

Martian burning festival through Eran Gro's eyes.

[The black knight arc] [3] [Burning festival] [9651]

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One of those rare days, he thought.

How long has it been?

He opened a dusty window and embraced what seemed to be -

"Ah, sunshine -"

Every once in a while, densely clouded sky of Mars would be cleared out and allow Sun's ray to pass through. Whenever the days came, people celebrated while they could.

Eran was staying at a military installation in Kamtaka, the capital of Mars. He was on a three-day vacation. He didn't expect much during his short vacation. Therefore, it was a very pleasant surprise that he would see a sunny day on Mars.

Sunny days were common on Earth. A sunny day on Mars was nothing like a sunny day on Earth however.

Donning a brown trench coat, he went outside.

"Hello, Captain Gro," A receptionist of the installation hailed him formally as he walked into lobby.

"Hello, a good day today, eh?"

"Sure, it is. Have fun today."

"Will do."

He had a plan today. It wasn't really a plan; he just wanted to go to a place.

It was a graveyard where Masu the sage was buried. When he arrived at the graveyard, someone was already there. He recognized the person instantly due to her very distinctive characteristics.

The most noticeable characteristic she had was her pony tail which reached her waist. It was Roon Dietrich, the clone daughter of Kan Dietrich. She kneeled in front of the sage's grave stone and seemed to be meditating.

He did not wish to disturb her and waited outside of the small graveyard. That wouldn't have been an easy task for ordinary people. Martian air had zero humidity and had plenty of fine sand particles. Without a proper air filter mask, one would suffer throat burning within an hour. Even on a clear day like this very day would still cause issues for the respiratory system.

However, Eran being what he was, he didn't have much problems with the Martian air.

Standing idly waiting Roon to finish whatever she was doing, he fell into thoughts. He recalled Masu's last words to him that he should find Ssilen the Gypsy. He had yet to conduct a formal search on her, mainly due to a fact that Mars as whole needed transition time.

Everyone was too busy to fill the cracks Masu left upon his death. The extra amount of paper works as well as other administrative tasks meant that everyone

at the Kamtaka castle had been extremely busy. Even Eran had been dragged into handling extra paper works at times.

When everything was finally returning to the way it should have been, roughly 4 year-something passed.

As Eran's focus came back for a moment, he saw Roon standing not far from him and she was staring at him.

"Hello, Commander." Roon greeted Eran with her soft voice and a grin.

"Hello, Miss. Dietrich. Do you come here often?"

"Not as often as I'd like to."

"I see."

A short moment of uneasy silence dominated the scene which was broken by Roon.

"I will be on my way. Good day, Commander."

"Aye."

Standing in front of Masu's gravestone which had already been significantly worn down as a direct result of Martian weather, Eran reminded himself that Masu's body wasn't actually buried in the grave. Kan Dietrich was adamant that his body needed to be cremated and that his ashes must be kept at the Kamtaka castle. Roon Dietrich agreed with cremation but wished to bury the ashes at his grave on ground.

In the end, Kan wouldn't budge and Masu's ashes resided in a basement of Kamtaka castle.

Paying simple respect to the grave, Eran soon moved on.

The city was showing signs of the burning festival long before Sun would set. People were outside and streets, if one could call that due to it being covered with sand, were crowded.

The burning festival was exclusive to Martians. On Mars, clear days was very rare. Annually, there could be just one clear day or none at all. And then there could be four or five clear days in one year. Overall, it was rare and, when a clear day came, Martians celebrated.

“Well, what to do now... How to kill time...”

It was actually a genuine question. Having been occupied with his career ever since coming to Mars, Eran hadn't really had time to grow a hobby or two. He wasn't even in a relationship. He literally had nothing to do outside of work.

“Maybe, I will grab a drink and kill time that way.”

And so, he headed over to a bar.

It was sunset, and the ground was starting to warm up. On Mars, the sand would hold Sun's heat during daytime and would release the heat during night time, resulting night warmer than day. This phenomenon was especially stronger on sunny days.

“Ouch,” Eran said as he stepped out of a bar.

The ground was already heating up so hot that he was smelling rubber on his boots. In other words, it was the perfect day for Martians for their traditional festival. They called it "The burning festival" for a reason after all.

People were outside of their homes, holding liquor bottles in their hands. The capital city of Mars, Kamtaka, was blooming with life on this evening.

City officials were gathering woods in the city square. Wood was a rare commodity on Mars. Wood was imported from Venus exclusively as Mars didn't have any trees.

They were making a giant campfire for the festival.

Eram was merely wandering around the city, enjoying the views as well as the mood. A few people had already been knocked out by excessive drinking. They were quickly relocated back into a building due to the ground being inferno.

He eventually had to go back to Kamtaka castle and dress up lightly. It was simply too hot out there. When he got back to the downtown, the campfire in the city square was lit and people were gathered around the campfire. The sun had already fallen into the horizon by then.

Everyone was drinking booze and Eran felt entitled to drink even more.

"Well, drinking all day along on vacation isn't too wrong, I suppose," He said to himself as he stepped into yet another bar. It was when his communicator vibrated on his wrist.

"Yes, this is Eran Gro." He answered as he took a U-turn.

A female voice resounded from the bracelet.

"Commander Gro, we are really short on hands. There are various reports of minor crimes all over the capital. I am sending you the list. Please, take care of some."

"Roger that. I am on it."

Despite of being called upon in his vacation, he didn't mind. After all, he had nothing to do and was killing time by just mindlessly drinking. He also figured that they were desperate enough to call him.

"Back to the job, I guess," He mumbled.

They were really minor crimes. Most of them were brawling over trivial matters. All he had to do was stop their fights and calmed them down.

At one point, his comm. bracelet vibrated again and he took the call.

"This is Eran Gro."

"Sir, we have reports of Sae the little Witch being in the city. We need you to look into this case and, if she really is here, ask her to leave."

Sae the little Witch was a nationally wanted figure within United Sol. She wasn't wanted on Mars but wasn't welcomed. While Eran had never met her in person, he was educated on her appearance in case she did show up.

Since she was a class S hybrid, the only person who would be able to deal with her was Eran. The description of the possible suspect was given out and Eran headed to a bar where reports came in.

A bandana, pink colors from her clothes, she was very easy to distinguish from others. She looked no more than a pre-teen girl who was drinking from a beer mug that was as big as her whole face. Some were keeping a distance from her and had watchful eyes.

Eran approached her at once. He had his hand on a blade, ready to activate it at any moment.

"What are you doing here?" He asked her quietly.

It was apparent that she had quite a bit of drinks already. Few empty mugs were by her.

She glanced at him and was back at drinking. "Isn't that obvious?" She replied carelessly. "I am drinking!"

"You are not welcome here and I ask you to leave."

Sae shrugged. Then she stood up, dusting off her mini skirt. Despite of many mugs she had, she didn't seem to be drunk which wasn't a surprise at all considering her class.

Hybrid was an extremely rare case of someone having both ESP and Hyper human capabilities. They were generally known to be master of none but have advantages from both fields. They were so rare that their number was less than ten at any given time in the era regardless classes. Sae was an extraordinary case where she was a hybrid and retained class S rating at the same time.

"So what?" Her voice became hostile. "You wanna a piece of me?"

Eran wouldn't have minded a fight, but it was a public place.

"What have you come here for?"

"I've come here to enjoy the show. You got a problem with that?"

She sneered and shrugged.

"Please just leave. Don't make it worse."

"Do you really think I'd care?"

... She had a point.

"Leave me alone. I won't cause troubles."

He wouldn't really have minding having a battle with her. A clash between two S classes would have been devastating however.

“Swear me that you won’t cause troubles,” He demanded.

She pouted. “It’s not me that cause troubles! Why does everyone pick on meeeee!!!” And then she started to cry out loud.

“Alright, alright, calm down.” He soothed her. “Calm down.”

At this point, people were evacuating the bar with several city officials directing the motion.

Sae eventually calmed down in a moment but she became angry instead.

“U ruined it! U ruined the mood!” She slammed the counter in front of her which broke into pieces upon contact.

“Just leave. That’s all I am asking.”

Shaking and panting at the same time due to both anger and frustration, she conceded.

“Fine, I will leave, fucking ass. I so want to fight you but I ain’t going to fight you tonight cuz I came here for a different matter.”

“And why did you come here then?”

“I came here to visit a grave, Masu’s grave.”

Eran froze momentarily at Sae’s answer at which point she threw a jab at him which he unconsciously blocked.

“Hah, I guess I should have known. It’s never easy to take an advantage of class S people,” Sae muttered but with a snicker.

“Did you lie to me?”

“I did not. I do admit that I got sidetracked a little though. Martian beer is fucking good, I’ve got to say.”

It wasn't easy to take her seriously but he did feel he could trust her. He could sense underlying sincerity underneath her jokes.

Having determined that she had a business and it was a legitimate business, he made a big call of leaving her alone. He felt that, as long as she was left alone, she would do no damage.

"I will leave you alone then." Taking few steps backwards, Eran declared. "Have a pleasant evening on Mars." Then he turned around and started walking away.

Looking rather amused, Sae had her mouth open and was vacantly looking Eran leaving. Startling and snapping out of whatever she was thinking, she dashed off a stool and followed him.

"Hey, mister! Hey!"

She followed him outside of the bar and caught up to him.

"What now? I said I'd leave you alone."

"Actually, I need a guide. I don't even know where his grave is."

"You can't be serious?"

Sae shrugged with a pout. "Well, duh. Why do you think I've been wasting time all along?"

"You could have asked."

"Like I said, I got sidetracked."

Standing in front of Masu's grave, Sae spoke, "Hey, dude, I am back." Scratching her head, she continued. "Geez, you could have died few hundred years later. Now I have to visit you once every decade or so." Then she mumbled. "One more habit to keep track of."

Eran was standing behind her.

She pulled out a bottle out of her pink backpack. It was an antique wine bottle which he could see that it was over 50 years old.

“Dude, I risked my life to steal this,” Sae said. “It’s all yours.” She poured it down onto his grave stone. She remained unusually silent and still for a moment before she placed the empty bottle back into her backpack and turned around to face Eran.

“I am done. I am outta here unless you want a piece of me,” She said jokingly.

“Just go,” Eran answered stoically.

“Fine, bye, kid.”

Next morning, Eran was informed that an antique wine bottle was stolen from Kamtaka castle. They didn’t have a suspect.

With a face plalm, he chuckled.

He deserves the finest wine, alright, he thought.

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