shuttle contacted the fleet as soon as it was in range. A middle-age man who needed to shave badly wanted to interview Tyron.

Tyron was promptly called.

"You wanna what?" Understandably, he looked amused.

"My name is Yagi Goodman, a senior journalist from ENN. I know your history a little. I'd like to interview you."

"Goodman? Didn't know there was such a clan?"

Yagi cleared his throat. "It's not a clan. I paid good money to have it legalized. It's just a last name. Anyway, to the topic please."

“Of course, not. I am not having an interview with some dude who came out of nowhere. You are shady.” Tyron was blunt although he was correct in his assessment.

“I am anything but shady. I am from ENN and have been employed by ENN for more than one hundred fifty years.”

Tyron fired a crooked grin and responded sarcastically, “And someone majestic as you wish to interview me. Oh, I am so moved.”

Yagi sighed and shook his head. “Sir, I am serious.”

“So am I.” Tyron pointed his thumb down toward the screen. “Whatever you want from me, I don’t want it. I finally got a stable career.”

Taking a breather, Yagi rolled his eyes once and seemed to be reluctant to speak further. After a moment of short silence, he opened his mouth.

“Mr, could we talk in private? I have a charming offer you probably won’t want to miss.”

Tyron crossed his arms. “If it’s money, forget it. Money’s easy to come by in this career.”

Yagi had a confident grin. “No, sir, no. It’s not about money. It’s ... about your career which ended absurdly when you shot down two ENN frigates.”

Narrowing eyes, Tyron was silent. He was a United Sol commodore before he was fired by Illy O’ren. He had to start over. Eventually, he grunted with a reply. “Fine, old man. Let’s hear what you’ve got to say.” Then he stood up and walked toward the captain’s quarter. “Reroute to my quarter.”

A crew responded promptly, “Yes, sir.”

Tyron was in his quarter for half an hour before he came out. Clearing his throat, he walked toward the captain’s chair and sat in it. At the same time, the shuttle was sailing away.

Naturally, the crews were curious and one of them inquired.

“Sir, do you mind telling us what it was about?”

“I do mind. Don’t ask.”

“Uh..., sir?”

“It’s personal.”

The crews exchanged awkward stares.

Tyron was quietly sneaking into a docking bay. With only essential light on, the area was very dim. It was also a designated night time for the crews. Therefore, majority of them were in their quarters.

Silently, he approached a fighter craft and was about to punch his passcode in when the light turned on and Eran entered the bay.

“Captain, what are you doing at this hour?” He indifferently inquired Tyron who startled visually.

Panting lightly, Tyron responded with stammer as he turned around quickly, “I, I, I was ... j, just...”

“Captain,” Eran called out resolutely.

Tyron cleared his throat and calmed himself. “I am the captain of the ship. I can come here at any time I’d like,” He declared and asked, “What are you doing here, Cadet?”

Eran walked toward Tyron in a slow tempo and told Tyron, “Whatever the journalist told you, you shouldn’t have been swayed.”

“W, what are you talking about?!”

“Too bad.” Eran pulled out his energy blade as he said.

“Cadet! What do you think you are doing?!” Exclaiming, Tyron pulled out his energy blade as well.

Eran spoke no more and stopped at 15 meters away from Tyron.

“Cadet, unless you wish to be court martialled, drop your weapon. This is your last chance!” Tyron warned although Eran maintained his distance and glare. Seeing him not backing off, he sighed. “Fine, kid. You think you can defeat me?! I am a class A hyper human.”

Eran posed to dash forward and Tyron posed to defend. He saw Eran dashing forward but immediately realized he was way faster than he could react.

This was when Tyron felt a sharp pain on his right shoulder. Looking sideways, he saw his arm apparently sliced clean. His face progressively filled with doubts and pain at which point, blood started to spout out violently. Screaming, he kneeled down while holding his right shoulder with his left hand.

“W, what the fuck?! How in the world?!” He uttered while aggressively groaning. Eran was in front of him with his blade pointed at Tyron’s neck. Biting his lips as well as panting heavily, Tyron looked up at Eran whose face was void of any emotions.

“You... You are a class S?!”

Those were Tyron’s last words as Eran beheaded him cleanly.

His body was found by crews few hours later and Eran was subsequently arrested upon inspecting video feed. Once the fleet rushed back to Mars orbit, he was sent down. Eran cooperated fully and spoke no words during this period.

Flanked by two guards and his hands tied, Eran stood before Masu in a court.

He looked over a report and talked to Eran.

“Do you have a reason for your deed?”

Eran explained calmly, “Captain Tyron spoke to a spy from United Sol. His mind was swayed by an offer and was ready to switch his allegiance.”

However, Masu saw no mention of any spies in the report.

“Do you have any proof to back up your claim?”

“He spoke to an ENN journalist named Yagi Goodman. He and Tyron spoke in a private channel. You should look into it.”

Masu ordered to bring the private record and two minutes later a disk arrived in the court.

According to the private conversation from Tyron and Yagi Goodman, Tyron was offered a rank of Commander if he changed his side. The offer came from Yakov who was United Sol President Gvew’s top adviser. It was Yakov’s plan to acquire in depth information regarding Mars and perhaps Venus.

“Did you eavesdrop?” Masu inquired Eran who had been as calm as possible. He certainly didn’t look like someone who was afraid and had doubts about his actions.

“No, sir.” It was a firm answer.

“Then how did you figure this out?” Masu nodded at one of the guards who promptly untied Eran’s hands.

“When Captain Tyron came back to the bridge, I sensed ambitions blooming from his eyes as if he had been offered something that was too good to discard.”

In other words, he assumed and acted.

“You murdered a man purely based on your assumption. You shouldn’t have done that,” Masu stated.

“If I didn’t do anything, he would have made out with vital info regarding Mars’ navy as well as others that we don’t want to expose.”

Masu was astonished by a fact that Eran made a big choice based on an assumption. Not only that his decision was swift. The outcome of this event was acceptable, he felt. Tyron was unable to defect which was the most important thing. Eran could have simply captured him however.

“You clearly had a choice to capture him alive instead of killing him. Why did you kill him?”

“I felt he didn’t deserve a third chance, sir.”

What he had done; it was no small feat. He decided a man’s fate almost instantly when he saw “ambitions” radiating from Tyron’s eyes. And there was the manner he killed Tyron as well. Tyron was an experienced hyper human. He shouldn’t have been killed in such a manner unless he was vastly outpowered. Granted, Eran was a class S hyper human and the Gro risked the whole clan to send him away, but given his young age, 22, he matured way too fast.

And he wasn’t like so when he had just arrived on Mars. Something had changed inside of him during past four years.

After a moment of silence, Masu declared his verdict which was already essentially made when Eran’s hands became free.

“Very well. I cannot complain about the outcome. You handled the matter well. It could have gone better if you had captured him alive, but the primary objective of dealing with a potential defect was accomplished. Therefore, your charges are dropped.”

After the court session, Masu summoned Eran to his office.

“Be at ease, I didn’t call you for a lecture or anything,” Masu told him softly. Heather was present in the office as well. She was leaning her back on a wall behind Masu.

“I apologize for the commotion.”

Beaming a faint grin, he told Eran, “No need for an apology. I suppose you did what you had to do although I don’t exactly agree with your method. Speaking of which, your method reminds me of Cecil’s.”

“The Crimson wizard?”

“Yes, the crimson wizard. His methods are brutal and forced although highly calculated beyond imaginations.”

Heather snickered. “Did you just complement the kid or what?”

Masu shrugged with a grin. “I suppose that depends on how you look at it.”

“Doesn’t matter, either way, in my book,” And Eran replied.

Masu said, “Indeed, it doesn’t. Anyway, I’d like to hear about your clan.”

“About the Gro, sir?”

“Heather, what do you know about the Gro?”

“Nothing at all. Didn’t even know they existed,” was her prompt answer.

“Therefore, I called you to hear more about the clan.”

According to Eran and what he knew and felt of his clan, the clan was content with this life on a small isle in the Pacific ocean. They led a very isolated lifestyle because of the pressure from the Bau. Either way, they did enjoy their lives in their own ways.

“You are a legend among the Gro,” Eran added, “A non-Bau climbing to the top of the Bau and they wanted you to be there instead of you clinging to the seat.”

“That’s my man,” Heather said proudly.

The Gro found out that Eran was more than just a class A hyper human when he cracked a large rock with his bare hands.

Heather whistled.

“Then the clan was divided. One group wanted to keep me. Another group wanted me to sell to the Bau for whatever they wanted,” Eran stated.

“Did anyone teach you swordsmanship?” Masu inquired. Seeing he was able to defeat Tyron pretty much in one slash, he wondered who his teacher was.

“No, sir. The Gro did not have proper trainers. I did have trainers but I was simply better than them.”

“Even skill wise?”

“Their skills were meant for lower classes. I had to teach myself my own skills suited for my speed and strength.”

Masu was impressed. What Eran said was he basically invented his own style.

“How did the clan come to the conclusion to send you off?”

“The debate went on for some time. It lasted for a year or so. The debate became pretty violent and there were small conflicts within the clan. It was when my father asked me for an opinion.”

“He should have asked your opinion in the beginning despite of how young you were,” Masu stated which Eran ignored and continued.

“I told him that I wanted to leave. My existence was a seed for endless conflicts. And my mind was set on reaching Mars to meet you, the living legend.”

He made such a decision when he was eight.

“After that, my clan decided to accept my wish and I think you can guess the rest.”

Masu nodded. He had a smile on his face. “Your clan is admirable. They listened to you and did a very good job covering you for 10 years. I am really surprised that no one within your clan tried to sell you out during the decade.”

“They ... deserve somewhere better, sir.” Eran’s face had been pretty much void of emotions but when he said so, his tone was different. It was more resolute. “I realized this after I arrived here. The universe is vast and yet they are confined to a tiny isle despite of having committed no ill deeds...”

Masu started to understand what changed him. It was a mix of anger and hope. Being away from the Bau gave him hope. But he was also angered by the fact that his clan, who he was indebted to, was still stuck.

In his mind, Eran’s clan being “content” was equivalent to having given up. He recalled what kind of ordeal the Klisis had to go through in order to leave Earth. It took thousands of lives. The Gro clearly that they had no chance but the birth of Eran Gro gave them false hope for a moment. He believed that the Gro made the

correct choice in letting him go loose in the wilderness. And he believed the clan made sure not to pressure him when sending him away.

The problem was though that Eran wasn't going to forget this clan and it had been eating away his sanity from within.

He realized that his way of repaying the debt was not having doubts of any kind. In other words, he chose to look forward only which was easier to be said than done. Once coming to such a conclusion, Eran's actions made sense to him.

"Know where you stand, Eran," Masu stated stoically. "As long as you are painfully aware of where you stand, you can't do wrong."

Eran replied stoically, "Yes, sir."

Masu continued, "You have to hang in there. Mark my words. United Sol will fall in probably less than two hundred years."

Both Heather and Eran looked shocked with their eyes widened.

"And when the nation falls, that will be your chance to get your clan off Earth."

As soon as Eran left, Heather rushed to ask, "United Sol will fall within two hundred years?"

"You heard what I said."

"That's a pretty bold claim, don't you think? Fall of United Sol will be the same as fall of the Bau."

Masu circled his chair around and faced Heather.

"When Cecil left United Sol on 99, United Sol was done for. It's only a matter of time. Besides, the Bau isn't doing too well, you know."

Heather had no attachment to the Bau anymore. Still, being told that her clan would be destroyed in the future wasn't pleasant to hear.

She muttered, "It's always about that guy, isn't it. They really should have kept you no matter what the cost."

Masu beamed a grin. "I wasn't going to stick around. Trust me."

Sighing, Heather turned sideways to gaze through the only window in his office. A fierce sand storm was waging outside which was blocking everything visually. It was just flat light brown outside.

"You know what, this planet is no fun. Nothing to look at," She remarked.

Grinning remorsefully, Masu gazed at the window.

**Fin**