

[Juron arc] [3] [The Grand Agenda] [9614]

Rev 1.1

Prerequisite stories

[Milky way arc] [4] [An end to many] [9613]

[The white knight arc] [1] [Juun] [9483]

[The white knight arc] [2] [Odd couple] [9598]

Stories in parallel

[Kain and Suu arc] [4] [Rise] [9614]

[Shell of Pluto] [1] [Shell] [9614]

“United Sol is weak! Now is the moment to strike!”

Juron was addressing the council. After Lord Arnkle’s unfortunate demise, he emerged quickly as a prominent member of the council. Being a class S ESP had certainly a part. But it seemed he was especially gifted at politics and was exceptionally keen on pushing his agenda.

Sevn was present in the council as a guest member. While he obviously did not like to see Juron even addressing the council, he had to agree on one thing; it was that United Sol did indeed seem weak. He did not agree with declaring a war on them however. He’d never agree with a war on anything truthfully.

“So, how did the council session go?”

Wemer inquired Sevn who returned from the council session. Sevn's face looked troubled which wasn't a good sign to begin with. They were in Wemer's office at the Knights HQ.

"He has a case," Sevn stated.

Juron came up with a grand plan to tackle United Sol. He stressed that United Sol could not be broken down in one conflict and proposed three wars to take them down in a span of a hundred years.

"He claims the first war must be started now," Sevn added.

"I suppose there was no mention or whatsoever about Milky way incident?"

The death of six hundred million civilians from Smuggler's den became officially known as Milky way incident.

Sevn confirmed by giving him a nod, quickly adding, "No one seemed to want to talk about it for sure. As a guest, I had no right for a speech."

"I wouldn't want you to get into a trouble. Being able to attend the council is a big enough asset," Wemer said. He then quietly crossed his fingers on his desk with a troubled face. He carefully asked Sevn, "So, did the council approve his grand plan?"

"Sort of."

"Sort of? What do you mean?"

Sevn explained, "Juron wanted cooperation of the three generals."

At this point, Wemer sneered. "By cooperation, you mean he wants the generals to obey him."

Sevn answered with a shrug, "More or less, I suppose so." Adding, "He requested a fleet of 15.000 cruisers for the first strike and declared that he would not go past Uranus outpost. He also vowed not to lose more than 10% of the fleet."

Juron already had well over four thousand cruisers which were originally under Lord Ankle's control. He was unable to obtain all of his fleet due to his family inheriting some of the fleet.

“It’s ridiculous to think that he even got that fleet,” Wemer said aggressively. “And it’s even more ridiculous to think that he is getting away with what he has done.”

“I think the reason he is pushing this war is to make people forget or even care less about his crimes. He wants to keep them occupied, I believe,” Sevn stated.

He explained that the council did reluctantly agree with his war plan but with a catch.

“The council did not grant his request in full. Only 12.000 cruisers were granted, 4000 of which will be his own. The council also did not grant cooperation of the three generals. Only General Wong will be working with him.”

Sighing deeply, Wemer replied, “So, it’s a war then.”

“Pretty much,” Sevn replied.

Juron’s fleet quickly joined up with General Wong’s fleet at the asteroid sea. General Wong had six thousand ships. Additional ships were provided by Andromeda royal navy to reach 12.000 mark.

Juron and Wong were on a private channel in their private quarters.

“I can’t believe I am talking to you right here right now as comrades,” Wong said. “You should be imprisoned, Juron.”

Juron shrugged but with a smile. “I’ve done nothing wrong. Lord Arnkle was a madman. He needed to be put down.”

Wong twitched his eyebrows at Juron’s response. However, he changed the subject slightly. “It’s not just him. You are literally responsible for the death of hundreds of millions. If anything, you, too, are a madman, Juron.”

“I am not going to deny that I am mad. All great men are mad. Just take a look at the Crimson wizard for an example.”

Wong was silent and Juron continued.

“At least, I am doing something. At least, I am not a hypocrite. I let the world know of my intention and what I do unlike the others who appears to be good men on surface but are something else in shadows.”

“Quit babbling, Juron,” Wong said promptly. “I care not for whatever the point you are trying to prove. You will pay for your crimes one day. What I hope is that I will be there to see you suffer.”

Juron had a faint grin on his face upon hearing Wong’s declaration. He calmly replied, “Whatever you say, General.”

People of Andromeda suffered for many hundreds of years by United Sol during Mirren’s regime. He imposed heavy tax on the colonists and their lives became a lot harder than it should have been.

The colonists revolted on year 9077 and the rebellion lasted for about fifty years. By year 9124, Andromeda republic was formed under Acshell the liberator. The current “Emperor” Richard Bau of Andromeda union was just someone who worked under Acshell. He happened to seize an opportunity when Acshell went missing one day and never returned. Because Richard was the most senior member at that time, he was able to seize the republic. He quickly renamed the republic to union and formed Andromeda council.

Since then Richard Bau enjoyed absolute powers, even claiming himself the title of an emperor. He was an exiled member of the Bau and the Bau did attempt to take him back into the clan but Richard firmly refused.

Richard’s stance of not working with the Bau went well with the citizens of Andromeda union in reality. And he actively voiced that he wanted to conquer Sol and make “Sol pigs” go through the same harsh years as what Andromeda colonists went through.

Thus, Juron’s desire to attack United Sol was received well by Andromeda council; after all it was in line with Richard Bau’s desire. However the council wasn’t foolish enough to ignore a possibility of Juron’s questionable motives.

And that was where the Knights came into the scene.

“Pardon?” Wemer looked surprised. “What did you say?”

“The council has tasked us to keep a watch over Juron,” Sevn declared.

“Oh, wow, I didn’t think they knew we existed?” Wemer was full of sarcasm. He had every right to be sarcastic. After all, the Knights hadn’t received any mission from the council over a decade. In fact, it would be their first mission ever.

“Wemer, the council realizes that the Knights have been overlooked,” Sevn added.

“I am not angry despite of my sarcasm,” Wemer explained. “But you do realize I have every right to feel sarcastic.”

After a moment of brief silence, Sevn nodded.

“It’s not like I have a choice anyway,” Wemer said indifferently.

The Knights was given a small fleet of ten Andromeda royal navy cruisers and joined General Wong’s fleet.

Juron apparently laughed out loudly upon hearing that the Knights had joined them. He even invited them to his bridge, welcoming them with open arms.

Wemer and the others weren’t obviously glad to see him. Nevertheless, it was a task they were given. When Juron greeted them in person on his bridge, Sevn couldn’t resist going against him verbally.

“I can’t believe we have to work with you,” Sevn stated sarcastically to which Juron responded with an ever-bright smile. “Yesterday’s enemy is today’s friend, some fucking idiot said,” He cited.

“You do know why we are here, do you not? We are here to keep eyes on you,” Sevn said while Wemer and the others were paying little interest in their verbal conflict.

“I do know what you are here for, but pray tell me; do you think this war is wrong?”

Sevn couldn't resist pointing a finger at him in response. "Any war is wrong. War itself is wrong."

"Hah!" Juron let out of a short but sneering laugh. "War is wrong? What kind of nonsense is this? War is necessary for peace."

Sevn was clearly angered by Juron's statement and his face became slightly red. "War is necessary? You are the one spewing nonsense!"

At this point, Wemer stepped in before it'd get worse.

"Sevn, stop. This is not what we are here for," Tapping his shoulder, he quietly whispered to him from behind.

Gritting teeth and sighing shortly after, Sevn turned around and followed Wemer out of the bridge.

"Fucking idealists," Juron uttered just as they left the bridge. He firmly believed that hard-earned peace would last longer and would certainly last longer than peace made by words and negotiations.

The fleet quickly mobilized and was about to cross the national border. However, the fleet did not formally declare war on United Sol.

While there was no firm rule set in universal laws that the fleet had to declare war at this point, it was universally understood that a war was to be declared when a war fleet crossed its national border.

"I beg your pardon?" General Wong was stopped by Juron from formally declaring a war on United Sol.

"We will declare war on them but not now," Juron told him.

"What do you mean by that? When are you going to declare war?"

Juron stated that he would declare a war when the fleet was nearing Sol system.

“Don’t be ridiculous!” Wong exclaimed. “I am sure that they have some informants on Freedom colony and there will be patrol fleets. We will be found long before we close in.”

“I am the fleet commander here. I know what I am doing,” Juron insisted. “The council has entrusted me with this mission and I intend to make the most of it.”

Wong growled in silence and spoke no more.

Juron’s intention not to declare a war when crossing border was not well received by the Knights obviously but their task was to keep eyes on him in case he went rouge. As long as he was doing his job, which was to attack United Sol, he was well within his rights to do anything to increase the chance of a successful campaign.

Of course, that did not mean they were denied talking about it.

The Knights’ fleet of ten Andromeda royal navy fleet was in the rear position of the entire fleet. It was a tiny fleet of just ten cruisers and nobody really cared what they did which meant that they were able to maintain their own command network and Wemer was fully in charge of the ten ships. It didn’t mean much since Juron ruled 12.000 cruisers but at least Wemer remained independent.

Wemer, Sevn, Juun and Iuny were in Wemer’s quarter, discussing the matter at hand.

“Juron did not declare a war at all when we crossed the border. I can only assume he wants to sneak in and attack with an element of surprise,” Sevn expressed his opinion after briefly explaining what happened.

“The fleet is strong,” Wemer added, “And I suppose he could threaten Freedom colony to cut off all outgoing signals.”

“Freedom colony isn’t exactly weak, either. They could, if they really want, fight back,” Sevn argued.

“I don’t think they will. Freedom colony has always avoided conflicts if possible,” Wemer responded.

“They must realize that, if United Sol falls, it’s them next?”

Wemer and Sevn were debating over Juron’s action while Juun and Luny couldn’t care less. Neither Juun nor Luny was rhetoric.

“You know,” Juun quietly spoke to which Wemer and Sevn responded back fiercely, “What?!” They exclaimed at the same time.

“Politics make people stupid and I dare to say that you two sound pretty stupid right now.”

Luny nodded in agreement which unfortunately noticed by no one.

Wemer and Sevn sighed.

Just as Sevn expected, when the fleet approached Freedom colony, Juron made a bold threat to attack the colony if any outgoing transmission was allowed. In other words, he wanted Freedom colony to maintain radio silence until told otherwise.

Lila, who was currently in charge of the colony, reluctantly agreed. The colony had a sizable fleet but it happened too fast for the colony to plan and react accordingly, and for Lila, less risk was better.

However, this event would teach her a lesson she would not forget and prepare a battle-ready fleet on standby in the future.

Radio silence from Freedom colony meant that United Sol informants had no way to let the Ark on Earth know that Andromeda fleet was approaching Sol system.

In general, the fleet would be spotted by patrol fleets and a network of probes would send an alert quickly to the Ark. However, Juron knew what he was doing. There were reasons that he chose to attack United Sol precisely at this moment.

The appointment of Fraser as the new president of United Sol had something to do with it. The Bau was pleased to have finally taken back the Ark, and the Bau desired to overhaul the Ark house as well as installing new administrators on

Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, and Uranus outpost. Which meant that Emuel's position was under a dire threat. Due to a strong possibility of Emuel's revolt, the Bau was extremely careful of handling his case but all other positions were about to be replaced with those who had connections to the Bau.

What that meant that all operations came to a temporary halt as nobody knew what was going to happen to their positions. Even Uranus outpost which was responsible for patrolling Outer Sol and beyond had also temporarily halted all patrolling activities.

The temporary halt in operations wasn't meant to last too long and nobody was worried that their national security was at a great risk.

After all, nobody attacked United Sol ever since its creation. For approximately 3.000 years, United Sol was never declared war on them simply because there was no one else out there.

Andromeda republic, later renamed to union, did become a foe but United Sol had always believed that they were far more powerful than them.

United Sol was in fact far more powerful at the beginning of formation of Andromeda republic. However, corruption ran deep within United Sol. The presidency was becoming weaker and the nation was decentralized. Emuel alone had 11.000 ships and he wasn't going to mobilize the fleet for sake of the nation. He'd only mobilize it for his own sake or benefit.

Without Emuel's fleet, United Sol had roughly 9.000 ships, some of which were classified light cruisers, AKA the Mice. In other words, United Sol had yet to fully recover from the short war Gvew had with Cecil. In fact, they weren't going to recover. Their economy was in tatters and it was going to get only worse.

Juron knew precisely what was going on with United Sol and chose a precise moment to strike them. His intention, however, wasn't destroying United Sol. Rather, his intention was to further weaken United Sol.

He had his reasons for choosing not to go all the way and destroy United Sol when he could.

One of them was the presence of Venus and Mars. The fleet from those two planets was far weaker than the fleet Andromeda union could field, but the two planets were strongly united and were currently under very strong leaderships.

Its people were fully united and very little corruption ran through their ranks. They were, in addition, fully aware of dangers and were battle-ready unlike United Sol.

Juron was not confident that he could take the two planets so far from home. Therefore, he decided to weaken United Sol enough to make them want to attack United Sol, thus weakening everyone while he would step in and pick up scraps.

“Sir.”

A voice called out and Juron slowly opened his eyes. He was in his captain’s chair on a bridge.

“What is it,” Juron responded with a low voice.

“We are exactly 4 days away from entering Sol system. You’ve wanted me to remind you when we reached this point.”

“I see. Open all channels and declare formal war on United Sol.”

The crew nodded firmly. “Right away, sir.”

“Our destination is Pluto.”

He had his reasons not to go beyond Uranus outpost. As much as United Sol was deeply corrupted. They just elected a new president and the Bau basically took the nation as theirs. While the new changes made them vulnerable, they were currently somewhat united under the Bau. If they were to replace Emuel, the administrator of Jupiter Assault outpost, the Bau would be stronger.

Therefore-

He wanted Emuel to repel his fleet seemingly on surface and thus ensure his position for the immediate future. As long as Emuel was in his place, United Sol would always be more vulnerable and less united.

That was Juron's firm brief and his reason for the first war. Approaching Uranus outpost would send big alerts to the Ark on Earth and the new President Fraser would have to ask Emuel to send in his fleet which Juron hoped he'd comply. There was too little time for Fraser to gather a sizable fleet to battle a fleet of 12.000 ships. Logically, he'd ask Emuel.

"Sir, General Wong is on channel."

"Put it through."

Wong appeared on main screen. His stiff face indicated that he was clearly not pleased with how things were going.

"About damn time you declared the war," He said.

Juron beamed a grin at him. "General, we are on the same side. Let's get along, shall we?"

Ignoring Juron's remark, Wong asked, "So, where to? I assume Pluto?"

"Yes, General. We will stop by Pluto."

Wong twitched his eyebrows when Juron said "stop by".

"We are going to bombard the planet, are we not?"

Juron shrugged. "Why should we, General? It's a useless planet."

"Then," Wong raised his voice. "Why do you want to 'stop by' the planet at all?"

"General, unlike you, I've done homework." At this point, Wong growled. Juron continued regardless. "I believe that two of former Ark house members are hiding on the planet. It is from a reliable source of mine."

"Just how 'reliable' are you talking about here?"

"Reliable as in 99%."

“So, you want to take them and interrogate them?”

“I highly doubt that they will join us and I highly doubt that we will be able to get much from them. I am assuming they’d rather die than surrender.”

If they wanted to join other factions, they would have left Sol system a long time ago. By choosing to remain within Sol system, Juron believed they were plotting something and he did not want unforeseen events to unfold in his grand plans. If they were willing to join them, that was fine. If not, he wanted to get rid of them to reduce possible variables.

By time, the fleet reached Pluto. United Sol was fully aware that they were at war. Still, there was no clear indication that a defense fleet was on its way which confirmed Juron’s suspicion that Fraser did not have the full control yet and he would likely to ask Emuel.

So far, everything was coming along according to his grand agenda.

“Dispatch shuttles. Gain control of Pluto colony Alpha,” Juron commanded from his captain’s chair. “Protocol B.”

Protocol B meant they were free to fire only if attacked first.

Juron was looking for a married couple. He figured they’d act when pressed. He didn’t know where they might have been. Therefore, all he could do was wait.

After an hour, marines reported that Pluto colony Alpha was fully occupied and asked what to do next.

“Spread out,” Juron gave out his order. “There must be minor settlements scattered around the planet.”

“Sir, the marines are asking what they are looking for.”

“Just tell them to search the planet.”

Eventually, an incident was reported. A group of marine reached a small settlement not far from Pluto colony Alpha and a fight broke out. The marines requested an immediate assistance.

It was what Juron was waiting for and he contacted the Knights to accompany him. Wemer was clearly reluctant to listen to him but Juron stressed that the Knights should be “keeping an eye on him”.

By time, Juron was in a shuttle to get down to Pluto surface, he was informed that they lost the marines.

“Scan the area for life signatures. They can’t be too far away,” Juron ordered. “Dispatch the shuttle and ask the Knights to follow me.”

“Yes, sir,” A pilot responded promptly.

They found three people, a man and two women, walking across on a barrel field not far from the settlement and the shuttles quickly landed by them.

Juron exited from his shuttle, and the Knights exited from their shuttle.

Juron and the Knights approached them and Juron was the first one to speak.

“I assume you were the ones responsible for the little accident from a small establishment not far from here.”

“And just who might you be?” The man demanded.

“My name is Juron. You may have heard of me, John and I suppose one of the women is Eder.”

Juron was expecting two people. He had seen photos of John and Eder. Thus, he was able to immediately identify who was Eder. To his knowledge, they had no children. Still, it was a possibility that they might have had a child.

“Is the petite one your daughter?” Juron inquired casually.

“It is none of your business, mister,” Eder talked back fiercely.

“So, you know who we are. What do you want from us? You must want something from us. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have come down here,” John stated.

Juron beamed a vague smile. “Indeed, I came here to recruit you.”

“Recruit us? What for?” John demanded.

“I want what you know about the Ark and United Sol. We’ve had spies but I want some first-hand experience in the matter,” Juron explained. He lazily looked at each of them and added, “And I must tell you this. You have two choices. You can come with me or die here.”

“Not in a million years!” John exclaimed. “I may have not seen eye to eye with the Ark but I am never going to expose vital info!”

“I see.” Juron figured as much and decided not to waste time. “Time to die.” He turned back and told the Knights, “Do it.”

“You do know we are here to keep eyes on you, don’t you? We are not your dogs!” Sevn told him aggressively.

Regardless, Juron declared, “The Knights, I order you to kill them. This is a direct order.”

“Why you...,” Sevn growled.

“I can have you killed for disobeying my direct order,” Juron continued.

Sevn was about to talk back, only to be stopped by Juun.

“Stop, enough,” Juun said. “I will do it. Somebody has to do this, doesn’t it?”

Juron beamed a grin at Juun. “At least, one of you is smart enough. I guess class S people are smarter.”

“You motherfu-” Sevn was unable to finish his sentence as Wemer covered his mouth. “You are going too far!” He whispered to him while dragging him away.

Juun walked to them and declared calmly.

“My name is Juun. And I am afraid I have to kill all of you here.”

“Confident, are you? We are three,” John responded while preparing to attack with his rifle.

Juun said no more and readied his blade calmly. He intended to waste no time.

As soon as John fired his rifle, Juun dashed toward to him at once. Due to his overwhelming speed, he would seem being vanished on spot by those with lesser classes. He aimed to disable John and he did exactly that by slicing off his arms with a wide slash.

John screamed in excruciating pain and surreal turn of event.

“Class S hyper human...,” Eder uttered. “So, Andromeda union has a class S in both ESP and hyper human...”

Panting hard, John took some steps back and then he laughed hopelessly. Eder and the other woman rushed to him.

Juun was going to finish him off and he posed again quickly and dashed toward him. Eder, as if knowing what Juun intended, stood in front of John and activated her barrier. He had no intention to stop and changed his mind and decided to kill Eder instead.

Blood spattered as Juun’s blade slashed Eder in half. His blade went from her right shoulder through her left waist. It was a powerful and clean slash and she was sliced in half.

Eder coughed blood and screamed loudly with unbearable pain. Her upper body which had been sliced, thus, disconnected from her lower body, fell violently into John’s chest who attempted to grab her, but with his arms gone, her body simply slid down from his chest.

John quickly kneeled down and talked to Eder who continued to cough blood. Her intestine was spilling out of her body and her lower body was a short distance away from her upper body.

“Oh, Gods..., Oh, Gods...,” John cried out.

Juun stood peacefully a distance away from them. "I am sorry," He respectfully told them. He had absolutely no grudge against them. But his order was to kill them and he wasn't going to do the job unprofessionally.

He was certainly Eder would not survive. John could survive but he was no longer a threat. Thus, his attention slowly moved to the last person who was capable of fighting.

The petite woman slowly stood in front of John and Eder, taking out what seemed to be a ceremonial dagger and holding dearly with both of her hands. Her hands and legs were visibly shaking.

Juun looked at Shell for a moment. "That is very respectable, miss."

"I don't have a choice, do I? If I am to die here, I'd rather at least try fighting for my life."

Juun nodded at her and told her, "Indeed. I shall not make it painful. That is the least I can do for you." And then he slowly posed to strike. He felt nothing even when he was clearly able to see the petite woman shaking harder. She was no threat, but an order was an order. At this point, the best he could do was to kill her in one slash and grant her quick death.

However, the petite woman slowly held the dagger backwards. Her shaking seemed to have been reduced and the dagger was clearly pointing at her left chest.

"What are you doing, miss?" Juun inquired calmly but he reached his own conclusion quickly. "Committing suicide wouldn't be too bad, either, I admit." And he had no intention to stop her. Death was death. It didn't matter who finished her.

The petite woman took several deep breaths which was understandable since she was trying to take her own life.

Suddenly, she shouted, "I, Anesita, am here!"

The dagger resonated once and emitted a faint shockwave. Juron narrowed his eyes as he felt the shockwave. He sensed something he did not like; he sensed a power that was far superior than his. And to his knowledge, he firmly believed only one person was more powerful than himself. It was Cecil.

“Finish her quickly,” He told Juun who was fixed in his position. “Did you not hear me? Kill her now!”

The petite woman shouted, “I am here and I demand a miracle in exchange of my life!” And the dagger resonated once more but with a stronger shockwave this time.

At once, the petite woman shoved the dagger into her left chest with little hesitation. This was when Juun dashed toward her to behead her. It was to give her the quick painless death he promised to her.

However.

Juun saw a space ahead of him being distorted. He quickly realized someone or something was being teleported. He knew how ESP’s teleportation worked and had managed to kill ESPs who were teleporting in and out. When an ESP teleported, always heart and brain teleported first and flesh followed micro-seconds afterwards.

In other words, if an ESP was teleporting in, he could either target heart or brain to kill an ESP before his flesh would teleport in. It was a gap of micro-seconds, but for Juun, it was possible.

However, this teleportation was different. As he swiftly and skillfully repositioned to strike a heart that was going to teleport in, he had a gut feeling that a heart wasn’t going to be there. His gut feeling told him to defend for some reason.

He quickly posed to defend and a foreign sword emerged from the distorted space. When the blades clashed, the first sensation Juun felt was –

Nothing.

He felt nothing from the clash. It was as if the blade didn't exit. But it was there. And then a figure appeared, holding the blade. The clash created a violent shockwave but Juun couldn't care less.

He couldn't care less because he intrinsically realized he ran into a formidable opponent. Juun and Cecil exchanged slashes. He blocked few and counterattacked few.

The joy.

Yes, the joy. For Juun, he had to always control, to be more precise, restrict his raw powers. If he didn't, his opponents had always died as a result. Even when he cut Eder in half, it was less than 30% of his raw strength. It was such a stressful act that he had to restrict himself to be merciful. He was fully confident that even Juron was no match for him.

The few slashes they exchanged, Juun used almost full strength. Yet, Cecil blocked and countered.

When Juun jumped backwards to create a distance from Cecil, his face was full of a bright smile.

"Who might you be?" He asked merrily.

"That is the Crimson wizard," Juron answered him instead. "The mighty class S ESP, the most powerful ESP ever existed, the most brutal man ever existed."

An ESP who uses a blade? An ESP whose physical strength is on par with his?

“I care not whether he is an ESP,” Juun responded promptly. “All I know is that I can use all my strength and my opponent doesn’t die.”

He posed to strike and vanished on spot. Cecil vanished on spot as well and their blades clashed in air, creating yet another powerful shockwave. This time, Juun used his full strength.

Yet his opponent did not die.

Watching Juun having fun of his life wasn’t his plan nor was it a cup of his tea.

“Time for us to leave,” Juron told the others, including Juun.

Juun complied by withdrawing his blade at once. He was pleased to meet the Crimson wizard and he believed his reputation was the most powerful ESP was well justified. At this very point, he felt that, as long as he tagged along with Juron, he’d run into more opponents like Cecil.

Turning around, he walked toward his group. But Juron walked toward Cecil, stopping at a fair distance from him still.

“I do have a question, Crimson wizard,” He said out loud. There was no reply from Cecil but he asked nonetheless. “What do you think a war is?”

Juron actually did not expect an answer from him but he did answer.

“Necessary evil and human history is nothing without it.”

A bright smile emerged from Juron. Nodding in agreement, he quietly retreated and his group followed.

Juron hated idealists. He hated idealists because idealists in general refused to face the reality. He studied the history and it was pretty clear that clear advancements were during war ridden eras. He bemoaned the existence of United Sol for that particular reason.

United Sol was the oldest nation in human history. It so far lasted for more than 3.000 years and such a long period of peace meant mankind wasn’t really moving

forward. And he believed the history of United Sol proved it enough. History of United Sol had always been power struggle among the Bau, the O'ren, and some other factions, and whoever won the presidency and obtained a large support at the Ark house level was free to manipulate the nation at will as if it was a toy.

Lack of war for such a long period meant that lack of urgency when faced with crisis. And how United Sol behaved against Andromeda rebellion and Milky way incident showed exactly that. Juron believed that the rebellion was victorious only because United Sol fleets couldn't really care less. Their home was safe after all.

And how United Sol was so passive when hundreds of millions of refugees were flowing in...

Idealists refused conflicts and always preferred negotiations with words.

Words wasn't going to improve the lack of urgency, he firmly believed.

"Our next destination is Uranus outpost," Juron commanded on his bridge.

"Aye, sir."

In the end, the fleet did not bombard Pluto. Juron was never going to bombard the planet. There was simply no point in bombarding the planet.

Outer Sol had been exceptionally quiet as Juron's fleet sailed through toward Uranus outpost. They never ran into any patrol fleets and they never ran into any pirates, either, both of which would have stayed well clear of Juron's fleet. After all, no one sane was going to dare going against a fleet of 12.000 cruisers unless it was a fleet of a similar size.

"Sir?"

Juron had his eyes closed and was meditating. In his head, complex calculations were occurring about what he might face as his fleet was approaching Uranus outpost.

“Sir!”

Frowning because he was disturbed, he slowly opened his eyes. “What now,” He said with a slightly frustrated voice.

“Sir, there is a lone cruiser approaching from front.”

“A... lone cruiser?”

“It is not answering to hails. I am going to check on its ship signature as soon as it’s in deep scan range.”

A moment later, the crew reported, “Ship signature says it is LC SilverHawk. According to the ship database we have, it says it belongs to a Liberty captain Oraekyn.”

“Oraekyn...!” Other crews started to murmur.

The legendary liberty captain Oraekyn, he was known as the most skilled and gifted captain known in clusters. There were so many unconfirmed tales about him that his mysterious nature enhanced his status as the most fearsome captain ever existed.

“So what, it is a lone cruiser,” Juron said with a sneer. “Fire at will.”

Indeed, it was one lone cruiser versus twenty thousand cruisers. There was no way that a lone cruiser would be able to crush a fleet of such a size. However, still the lone cruiser was advancing toward the fleet and nobody knew what Oraekyn was up to.

At one point, the cruiser accelerated rapidly at which point the fleet started to fire at the cruiser. The fleet was missing shots on the cruiser by hair because LC SilverHawk was skillfully drifting around while sailing fast-forward.

“Stop the damn cruiser,” Juron raised his voice slightly. “It’s just a lone cruiser for God’s sake.”

Yes, it was just one cruiser. But because it was just one cruiser, he had no restrictions; no fleet ships to work with and no rules to follow.

LC SilverHawk quickly sailed into the fleet and started to create havoc by firing randomly. The shots couldn’t be accurate because the ship was rapidly drifting in all directions to avoid being shot but due to density of the fleet, his random shots were hit. Furthermore, friendly fire was becoming an issue.

“Watch that friendly fire!” A voice from a fleet channel shouted.

Another desperate voice shouted, “We are hit! God damn it! Watch where you fire!”

Juron gritted his teeth. He started to see what Oraekyn was trying to accomplish.

Yet another desperate voice shouted, “Woah, hey! You are too close! You are getting too close! AARRGH!”

A cruiser collided into another and the two ships exploded.

And meanwhile LC SilverHawk was merrily sailing around amid the chaos, firing randomly in all directions while avoid being hit.

The fleet formation was becoming disorganized and casualties were occurring all over the places. The fleet had already lost over ten cruisers from collisions and friendly fires.

Loss of ten-ish ships out of twenty thousand wasn’t obviously a big loss. It couldn’t even considered to be a loss of any scale. But that wasn’t really the point. The point was that they were being outplayed by a single ship.

“Use missiles!” Juron exclaimed.

Aside from energy based laser turrets, cruisers did have an optional weaponry in missiles. However, missiles were not virtually unlimited like energy. While it wasn’t overly expensive to produce missiles, compared to lasers which was powered by virtually unlimited energy, it was expensive and did require a supply line to keep the missiles in circulation.

Long story short, laser weapon was considered free. Missile was not. Therefore, captains were instructed not to use missiles unless absolutely necessary. Even Juron was kindly told by the council to keep losses to minimum and use as least supply as possible.

“Are you absolutely sure, sir?”

“Do you have any better idea?” Juron raised his voice.

Unlike laser beams, missiles had a tracking device in its warhead. Thus, it would be far more effective than laser beams against an unpredictable opponent like LC SilverHawk. Whether it would actually be effective was entirely another matter.

“Fleet commander to all ships, you are permitted to use missiles. Take that ship down!” Juron commanded.

However, as much as Juron knew what he was doing, when it came to fleet battles, Oraekyn knew more than anyone else. When missiles were fired, behavior of LC SilverHawk immediately changed. The cruiser started to use other cruisers as a shield to avoid missiles and what happened next was something Juron never wanted to recall again.

“LC SilverHawk... is sailing away, sir.”

A shell-shocked crew reported weakly to Juron. And a dark shadow was all over Juron’s face.

“Damage report,” Juron inquired to which the crew remained silent. “Damage report!” Juron repeated with a shout.

The fleet had apparently lost 821 ships.

1 ship took down 821 ships. Granted, the battle situation was in Oraekyn’s favor, still it was inexcusable that so many ships were lost.

Furthermore, Juron promised not to lose more than 10% of the fleet. The loss meant that he had very little left to lose. And there was more; the moral was

down. The captains could not believe what happened before their eyes and their moral was highly questionable at this point.

Juron had to alter his plan somewhat and quickly. His original plan was to clash with Emuel's fleet and withdraw after a while. However, now with less than 400 ships before hitting his promised 10% loss, any big clash against another big fleet sounded too risky.

Still, he saw no other choice. For his grand agenda, it was vital that Emuel must keep his post as Jupiter administrator. He needed Emuel to keep United Sol decentralized. In the end, Juron chose to risk exceeding the minimum 10% loss that was promised.

The fleet proceeded toward Uranus outpost and long range sensor picked up a sizable fleet ahead.

"It's big," A crew reported. "Over ten thousands, sir."

Juron smiled and whispered to himself, "Just as I expected." He was absolutely certain that it was Emuel's fleet which also meant that his analysis regarding United Sol was correct.

"Proceed as planned. Open a fleet channel to all ships. Voice only."

"Open, sir."

"This is the fleet commander Juron. I am sure you can see the fleet ahead of us. I must tell you that our job is not to destroy that fleet. Our top priority for this invasion is give them a wake-up call."

It was the first time they were told of the goal of the war. Even the bridge crews started to murmur.

"Why, you may ask. Why not, I answer," Juron continued, "United Sol is weak but they are still strong enough. Remember that our nation has more ships than what we have, yet I've brought only 12.000. The purpose of this war is to weaken them, and we must not hammer that fleet ahead of us, for that fleet is United Sol's enemy."

Juron made a pause to give captains and sailors a moment to think.

“Trust me, for I know what I am doing. Believe in me, for I am your commander, your brain.”

He made yet another pause.

“Now, we will attack that fleet and we will withdraw after two hours. Be completely defensive. I want no losses.”

It was unlikely that the fleet would suffer no losses but what Juron really meant was he wanted as small loss as possible.

The fleet by Uranus outpost did turn out to be led by Emuel and the number was 11.000 large which meant that he had brought his entire ships. However, after half an hour the battle began, majority of Emuel’s fleet started to withdraw.

“Sir, they are retreating?” A crew urgently informed Juron who was paying careful attention on fleet losses. He, too, noticed that the fleet was retreating. He couldn’t understand why as the battle was in early stage and it was pretty much an even battle so far.

“Sir, a small portion of the fleet is remaining.”

Approximately 2.000 ships remained in battlefield while rest of the fleet retreated. Groaning, Juron quickly span his brain to figure out what was going on. Within seconds, he came up with an answer.

“Decoy?” And then he let out of a laugh. “Hah! So, he is thinking what I am thinking. He wants to retain strength of his fleet to stand against Fraser!”

Juron’s hypothesis was that Emuel felt he needed to retain strength of his fleet to stand a chance of keeping his post as Jupiter administrator. Yet, he needed to carry out his mission given by Fraser. Therefore, he chose to lose the battle intentionally and report back to Fraser. Emuel would be failing a mission but he did not disobey and would keep most of his fleet strength intact which would

make Fraser hesitate replacing Jupiter administrator since Emuel still could revolt and stand a chance.

And it was Saturn after Uranus outpost. Saturn defense would fall onto Fraser who should have enough time to assemble a sizable fleet by then.

“Emuel the Snake, indeed,” Juron remarked with a smile. Since he and Emuel were seemingly on the same page, he no longer needed to worry about further losses. There were only two thousand ships in front of them.

“Initiate offensive formation! We have an hour and half left. I want that small fleet eliminated!”

The small fleet became disorganized and reacted very badly to the sudden retreat of Emuel’s main fleet, and while Juron’s fleet pressed hard on them, somehow the small fleet started to reorganize itself and reformed its formation.

It was as if they found a new leader and the new leader was quickly reacting to the situation. Despite of heavy initial losses due to chaos in ranks, the small fleet started to fight back in an organized manner. And despite of Juron’s fleet throwing everything they had for the remaining an hour and half, over half of the fleet remained intact when Juron chose to withdraw.

“Heroes are born in crisis...,” Juron cited as he struck his back deeply into his captain’s chair. He assumed someone rose in ranks amid the chaos and took control over the abandoned fleet.

“Damage report,” Juron demanded.

“98 ships lost, sir.”

“Good.” It was within the loss limit. It was close but everything went to according to his grand plan. He couldn’t complain about how it went considering he experienced few hiccups along the way.

“Fleet commander to all ships, withdraw. We are going home,” Juron announced.

The first part of Juron's grand agenda was complete.

Fin