

Hurray for Eran Gro because he earns his signature blade as well as a wife in this episode.

I consider this story better than most and the outcome of this story was the exact opposite of my original plan. No one was supposed to die in my original plan but, once the story started to get going, it turned out like this.

## [The black knight arc] [4] [The Black knight] [9705]

Rev 3.2 (Creation date: Unknown I forgot) (Latest revision: Feb 17 2018)

### **Note:**

Reading Hermit arc is recommended for better understanding of Ssilen and Ed.

Year 9705

Eran Gro had been in financial troubles for many, many, years. One incident and another, his blades kept on breaking down due to his immense raw strength. He had tried the best energy blade the industry offered, but it still broke down only after few weeks.

Each blade cost him over ten thousand credit and his bank account was already overdraft. Thankfully, his status of being a fleet commander allowed him to continue using his credit, but something had to be done. He knew a way since Masu gave him a farewell gift. Alas he hadn't really had time and wasn't desperate enough.

In the end, he finally came to a conclusion that he must seek out Ssilen.

He was a fleet captain of Mars, so it wasn't hard to catch floating gossips. It was said that Sslien was last seen around the outpost of Uranus. But that was all he could get. She wasn't an easy person to get a hold of.

When Eran arrived at the outpost, she had already left there. Whenever he managed to get a piece of information regarding where she was, he was always one step behind to meet her. It became a pattern and two seasons of time passed. In the end, he chose to send out scouts.

As soon as Eran arrived back, Kan Dietrich called up for a conference meeting.

Kan, Roon, and Eran were gathered in a secured room. Kan didn't care for formality, so the room had nothing. Eran leaned his back against a wall, and so did Kan with Roon standing in middle.

"I've decided to repel the pirates," Kan declared.

Roon was more than surprised to hear that. The Dietrich family and the Nebula pirates, the Ra, went way back. Marriage of Kan's parents, Marcus & Kakari was a political marriage to bring the two clans closer. Nebula pirates benefited by having safe haven in Sol system for a base of operation as well as material imports from Mars, and the Dietrich clan benefited from having an ally. This was due to a fact that the Bau and the Dietrich were once rivals with the Dietrich eventually being kicked out to Mars. The Bau wanted to destroy the Dietrich in a way or another and the Dietrich needed allies.

However, the scenery altered a lot once Mars declared independence. By having a far more powerful ally in Venus, the Dietrich no longer required a shadow ally in the Ra. However, it didn't harm them from keeping a fragile relationship with the Ra.

Originally, Kan was willing to keep the fragile relationship going. But his stance took a U-turn upon learning that they were directly responsible for death of Masu's deceased wife.

To Kan Dietrich, Masu was more than just a servant. He was his spiritual father and mentor. He just meant so much to him. And knowing that it was the Ra clan who was responsible for his wife's death, he decided to distance away from the Nebula pirates and eventually decided to call the meeting and declare them forfeit.

Roon responded while looking shocked, "I hope you are not serious? They are one of few allies we have."

"And what do they do for us nowadays?" Kan argued.

After a brief moment of silence, Roon replied, "I see your point, but they are still our ally. We may still need them in the future."

"I don't think so," Kan shook his head. "Eran, any thoughts?"

Eran Gro didn't usually say anything in these meetings. He simply followed orders when given.

"I don't think it's my place to comment on this. I don't know the full history between the Nebula pirates and your clan. I will simply follow whatever order you give me."

Kan's attention slowly moved toward Roon. "And Roon?"

"It seems your mind has been made up. I won't stand in your way."

"Alright, Eran Go, I order you to hunt down all pirates. Locate their bases of operations and give them hell. Surrender is not accepted. Spare no one."

“Clean up the area completely?” Eran asked and Kan gave him a firm nod.

“Understood.”

When he returned to his fleet in orbit, an officer was waiting for him in a docking bay.

"Captain, Miss. Dietrich is on a channel, waiting for you."

He quickly headed to the bridge of his ship. Roon was already on the screen.

"Hello," Eran Gro quickly walked to the center of the bridge.

"I don't know what's gotten into him in that meeting," Roon said, "I suppose he has his reasons; he wouldn't tell me."

Eran shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine. I simply follow orders."

"Yes, anyway I have a favor to ask. It's related to your mission somewhat."

"What is it?"

"I want you to investigate the reason he chose to do this."

"Couldn't you just ask him?"

"He normally tells me his reasons without me asking. He didn't, so I am not going to bother asking him."

Sighing, Eran Gro reluctantly agreed. "I understand although I cannot guarantee anything."

He wasn't a kind of person who asked too many questions. It was just his personality, and since he asked no questions and barely had any objections, he was very easy to be commanded and he carried out his missions well.

As the channel was closed, other crew gathered around the one who took pictures of Roon Dietrich. Sighing and shaking his head at them, Eran left the bridge. He visited the cafeteria.

"Hello, captain," The only bartender of cafeteria greeted him. "The usual?"

Eran Gro nodded. The bartender soon slid a glass of kiwi cocktail to him.

"What's up with those fanboys?" Eran muttered.

"So, you were there, huh." The bartender laughed. He took out a photo from his chest pocket. It was a picture of Roon Dietrich.

He frowned awkwardly. "You, too?"

"Yeah, why not. The woman looks very innocent. And that makes her very attractive and that voice of hers," The bartender nodded in a rhythm.

He found about this not long after he joined Mars, but this trend had been getting worse and bolder as well. Overall, he did not like it although he had done nothing to prevent it. His brief was that the soldiers needed something to focus on as life in space was dull.

In addition, Mars did not have their own broadcast stations. The Kamtaka castle had one small radio station where news was sent out and that was it. All of Marian media entertainments came imported from Venus and Sol system.

After getting back from the cafeteria, he ordered the fleet to set a course to Martian asteroid fields which was presumably where the pirates were located.

And then one day, his bracelet began to vibrate while he was taking nap in the captain's quarter, his consciousness came back slowly. He opened his sleepy eyes and touched the bracelet. "What is it?"

"We are at a border, and we are spotting pirating activities. We need you here, captain."

"Be there A.S.A.P."

When he reached the bridge, he was presented with a tricky situation. The pirates were attacking a group of trade ships from opposing border. He had no permission to cross the borderline.

"The trade ships are sending S.O.S signal. Shouldn't we do something?"

"No," Eran Gro answered firmly. "We cannot break the treaty. Send them a message to move to our side so that we can assist."

"I've already done that. They said that their engine has been disabled and cannot move at all."

He and his fleet had to just watch them being destroyed. From one of exploding trade ship, an escape pod was ejected, and it moved into Mars territory.

He quickly pointed at the pod on screen. "Get that pod. Do not let the pirates get it."

The pirates, as if they knew their limit, did not cross the border line. They let his fleet rescue the pod.

"Captain, we've secured the pod. The merchant is fine as far as I can tell."

"Get the merchant to a secured room. We are going to talk to him."

When he reached a quarter where the merchant was being held, they found themselves in a rather amusing situation.

"I don't believe this! I've lost everything!" He was casually sitting on a chair surrounded by two crewmen. "You guys didn't do anything! I don't believe this!"

"We saved you. You should be grateful," Eran spoke aloud as he approached.

"Oh, yeah?" He raised his voice. "If you saved me, why didn't you save my ship?"

He scoffed. "Fine, we will put you back in your little pod and leave you here."

The merchant laughed nervously because Eran sounded serious. And he was serious as crewmen grabbed his arms and were ready to take him away to his escape pod.

"Calm down," The merchant resisted crewmen who were trying to take him away. "I will cooperate."

After some moments of questioning, Eran was able to obtain some loose information regarding pirates in the area.

A local pirate group was mentioned by him numerous times.

"Broken flag? That name sounds familiar to me," said Eran.

"Those bastards! I've been hearing that they control this area! I bet it was them also that got my ships!" The merchant exclaimed with anger.

He had indeed heard of that name few times. He never took them seriously as they never harassed Marian merchants.

He looked one of the crewmen and told him, "Get more info on them."

Nodding, the crewman left.

"So-, what do you want now? We can take you to Mars."

"Only to Mars?"

"Only to Mars," Eran confirmed.

His fleet had no authority to go elsewhere, therefore he had no choice in where to take him.

"Grrr...," The merchant groaned. "Fine, fine... Drop me at Mars..."

The merchant never stopped complaining until Eran dropped him off Mars shuttle port. When he was about to go back to his ship, an officer informed him that Roon was looking for him at the castle.

"Argh." Eran scratched his head. He had a feeling that he was being called for paper works.

When he arrived at the castle, his fear became reality. Roon was walking toward him with a data chip.

"Hello, Mr. Gro," She greeted him with her usual charming voice, but it wasn't so charming this time for him. "I would like you to..."

"I know, I know." The chip would contain thousands, if not more, documents which he would need to read through and decide whether to approve for further actions or reject downright. The documents were mostly disputes between miners and such which were taken care of low-end workers usually.

"I will do it in my spare time in space. Are you fine with that?"

Roon gave him a nod. "As long as you finish it within 15 days."

"Alright, fine."

He returned to his fleet in orbit.

"Welcome back, sir," Bridge crews saluted at him.

Eran fell into the captain's chair. He felt like he came home. "Good to be back," He said. "Anything to report?"

"There have been several pirating activities in the vicinity and a report you requested regarding the pirate group is waiting in the captain's quarter."

He sighed deeply. "They never stop. I will check the report when I am able."

"Oh, and there was a strange request."

Apparently, a reporter from ENN has requested to be aboard Eran's command ship. The reporter identified himself Yagi Goodman. Yagi was working on a criminal investigation documentary film. It made sense that he wanted to write a commentary article regarding pirate activities.

"I don't want to bother babysitting a dude," He remarked.

And he denied the request, and within minutes of the denial, Yagi made the same request again.

"I thought I made it clear..."

A crew responded. "He says he is willing to pay."

He scoffed. "Like money is going to make me change my decision. Block his request completely." Having said that, he stood up. "I will be in my quarter."

A datapad was on his desk.

According to the report which came from Mars local database, Broken Flag had a long history of being there. They were one of three pirates gangs that came soon

after Kakari Ra arrived on Mars 862x, meaning they had been there for almost a thousand years. Eran reckoned that their original members would be long dead by now and that perhaps they even lost contacts to Nebula itself.

If Broken Flag became a rogue pirate gang, it would be much easier to take care of them without any political issues. He had to find a way to confirm this.

Meanwhile, he found a need to shave. While at it, he took a quick shower as well. When he was out of his bathroom, he found a beeping notice on his comm.

"Yes?"

"Sir, there is a pirate activity right now. It's not far from here and is located within our designated zone."

"Prepare the fleet. I will be there soon."

"Roger."

He had a fleet of two thousand five hundred vessels. By no means was it a large fleet. In fact, it was a small fleet. In contrast, the Jupiter administrator Emuel had roughly ten thousand vessels under his command.

However, a small fleet had its advantages. The most noticeable one was that Eran did not need any approval from Kan Dietrich to mobilize his fleet; his only restriction was crossing the border. He was able to react fast. And being a small fleet didn't attract too much unwanted attentions.

By time he arrived at the bridge, the fleet was already on its course.

"Sir, I am detecting a shuttle following us."

Another crew responded shortly after. "Its signature reads that it belongs to ENN."

"It's that guy again?" Eran muttered. "Give him a warning."

The fleet was rapidly approaching the pirating scene while giving warnings to the shuttle.

"That's it," Eran growled. "Prepare to fire at the shuttle."

The bridge crews were annoyed as well, but firing at the shuttle wasn't a good idea. Eran knew this as well. "Just use one turret at the lowest power," He added.

The shuttle did not have shields, and after it was struck by a beam of laser, it lost its balance.

"Sir, now he is emitting S.O.S. signal."

It was too late to realize that it was all a part of his plan. Eran fell for it. An ENN reporter shuttle had been hanging around his fleet for few weeks. He had repeatedly given warnings, all of which were ignored flat.

"ETA to the scene?" Eran asked as he stood up from the captain's chair.

"Six minutes, sir."

Eran picked two officers randomly as he headed for the exit. "Follow me, you two. Arm yourselves."

As the ENN shuttle was being towed into docking bay, Eran and his two crewmen arrived. They waited until a figure walked down from the shuttle's entrance.

"You are under arrest," Eran declared. "For disturbing our official duty." And his two crewmen aimed their pistols at the figure.

"Woah, woah, calm down. Let me introduce myself. I am Yagi Goodman, an ENN reporter." The man who claimed to be Yagi had a cheeky appearance. His calm reaction showed that he was prepared for this outcome.

The man looked like a very tired middle aged business man who'd spend his earnings for booze. His slim figure, dark brown skin, unshaved face, and a long brown coat all added up as the perfect image of such a man.

"I could care less who you are, Mister," Eran spoke with a strict voice. "You are under arrest. Seize him."

Yagi did not resist at all and was taken to a cell with ease.

"Don't do anything foolish or else," He warned Yagi as he was taken away.

"Hey, listen, I am not going to do anything rash. You can take my words on that. I just want some materials."

When Eran arrived back at the bridge, main screen was displaying a group of pirates had surrounded a small merchant fleet.

"They aren't reacting to us, I mean the pirates," A crew reported. "As if they don't care about our presence."

"And the merchants?"

"They are sending out SOS. However, they aren't contacting us, either."

The situation was clear. Pirates knew Mars fleet would not harm them, and the merchants knew also knew Mars fleet would not help them.

“Send the pirates a warning,” Eran commanded.

“No response, sir, and they are starting to fire at the merchant ships.”

“Send one more warning. Tell them it’s final warning.”

“Still no response, sir.”

Eran stood up from his captain’s chair. “Eran Gro to all ships, open fire on pirates!”

His fleet was far, far more, superior in fire powers as well as numbers. The pirates were forced to retreat in less than one minute after losing more than half of their fighter crafts.

“Captain, the merchants are contacting us now.”

He was back in his captain’s seat. “Put it through.”

“Audio only, captain.”

“Interesting,” A foreign voice sounded. “Since when Mars turned against local pirates now?”

Eran cleared his throat and said, “I think a ‘thank you’ may be in order.”

“Sure, thanks. I hope Mars can keep the area clean. It’s a well-known fact that Mars and the local pirates are allied.”

“Was. Not anymore.”

“We will see about that.”

There were five asteroid belts within Mars territory. The asteroid belts weren't large in scale but were just big enough for small mining bases to operate on its own and remain self-sufficient.

Presumably, the local pirate bases were located in those asteroid belts.

"Set a course back to Mars orbit. I will write up a report meanwhile," Eran commanded.

He wasn't going to actually write up a report. It was just an excuse, and the crew knew. He had never actually written any reports in his career. Reports were usually made by a random bridge crew. While his fleet was heading back, he took a nap instead.

His comm. bracelet vibration woke him up.

"Yes?"

"We are at the orbit. Miss Dietrich is on channel for you."

"Be there soon."

Roon Dietrich was on main screen when he arrived at the bridge.

"Hello, I was told that you have a report?"

He nodded, saying, "In private."

"I see. I will see you in the captain's quarter."

A new holographic screen was there with Roon on it when he entered the captain's quarter.

“So, what is it that it must be made in private?”

“Do you know anything about three pirate gangs: Broken Flag, Burning arrows, and Behaving jerks?”

Roon crossed her arms and went into thoughts for few seconds before responding. “I’ve heard about them. They were the gangs that came shortly after my grandmother’s arrival.”

“Anything else?”

“We never contacted them. They never contacted us. We never bothered them and they never bothered us.”

A simple but effective relationship, it was.

“If I am to succeed the mission Kan gave me, I must destroy them. I am just unsure if it’s alright for me to destroy them.”

“I suppose you must destroy them. I believe Kan is aware of consequences.”

“I see. I am heading there now. I will keep you informed.”

Nodding, Roon closed the channel.

Upon coming back to the bridge, he inquired, “How is that reporter doing here?”

“Doing nothing but sleeping on his bed according to the camera.”

“Bring up a map of the area. Highlight the asteroid fields.”

“Aye, sir.”

Main screen on bridge was replaced with a map, showing Mars in middle and five asteroid fields around it. He pointed at the biggest field.

“Set a course to the field #1. ETA?”

“10 hours, sir.”

“I will be in my quarter.”

While he was checking through e-mails from his scouts, he received an interesting report from one of his scouts. His report indicated that he found Sslien subordinate whose nickname went by “Ed”. And that “Ed” was willing to set up a formal meeting between Sslien and him if he was willing to meet Ed in person.

He sent a reply to the scout, indicating that he was willing to meet this person, Ed, and ordered the scout to proceed.

And, since he had 10 hours to spare, it was time to look at the data chip Roon handed to him.

His comm. bracelet vibrated, indicating that his fleet arrived at the asteroid field.

As soon as Eran entered the bridge, he saw the view of the field on main screen.

“Anything to report?”

“We are detecting one unusually large asteroid with energy activities. We presume that is their base of operation.”

“Any comm?”

“They haven’t contacted us yet, captain.”

Sitting in his captain’s chair, he ordered his fleet to proceed into the field. The asteroid field was full of dust particles and various sizes of asteroids. Some were as big as small buildings and some were as small as rocks. And there was one large asteroid in middle; it was big enough to house a mining base within.

“Full power to shield, just in case,” He ordered.

As his fleet came close to the big asteroid, he could clearly see that it was indeed a base. There were activities on its surface and they seemed to be completely ignoring Eran’s fleet.

Regardless, he made a contact through a public channel.

“This is Eran Gro of Mars. I’ve been ordered to repel local pirate gangs. Contact me if you wish to negotiate.”

That was as straightforward as a message could ever be. And surely enough, a contact was made from the asteroid.

“On screen.”

A man with a rough face appeared on screen. It was easy to tell that he went through a lot of hellish situations from his scars on face.

“I am Jack Flag of Broken Flag. I am the current leader of this gang. You have a lot of guts to announce that inside of our domain.”

Eran replied right back. “And you have a lot of guts for letting us in and come this close.”

“That’s because I thought we had an agreement. You never bother us. We never bother you.”

“Not anymore.”

“Who the fuck gave you that order?”

“Kan Dietrich himself.”

Jack Flag became silent for a moment. He eventually replied, “So, he did, eh.”

“Looks like you were expecting.”

“Maybe, I knew this wouldn’t last forever, especially since we lost contacts with the Nebula.”

“When did you lose the contacts?”

“Some six hundred years ago, give or take some years.”

.....

“That was a good joke, Mr. Flag. I almost laughed.”

“It’s the truth though. Some years after Lady Kakari Ra returned to the Nebula, we lost all contacts.”

That was because Kakari revolted and shook whole 3Ra Syndicate upside down, but neither Eran Gro nor Jack Flag knew that.

“So, I suppose the two other gangs also lost contacts?”

“That’s right.”

“That makes you how old?”

“I am actually the fourth leader of Broken Flag. I am pretty young, just two hundred seven years old.”

“Very well, Jack Flag. That doesn’t really matter, does it? I’ve been ordered to taken down the gangs and I am here for that.”

Jack Flag became silent again with a grim look on his face.

“Is surrender an option?”

“I am afraid not. Kan Dietrich wanted all of you dead for some reason.”

Jack Flag became silent once again, this time, for a long while.

“You are weird,” Jack Flag said eventually. “Your words are the least threatening, yet the intention of your words is the most threatening I’ve ever felt. I feel like a clown is aiming a gun at my head and giving me jokes while pulling the trigger.”

“I will take that as a compliment.”

Jack scoffed. “Whatever.”

“I shall give you 12 days of grace period. I will come back on 13<sup>th</sup> day and begin to fire on the base. My order is not to leave anyone behind. Therefore, I will make sure everyone here is dead. You have 12 days to get out.”

“I want to talk to you in private.”

“Certainly, redirect this channel to the captain’s quarter.”

“Aye, captain.”

They reinitiated the conversation in the captain’s quarter.

“I see that there is no way to convince you,” Jack said.

“I am carrying out my order. There is nothing more to it.”

“I can see that. But it’s usually possible to barter.”

Eran didn’t respond.

“Listen,” Jack said, “We knew this day would come one day. We knew.”

“How though? What made you certain?”

“It’s because of Lady Kakari Ra’s past deed.”

“Which is?”

“I won’t tell you. Only a member of the Dietrich has a right to hear it.”

Having recalled the little mission Roon Dietrich mentioned, Eran responded. “I will bring Roon Dietrich.”

“That’s fine, but only she can hear it.”

“That’s fine by me.”

He honestly couldn’t care less. It wasn’t his business after all.

“We will not leave here. So, when you come back on 13<sup>th</sup> day, we will still be here. The fact is that we can’t leave here. We are wanted in Sol system and leaving here would result us being hunted down. It’s too far to even attempt to make our journey to the nebula. It’s simply too far.”

“I see.”

“All I ask is a safe passage for my daughter who turns 21 next season.”

“I am afraid I cannot do that. Not a single soul is to be alive.”

“You can have her if you want.”

“I am not interested in that kind of arrangement.”

“She’s quite a beauty. I know it’s hard to believe because of how ugly I am, but she really is.”

“Again, I am not swayed by such offers.”

Jack went into thoughts. But he had nothing to offer in exchange of his daughter’s safety.

“Please, I beg of you. I will do anything for safety of my daughter. Anything!”

Eran gave it some thoughts and soon replied, “You will turn off your base’s shield and defense turrets on 13<sup>th</sup> day. We will attack the base while I and marines will enter your base. If you can do that, I will make sure to take your daughter and will make sure that your daughter will reach Freedom colony safely. No harm will be done to your daughter and she will be treated fairly.”

That proposal was basically asking Jack Flag to give up on everything. Still Jack replied almost instantly, “I will do that. But I want your words that she will be safely out of Sol system.”

“As a Gro, I swear that you have my words. Your daughter will not be harmed and will be safely escorted out of Sol system. I will personally make sure of that.”

When Eran returned to the bridge, he ordered his fleet to withdraw to honor the grace period and ordered his fleet to set a course to Mars orbit.

He explained the current situation to Roon.

“I will tag along with you of course,” She replied promptly.

“They seem to be good people. Pirates, they may be, but they clearly knew what they were doing and knew consequences. It would be a waste to just kill them.”

“What are you proposing?”

“We should absorb them. We could use men like them.”

“I will bring your proposal to Kan, but I don’t think he will change his mind. I really need to know my grandmother’s past deed he mentioned.”

“I see. I will wait for your shuttle.”

As Roon expected, Kan Dietrich refused Eran Gro's proposal. His order was clear: kill them all.

Roon's shuttle arrived at Eran's commandship soon after. Her presence on his ship became big news among crew members. It would be their first time to see "Miss Mars" in person.

"Sir?"

Eran was nodding off in his captain's chair.

"Sir!"

That woke him up. "What?"

"Miss. Dietrich's shuttle has just docked. And..."

"And?"

"Well, um, we have some request from crews of other ships to dock."

"Why would they want to come here? And how many is 'some'?"

Eran was told that "some" was in hundreds.

"Deny the request, all of them."

He knew what they wanted to come aboard for. It wasn't even a rocket science to figure that out. He even knew that bridge crews had digital cameras on them right now, just waiting for Roon to enter.

Normally, a guest would be given a guest's quarter, but since Roon was a special guest, she was given the captain's quarter which was only accessible through the bridge. A bed was temporarily placed in the captain's quarter.

Roon eventually entered the bridge and Eran escorted her to the captain's quarter during which bridge crews took a lot of pictures.

"Well, that was an interesting experience," Roon remarked.

Ignoring her comment, Eran said, "You will stay here until the end of the journey. I placed a bed here. Bathroom is that way, and you can either opt to take food delivered here or you can hit the cafeteria."

"Thank you."

Just as Eran turned to exit the quarter, Roon inquired.

"Mr. Gro, are you shielding your mind?"

Narrowing his eyes, he replied, "I beg your pardon?"

"I can usually read flows of thoughts coming off people. I sense no such thing from you."

"Well, probably because I wasn't having any thoughts." Having said that, he left at once, ending the conversation awkwardly.

When the fleet arrived at the asteroid belt, there were fleets of fighter crafts in orbit of Broken Flag base. They had been obviously preparing for a battle.

Roon was in Eran's captain's chair and he was standing next to her.

"Eran Gro to all ships, prepare for a battle. You are to accept no surrender."

"Sir, a contact from their base. It's from Jack Flag".

"Lady Dietrich, it's probably for you. Please enter the captain's quarter as only you are entitled to hear."

Nodding, Roon quickly walked into the captain's quarter.

"Eran Gro to all ships, our battle plan is simple. We will exterminate the fighter crafts first. And then we will focus fire on the base and disable it. Once that is done, we will send out marines to make sure no one survives."

A captain in his fleet questioned, "Shouldn't we just destroy the base? That would ensure that no one survives."

“I actually want the base intact. It could be proven useful in the future.”

“Of course, sir. Understood.”

“I repeat: we are to accept no surrender. We are to kill everyone, including women and children if there are any. If you can’t bring yourself to kill women and children, just call me. I will personally kill them all.”

“It won’t be a problem, sir. The Bau has done worse,” A fellow captain responded.

By time Roon came back to the bridge, the battle was underway.

Inhaling deeply, she sat back down in the captain’s chair. “I understand now.”

“Do you?”

“Yes, I understand why Kan wants to kill everyone here. I understand perfectly.”

For Kan, Masu was his father. Knowing that Kakari Ra was the one directly responsible for death of Masu’s wife meant that ... he was actually justified to kill every single soul related to Kakari.

“Do they deserve this sort of end?”

“Eh?” Roon was confused.

Eran was looking forward only, looking at main screen where it was a clearly one-sided battle. Fighters didn’t stand a chance against battle-ready cruisers.

“Do they deserve this?” Eran wasn’t expecting an answer. He was simply talking to himself. “Pirates or not, hatred or not, they don’t.”

Roon realized Eran wasn’t very pleased with this outcome. Neither did she, but having known Kakari’s Ra’s deed, it made her understand better and that Kan had every right to be furious.

“They knew this day would come,” Roon said. She was sure of it which was why they told her what they knew.

Twenty five hundred fighters were all shot down in two hours, and the base was exposed.

“Sir, the base has just lowered its shield and I am not detecting any energy flows from their turrets.”

“So it seems,” Eran replied indifferently.

“What are your orders, sir?”

Roon slowly closed her eyes. “You knew this,” She said.

“So it seems.”

Eran ordered to send out marines. He also led his own marine force into the base.

“Make a group of three,” He quickly gave out orders as soon as their pods entered a docking bay. “Move out. Spare no one.”

While other boarding pods were also entering the docking bay, Eran proceeded into the base alone, killing anyone who was in his way. He knew where to go. His destination was to reach the base main bridge before anyone else did.

He did in fact arrived at main bridge of the base before any marines did. There were only two people, Jack Flag and a woman who was presumably his daughter.

The woman stepped forward.

“My name is Grace F!” She proclaimed. “Accept my request for a duel!”

Further behind him, there were loud noises of rifle firing and screams. Marines were shooting down remaining resistances. The order was not to leave anyone

alive. Therefore, they did not accept surrenders although no one attempted to surrender.

“Grace!” Jack Flag tried to stop her. “Don’t!”

“Why not, dad?! I’d rather do something than waiting to die!”

Obviously she was not yet told the secret deal between Eran Gro and Jack Flag to get her out.

“I accept your request,” Eran said indifferently. “You decide the rule.”

“Death marks the end of the duel!” Grace exclaimed.

He accepted, saying stoically, “So be it.” And he looked at Jack who avoided his eye contact.

Grace dueled every man from Broken Flag, Burning Arrows, and Behaving jerks. Not once had she lost. Rightfully so, she was confident.

But her confident took a sharp U-turn when the duel started. Quickly enough, she started to sweat.

Eran Gro was standing there with his blade out and activated. He was in a casual stance and looked rather careless on surface. However, Grace could not find a weak spot in his stance. Furthermore, she could not read his mind.

Unable to do anything, all she could do was maintaining her defensive stance and sweat. It was her first time feeling awkward toward her opponent.

“If you don’t come, I will come to you,” Eran said casually.

To which Grace replied fiercely, “S, shut up!” In desperation, she made an attempt to slash him after dashing toward him. He evaded with ease and punched her in face and she was literally blown away only stopped by crashing into a metal wall. Her nose was broken along with cheek bones.

“What the...” She coughed blood. “I couldn’t even see...”

Sighing, Jack Flag ran to her and had to pull her out of the heavily deformed wall. "Girl, you played in a small pond. This is the world."

"Dad..., I couldn't even see his punch..."

Jack couldn't see, either. All he saw was Grace dashing toward him and then was blown away by something. And the next thing he knew was Grace being literally embedded in a wall. Jack pulled out med pads from his cargo pants and placed them on her bleeding lips, cheeks and nose.

"I will... try one more time..." Grace said with labored breath. Jack didn't stop him.

Without thinking further, she howled as she dashed toward Eran again. Their blades clashed and she felt sharp pain in her wrist. Her wrist immediately broke as soon as their blades clashed. Doubts filled her eyes. She was utterly no match for him at all.

Even Jack had a hard time believing what was happening also. Grace was a class A hyper human. At first, he thought Eran had more experience and skills, but now it appeared he was on a totally different level. The fight looked like a clueless kid trying to fight an experienced adult.

"You are a class S, aren't you, Eran Gro," Jack spoke in awe. He had never seen a real class S in action. He had heard of faraway tales which seemed surreal.

Dropping her blade, Grace screamed out of excruciating pain. "My wrist.... Ugh! My wrist..." Kneeling down, she started to cry due to pain.

Eran didn't deny to Jack's inquiry. "Yes, I am."

Jack placed another med pad on her broken wrist to stop bleeding. "Eran Gro, take her."

"What?! What are you saying, dad?!"

"Girl, you've always told others that, if any man could defeat you, you'd be his bitch. Now, he defeated you fair and square. You are his bitch now. Go."

“That was a JOKE!” She cried out of both anger and pain.

“It didn’t sound like a joke to me. And I don’t think those men you defeated thought it was a joke, either. Why did you think they came to you to duel one after another?”

“T, this is different! He is our enemy!”

Jack turned his attention toward Eran Gro.

“We had a deal, Eran Gro. It didn’t quite turn out the way I wanted, but regardless a deal is a deal.”

“So it seems.”

“What is this deal you are talking about, dad?!”

Jack told her the deal which was getting her out safely. Eran would protect her identity while she would escape elsewhere.

“That was the original deal, but as you can see, the deal changed somewhat. You won’t escape now. You will live with him.”

“Ridiculous! I’d rather die here than go with him!”

Jack grabbed her by collar. “Snap out of it! His order is to kill everyone here! In exchange of turning off defense, I was able to secure your safety.”

His eyes started to fill with tear. “I made this one chance in exchange of every one’s life. Don’t let this go wasted, girl.”

Grace was already crying. Her eyes were full of tears and tears were flowing down through her cheeks. “Dad, I don’t wanna go. Allow me to die with you and everyone else. They are like my family. Why was only I allowed to live?”

“I can kill you here if you like, Miss Flag.”

“Don’t you dare!” Jack shouted. “I kept my end of bargain. You keep yours!”

Eran withdrew his blade. “Agreed.”

“Go now, girl. Eran Gro, take her. Take her now. I am initiating self-destruction sequence.”

“I see.” He approached her and offered his hand which Grace refused.

“I will walk.” She seemed to claim down and perhaps accepted the situation.

“Unfortunately, I cannot let any marines see you. Therefore, I must carry you.” Before waiting her to reply, he grabbed her by waist and dashed out of the bridge. He dashed so fast that he simply vanished into thin air.

Jack laughed pleasantly as he initiated a self-destruct sequence. “Of all years I tried to find the best man for her and I found one right at the end of my life. I have no further regrets.”

“SELF DESTRUCTION SEQUENCE INITIATED. OVERLOADING THE REACTORS. COUNTING DOWN 90, 89, 88...”

“I will gladly die...” He continued his pleasant laughing.

When Eran arrived at the docking bay, he dashed toward a boarding pod without anyone spotting him. He pulled out an extra uniform from the pod and asked Grace to wear it.

Grace showed no further resistances and was complying.

“COUNTING DOWN 86, 85, 84...”

Marines were rushing back to the docking bay.

“Have a seat. Do not speak to anyone,” He whispered to Grace.

“Sir!” Marines saluted at Eran Gro when they entered the pod.

“Have your seats. Time is of essence. I will be controlling the pod.”

Everyone was busy getting in, so Grace wasn't noticed.

“Follow me. Again, do not speak.” He told her when the pod docked and other marines took off.

Grace quietly followed him through the bridge and into the captain’s quarter. After that, he called Roon into the room and briefly explained the situation.

“I see. You had a secret deal.”

“If he resisted, we would have seen heavier casualties. I wanted to avoid that.”

“I am not judging you. I trust that you did so in the best interest of Mars.”

Grace was in a corner of the quarter. She was crouching and was glaring at Eran.

“What’s her name?” Roon inquired her gently.

“Grace Flag,” Eran replied.

“I suppose ‘Flag’ is an illegal last name?”

“Most likely.”

“Just call me Grace F. I never liked ‘Flag’.” Unexpectedly, she spoke out.

“How are your wounds?” Eran asked.

“I won’t die from it.”

Eran Gro asked Roon to teleport Grace out of the ship once they arrived at Mars. She agreed.

News of annihilation of Broken Flag spread quickly. Kan Dietrich was extremely pleased with the outcome.

Kan Dietrich was on screen.

“Congratulations, you’ve done your job to complete satisfaction.”

“I’ve simply carried out your order.”

“True, but not many would have complied and follow every detail.”

‘Every detail’ meant sparing no one.

“Thank you, but there are still Burning arrows and Behaving Jerks.”

“Broken Flag was the biggest of the three. The rest should be easy now.”

“True enough.”

“I am granting you one additional thousand vessels under your command. It will make your job easier.”

“Thank you, sir. I have a little request if you don’t mind.”

“You can ask me for anything right now. I am in very good mood.”

“I’ve found a talent. And I would like employ her as my first officer.”

“Is that so? Mars always need more officers. I don’t see why not. What’s the name?”

“Her name is Grace F.”

“I see no problem with that. She belongs to a clan?” Kan didn’t ask what ‘F’ stood for and he couldn’t care less. Eran would have lied even if he did ask.

“No, sir. It’s just an illegal last name she picked up.”

“Request granted. You are a fleet commander now, so you should need some officers to offload your workload. I fully understand that.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Eran Gro came down to Mars to meet up with Roon at Sand Giant bar. Grace was dressed in an official Marian space uniform at the bar.

“There she is,” Giggling, Roon introduced the new Grace to Eran. Her wounds healed completely over few days. Due to being class A hyper human, her healing speed was fast.

Grace F had a petite figure with height of about 5ft 5in. Her hair was light brown and hair style was short. She was clearly shorter than Roon Dietrich who was 6ft tall. Roon was even taller than Eran Gro whose height was 5ft 8in.

“You are officially employed now, Grace F,” He told her. “Despite of what happened to your family, I hope you will be able to get it behind you and move on.”

Grace sighed. “I don’t hate you for what you did. It just happened so fast and so awkwardly that I had no time to gather myself.”

“Understandable.”

“I did mean when I said I wanted to die with them.”

“Also understandable.”

“I am leaving now,” Roon said while walking out of the bar.

Eran approached the counter. “Master, drinks on me.” And sat on a stool. Grace followed and sat on a stool as well.

“So, was it true that you defeated all men from the gangs?”

“Yes, it was true. I dueled even father and won.”

“Was it also true that you’d marry the man who defeated you?”

“It was kind of a joke. That was the only way to keep duels flowing in. You see, father was looking to get me married to a suitable man, and he wanted a powerful man.”

“And your mother?”

Grace laughed casually. “You wouldn’t believe who my mother was.”

“Was?”

“She’s not dead probably. I just don’t know who she is and where she is.”

A bartender slid drinks to Eran and Grace.

“Meaning?”

“My dad raped some random woman during a raid. She got pregnant and here I am. He let her go as soon as I was delivered.”

“I am more amazed that he told you the truth.”

She chuckled. “We may have been just pirates but we stood by our codes. I am proud of them.”

“So it seems...”

“I don’t hate you,” She assured. “You stood by your own code. You kept your words. And you know, like dad said, you beat the crap out of me.”

She added, “Literally speaking.”

Eran grinned, “So it seems.”

“So, I am all yours.”

“So it seems...”

When Eran came back to his ship, Grace F followed. She was announced to be the first officer of the ship. It turned out that she had proper training as a ship crew and knew quite well how to get things done. She claimed that, as a pirate, she had to know “many things in many areas”.

As a first officer, Grace took comm. station on bridge.

“Grace, you would know which belts Burning arrows and Behaving Jerks base are in?”

“Certainly. Which one are you going after first?”

“Well, Behaving jerks is certainly a catchy title. Let us see if they are really behaving jerks.”

“Understood. Their base is in belt #3.”

“Set a course to asteroid belt 3.”

“Aye, aye, captain.”

The crews didn't know where Grace was from and didn't ask. As former miners, they all had their own shares of past that they didn't want to share. Some suspected Grace might be a pirate because it wasn't hard to figure out what “F” stood for, but they never pushed the issue.

“Approaching the belt 3. Also detecting pirate fighters approaching,” A crew reported.

“Eran Gro to all ships, prepare for a battle.”

The battle ended in forty minutes. Slightly over two thousand pirate fighters were destroyed. Eran's fleet suffered no casualties.

“Still detecting some pirate fighters around what appears to be their base.”

“Grace, contact them.”

“No answer,” She replied.

“Use your name. Contact them.”

“Are you... sure?”

“Come on. These crews aren’t fools. I bet some of you have suspected that ‘F’ of Grace F stood for ‘Flag’.”

“True, sir,” A crew responded.

“We don’t mind though,” Another responded.

“So, go ahead. They won’t mind and they won’t report you. Even if they do, nothing will happen.”

“How can you be so sure? If Kan Dietrich finds out who I am...”

Eran laughed and so did the crews.

“All reports go through Roon Dietrich first and you think she’d let such a report reach Kan Dietrich?”

Grace was actually convinced by what he said.

“This is Grace Flag of former Broken Flag. On behalf of now deceased Jack Flag, I demand The Jerk to come online to this channel.”

“The Jerk?”

“The is his name, Jerk being his last name.”

He shrugged. “Charming.”

A stocky man appeared on main screen. “You think I’d fall for that? Broken flag was annihil- ” Then he recognized Grace. “I will be damned. It’s actually Grace over there.”

“Greetings, you are the leader of Behaving Jerks, correct?” Eran spoke.

“What the fuck is Grace doing over there?!”

“He defeated me,” Grace answered.

“I am double-damned. Those nice small tits of yours can never be mine now.”

“I hope you do realize what situation you are in,” Eran said gravely.

The Jerk shrugged. "Sure, sure, you want to kill us all. I am triple-damned. What a damning day it is."

Eran declared, "And I don't take surrenders."

"So I've heard."

"I am here to inform you that I am giving you 12 days of grace period. I will be back on 13<sup>th</sup> day. Whoever remains there at that time will perish."

"You've already killed over half of my men. Why wait 12 days?"

"It's my policy."

"Don't bother. I am initiating self-destruction sequence."

A crew reported immediately after. "Sir, the pirate fighters are docking with their base."

Eran's face twitched slightly. They were good men. They did not deserve to die like this.

The Jerk giggled pleasantly. "Hey, Grace. I am glad you got out. Your father was looking for a man to hand you over and I guess he finally found one in the end, eh?"

Grace closed her eyes because tears were gathering in her eyes. The Jerk continued regardless. "Grace, your mom was fucking hot. Jack was right that he raped her. Someone else would have raped her anyway. She was that hot."

A computerized voice was heard over the channel.

*'Self-Destruction sequence initiated. Overloading the reactors. Counting down 90, 89...'*

Several other figures showed up on main screen. "No, shit! It's Grace! She's still alive!"

"I thought everyone was killed?"

“No way! Let me see!”

They didn't seem to be afraid of their impending doom. And Grace couldn't resist sobbing and started to cry. Even with her eyes shut, there were tears flowing out of her eye lids and were floating around in zero gravity.

“Grace! Hey! Don't cry!” A random figure in back of main screen shouted.

“Remember us!”

“Yeah, we are the Behaving Jerks! We always behave!”

“It would have been really nice if I fucked you once though.”

“Hey, Gracie!”

The Jerk laughed among the crowd on screen. The bridge crews were speechless. Even Eran was speechless.

One new face after another, the pirates said something which Grace could no longer hear well because they became too loud.

*'10, 9, 8 ...'*

At the timer went down to a single digit, everyone backed off and only The Jerk remained on screen.

*'7, 6, 5...'*

“Grace, remember us. Then we shall live on,” The Jerk said with a big smile on his face.

*'4, 3, 2...'*

**“GRACE! REMEMBER US!!!”** The jerk shouted as the countdown was at 1.

Grace's eyes remained closed although tears were dropping like a small waterfall from her eye lids. She wasn't crying loudly, but her tears fell through her cheeks continuously. "Channel... dead, sir....," Grace could barely make out words. "May ... I ... take a break..."

"Request denied," Eran said as he stood up. He walked toward Grace who was shaking her body uncontrollably.

"I am sorry," He said and that was the trigger. She burst out in tears and collapsed. She cried so hard and loud. At one point, she just passed out. After sending her to a sick bay, he came back to the bridge which was dead silent.

"Delete the records," Eran said. He meant deleting the channel log.

"But, sir, we need the log for the report."

"I don't care. Delete it. I am not risking Grace's life over this. She will NOT be found. This is the least I can do for the gentlemen who just sacrificed themselves. Their sacrifices will not be in vain."

The crews while didn't speak out agreed with his view.

"For the report, simply state that they had some EMP bombs aboard when self-destructed. I will handle the rest."

"...Yes, sir."

The report was sent to Roon who requested a call back when the fleet arrived back at Mars orbit.

"Yes, I am here."

Roon was reading over the report on main screen. "Some important details are missing," She said.

"Read the flows of my crews' mind. That will explain it."

“... I just did. And I am so sorry.”

Eran Gro raised his voice. “They were decent men. Pirates they may have been, but they were decent men.” Veins started to pop on his forehead. “No coward ends their lives like that. No coward does that. It takes more than just guts to die like that and cowards don’t have guts!” He was breathing heavily and he was clearly agitated.

“... I am sorry,” was all Roon could respond.

“Burning arrows will take a similar end like them probably. I do NOT like this, Miss. Dietrich.”

“... How is Grace?”

“Don’t know. Don’t care.”

“... I see.”

Grace eventually returned to the bridge a day later. She looked fine on surface.

She said indifferently, “Burning arrows is based in the belt 4.”

“Set a course to the asteroid belt 4,” Eran said, again indifferently.

“Aye, sir,” Even the crew responded indifferently. But the air on the bridge was heavy.

When his fleet arrived at the asteroid belt, there was no pirate fighter on radar.

“Please tell me that the base is empty,” Eran said.

“No, sir. I am detecting at least three thousand men from their base.”

“God damn it.”

“Grace, any way to save them?”

“No, sir.”

“No other ways, really?”

“Even if surrenders are accepted now, they will not surrender now. With two third of our families dead, they will not surrender.”

A short moment of silence dominated the bridge which was broken by Eran.

“Grace, open comm. You know what to do.”

It took Grace some moments to speak. She tried to speak earlier but she couldn't just get her words out for a moment.

“T, this is ... Grace F of Broken Flag. On behalf of... my dad Jack Flag and Uncle The Jerk, I request... to speak with Dark Arrow.”

A skinny man with a firm look appeared on main screen.

“Grace, when The Jerk sent me a message that you were alive, I was highly skeptical. It's good to see you alive,” Dark Arrow said.

“And it will be good to see you alive as well,” Eran said. “Surrender.”

Surrender wasn't allowed, but Eran was breaking the mission rules.

*Masu once told him, “As a captain, what you must comply is orders from higher ranking officers. 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 all the time, I am rather asking you to be flexible.”*

“I am afraid I cannot do that. We will not surrender.”

“Then get the fuck the hell out of here. You call yourself an arrow. Then run like an arrow.”

“No place to go. We’d rather choose our own end than be hunted down in Sol system.”

And again a computerized voice was overheard from the channel.

*‘Self-Destruction sequence initiated. Overloading the reactors. Counting down 90, 89, 88...’*

“Are there women and children over there?”

“Yes, there are.”

“Then at least send them over.”

“No, they shall all go down with the rest of us.”

Eran inhaled and shouted, **“Grace!”**

Startled by the sudden shout, but knowing his meaning of the shout, Grace spoke, “Uncle Dark Arrow, please listen to him. He means us no harm. At least send women and children over.”

“We do know he means us no harm. No coward with intent to kill us comes here and gives us something like a grace period.”

“Fine. Fine!” Eran stood up. “I will kill all of you by myself!”

Everyone was like, “what?”

He dashed out of the bridge and got into a fighter and literally crashed into a docking bay of self-destruct initiated station.

*“Counting down 61, 60...”*

“Captain! What do you think you are doing?! Are you gonna kill yourself?!” A crew desperately contacted him over a comm. bracelet.

“60 seconds is enough!”

And indeed it was. Eran Gro went straight to the main bridge murdered those there in 30 seconds and came back to the bridge with 5 seconds left.

The crews were able to see how he murdered those on main bridge which was where Dark Arrow was. He was so fast that people just fell with their throats cut. Dark Arrow showed some resistances but he went down in a second. Dark Arrow did seem like speaking some words to Eran on screen.

He murdered them to save Grace from total break-down. He did not want them to repeat what happened at Behaving Jerks base. Once was enough, he felt. Twice would break her down mentally, he felt.

When he came back to the bridge, the place was instantly filled with scent of blood.

When he sat back down in his captain's chair and blood dripped from his coat, main screen displayed an explosion of the base.

"Dark Arrow's last words, Grace."

Startled, she replied, "Y, yes?"

"Remember us."

"I see..." Slowly closing her eyes, she spoke, "I see... Thank you for putting them down."

The mission was "very successful" according to Kan Dietrich. Eran could care less though.

Meanwhile, Yagi was sneaking out of his quarter. He had hacked into a comm. channel and had been recording what happened.

"This is big, so big that I will so get promoted!" He joyfully whispered as he made his way into a docking bay.

“Not gonna happen.”

Startled by a sudden voice, Yagi looked back where he heard the voice. “Wha- ”

And that was his last word as his head fell to the ground.

“I did warn you.”

It was Eran Gro.

Some time passed after the mission was over. Everything was back to how it was for Eran Gro and his fleet.

He was having drinks at Sand Giant bar after completing a patrol duty. Grace was with him, having drinks also.

A stranger entered the bar and walked straight toward them.

“Are you Eran Gro?”

Without looking back, he answered, “Yes, I am.”

“My name is Ed.”

“I see.”

He slowly turned his stool around to face him. Grace also turned her stool to face him.

“What do you want now?” Eran asked which confused Ed slightly.

“I thought it was you who wanted something.”

“Not anymore. To hell with it. Not anymore.”

Feeling offended, Ed replied. “So be it then.”

“Yeah, so be it.” He turned back to counter and resumed drinking and so did Grace.

When Eran Gro and Grace left the bar an hour later, Ed was standing there with a woman.

Grace attempted to draw out her blade but was stopped by Eran.

“I think I know who she is. Sslien, I take?”

“That’s right.”

Sslien wasn't exactly how he imagined her to be. She was very tall and attractive. He was told that she was the leader of the Gypsies guild. Therefore, he figured that she'd look like a beggar or a similar sort. However, she was wearing what appeared to be brand clothes. To be exact, dark brown wool miniskirt and bright green short jacket. She was a woman, a fine woman at that.

He took out the small black fragment received by Masu and threw it over to Sslien who caught it with ease. “I don’t need it anymore. Take it.”

Catching it, she was instantly drawn into it. “A very dangerous object you got there. Did Masu give this to you?”

“That’s right.”

“Something happened to you. I can feel it. Something disturbed you greatly.”

And there was more. She was sensing thousands of consciousnesses from the fragment.

“Masu gave it to me to craft a blade with it. Alas, I don’t care about it anymore.”

Sensing something was amiss, she inquired Ed.

“Ed, what happened here recently?”

He explained to her regarding the pirate massacre.

“Dear God, were you behind the extermination?”

“They weren’t exterminated!” Grace exclaimed. “They chose to die!”

Ssilen crossed her arms. “Seems like they were exterminated to me.”

“How dare you!” Drawing out her blade, Grace slashed Sslien but she evaded the attack easily.

“And your name is?”

“Grace F!”

Ssl’s eye brows twitched. “The daughter of Jack Flag?”

Grace ceased attacking at once. “Did you know my father?”

“I met him, twice.”

Local law enforcement officers arrived because a fighting was reported. But they were quickly dismissed by Eran.

They went back into Sand giant bar. Grace told her and Ed the story in full detail.

“I see. My apologies. They weren’t exterminated. They died like how men should have died.”

“It’s alright. It’s just that I’ve been on edge of my mood lately,” Grace said.

“Rightfully so. And even he over there seems to be on edge.” Sslien casually pointed at Eran who was drinking a distance away from them.

Grace made no comment on that.

Sslien placed the black fragment on counter.

“What is that thing?” Grace asked. “The commander gave it to you, didn’t he?”

“It’s a small crystallization of hellfire.”

“Hellfire?”

“The best skill an ESP specialized in fire could use. There are only two people who could cast hellfire. One of them is me and I haven’t cast hellfire in ages, so that would make that the other person had cast it.”

The other person was Cecil Klisis.

“Hellfire absorbs life and its memories as it erases them. Coincidence or not, this fragment absorbed thoughts of all pirates perished during the event. And the thoughts are led by three more potent spirits.”

Grace narrowed her eyes. “Do you mean to say that...”

Giving her a firm nod, Sslien answered. “Jack Flag’s thoughts are there along with The Jerk and Dark Arrow.”

“Can... Can I talk to dad?”

Ed joined the conversation. “Unfortunately, it does not work quite like that, young lady. The captured thoughts are like a snap shot of their minds. They have no ability to communicate. They simply repeat whatever they had in their minds at their last moment.”

Clearly disappointed, Grace looked down. “Can you tell me what they say at least?”

“Remember us.” It was Eran who answered her. “They kept saying ‘Remember us’.”

Sslien and Ed were pleasantly shocked. Only high class ESPs could barely listen to it. Yet, Eran Gro was able to listen to it, quite vividly it seemed.

The four eventually left Sand Giant bar.

“Is it alright for me to take this?” Sslien asked Eran for assurance.

“Like I said, I don’t want it anymore.”

“So, you won’t mind whatever I am going to do with this?”

“Be my guest. Grace, let’s go.”

Watching the two disappear into a dust storm, Ed remarked, “They are going to be quite an interesting pair, lady.”

Sslien chuckled in response and said, “Fate really works in mysterious ways.”

Roughly a year later, Ed found Eran Gro and Grace F in Sand Giant bar again.

“You again?” Eran said, not surprised though.

“Glad to see me?”

“Nope.”

Smiling, Ed turned his attention onto Grace.

“How have you been doing, lass?”

“Not bad, I guess, sir. How is Sslien doing?”

“No idea. I hadn’t met her for some time. When I did meet her recently, she handed something over to me and asked me to pass it to your man.”

Ed was wearing a ragged robe and he pulled something out of his dirty sleeve. It was a deactivated energy blade. It had a distinctive appearance. It was pitch black. It could have been mistaken as a blade covered in soot or something similar.

“A black blade?” Grace commented.

“Sslien named it ‘The Hellfire blade’.”

“And it says ‘Remember us’,” Eran said with a long sign. “I guess I know where the fragment went.”

Ed made a short pause before speaking to Eran. “Lad, even as an old class A ESP, I am not powerful enough to be able to listen to what the fragment says all the time. Yet, you, a hyper-human, can hear it. That can mean only one thing.”

Not amused, Eran replied, “Which is?”

“It has accepted you. Thus, you are the rightful owner of this blade.”

Ed carefully handed it toward Eran. “Hold it.”

Without thinking much, he held it and the moment he held it, he felt cold sharp sensations through his arm to his spine.

“No switch?”

“It’s no ordinary blade. It obeys your will. It will activate if you want it to be.”

It was an alien concept, but it seemed Eran understood it quite easily as the blade activated. Pitch black blade would vibrate for a second and it would start to glow in pure black.

And the next thing he knew, his consciousness was sucked into oblivion.

Eran Gro was in a place completely void of any light. There was nothing else. Everything else was just pitch black.

Suddenly, a ghostly image of Jack Flag appeared. He was facing Eran Gro but seemed to be unaware of his presence.

He laughed and spoke, "Of all years I tried to find the best man for her..., I finally find one in the end. I have no regrets..."

His image slowly faded and The Jerk replaced Jack Flag's ghostly image.

"We may perish now. We may be gone. But Grace will live on. Remember us, Grace," He said.

The Jerk's image slowly faded and Dark Arrow appeared who looked like posed for a fight. It was in fact the last moment just before he was killed by Eran Gro.

"You will look after our Gracie!"

After Dark Arrow's image faded, a figure appeared. The figure was wearing a white robe. The robe was so white that it looked like it was radiating some sort of light.

"Welcome to the seventh sense."

"Oh, great. I've gone insane."

"You went insane a long time ago, did you not?"

"You think? Who are you anyway?"

"Cecilia."

"Alright, Miss, what do you want from me?"

"Actually you came here on your own accord. You do not need anything however. You have achieved the perfect mind. As a hyper human, you do not need anything else."

There was a silence between them.

“Be gone, the Black Knight.”

And he was back to Sand Giant bar. It felt like a long time had passed, but it seemed it was only his mind because he just saw the blade being activated.

“A black blade... I guess it suits me,” Eran remarked.

Smiling, Ed bid farewell to him. “Farewell, Black Knight.”

# Fin