

[Juron arc] [5] [New enemies] [9633]

Rev 1.3

The last part of the story.

The first part is: **[Shattered union arc] [8] [2nd Sol-Andromeda war] [9633]**

The second part is: **[Kain and Suu arc] [6] [Admiral Kain] [9633]**

Related stories

[Legends arc] [Andromeda rebellion] [9071]

Milky way arc

Juron was giving a speech in the council. It was the year. His 20-year war plan was completed. It was completed 3 years earlier than expected. He had hoped it to be sooner but had to be content with the result.

As expected, not everything went to according to his plans exactly. However, overall, most of his plans were carried out accordingly. If he had any major complaints, it was his failure to remove Commodore Kain from United Sol.

He had been keeping close eyes on Kain ever since he submitted the war plan to the council. While he did not consider him as a major obstacle, he certainly did

not like the positive energy he was bringing into United Sol. He attempted to get rid of him. However, the vast distance between his and Kain's location meant that Juron's influence was too weak. He sent a team of highly trained agents to Uranus outpost in order to scheme and, at first, all seemed to be going according to his plan, but he lost contact with the agents at one point.

In the end, Juron decided that it was not worth his time and effort to get rid of him. He figured he'd simply defeat him in a battle.

"The time is now!" He slammed his fist on surface of his speech desk. "The fund is ready. The fleet is ready and our wills are ready!" He declared, "We attack United Solar system federation now and knock the Bau off their perch!"

While some councilors were discontent with Juron's methods, most councilors did favor Juron's goal. They would have loved to see the Bau being knocked out of their perch. Therefore, most councilors gave him their support and Juron even received a warm ovation when he walked off.

And later that day, Juron submitted his full plan for the second invasion to the council. Unlike the first invasion which he simply tested United Sol's response, he did state that the second invasion was meant to go further. He did, however, clearly state that he did not intent to conquer United Sol with the second invasion but rather "greatly weaken" them. It was his third invasion that was to completely crush United Sol.

He promised a “fair and square” victory against Earth defense fleet and promised he would go as deep as Jupiter before he’d retreat.

He was asked why he would not defeat United Sol in this invasion.

His response was, “Cutting your enemy down in one slash never gives you the satisfaction. I want to see them suffer low and gradual death.”

He added, “I shall give you a fair and square victory that will be decisive against Earth defense fleet, and you can laugh at them after that. Ridicule them if you like. Mock them. That is where the real satisfaction lies. We shall kick them when they are down.”

The council was satisfied with his responses and subsequently his war plan was given full approval.

He would again be working with General Wong in addition to General Garrik who was retired General Morrik’s son. Juron was the fleet commander in the chain of commands.

A part of his war plan was quick fleet mobilization. Therefore, it took less than a day in order to fully assemble the invasion fleet of twenty six thousand ships at Heaven of Order.

The fleet was assembled from three independent fleets. A fleet of 4,000 was Juron’s own fleet. General Wong’s fleet of 11,000 ships and General Garrik’s fleet of 11,000 ships made a strong fleet of 26,000 ships.

Juron was announced as the fleet commander which was as expected.

Unlike the first war, the council did not shackle him with conditions and limitations. They wanted to see what he could do if given complete freedom.

He received a warm welcome when he entered the bridge of his command vessel.

With a smile, Juron responded as he walked toward his commander's chair.

"Fleet status report."

A nearby crew responded, "All green, commander. All crews checked in. All equipment and supplies checked in. However, we are to stop by Creg's and receive missiles."

Missile was an optional weapon for cruisers. It wasn't recommended to use them and ships weren't usually stocked with them, either. However, since this war was crucial, the council approved missiles.

Juron sat in his commander's chair and elevated it slightly. Opening a panel on his right chair arm, he manipulated few buttons to adjust his chair settings.

"Very well," He responded eventually. "Set a course to Creg's. We are moving out."

"Sir, the Generals are hailing us."

"Figured as much," Juron whispered himself and then answered, "Very well. Put it on."

Main screen was divided into two panels. General Wong showed on one. General Garrik showed up on the other.

“Juron, we get to work once more,” Wong said with a crooked grin.

“General Wong, it’s so good to see you again,” Juron responded. He didn’t mean it.

Wong glanced sideways and introduced. “This lad is Garrik, son of Morrik.”

Garrik beamed a smile. “Councilor Juron, I’ve heard a lot about you.”

Mostly bad gossips.

Standing up from his commander’s chair, Juron bowed lightly to show his respect.

“It is an honor to meet the son of legendary Morrik.” Of course, he didn’t mean it.

Regardless, Garrik seemed to have been very pleased by Juron’s show of respect.

“Gossips are merely gossips indeed, Councilor,” He remarked and added, “It will be an honor to work with you.”

Whatever you say, moron, Juron thought.

“Aye,” Juron responded respectfully.

The general moral of the fleet was very positive. Most of crews who went to the first war with Juron were still in service in this fleet as well, and they knew Juron was capable of leading the fleet. All in all, there were little doubters this time.

Upon arrival at Creg's, the fleet started to receive shipments for missiles. Due to the size of the fleet, it would take four days at least which prompted Juron to land down on the planet for some sight-seeing.

Planet Creg's was a humble planet. Unlike Heaven of Order where the planet was fully developed, parts of Creg's remained undeveloped. It wasn't due to lack of funds. There was simply no need to develop the entire planet.

The planet featured 0.7 gravity and was home to mostly middle to low class civilians. It had light green sky in addition.

For Juron, who spent his childhood life on Heaven of Order, the first impression of the planet's capital was,

"Unimpressive."

Lack of high-rise structures displeased him. Also lack of visible city planning displeased him as well. He didn't want to spend time in the city and returned to his ship at once.

"Does anyone know what this planet is called 'Creg's'?" Juron casually asked the crews once he returned.

"It is named after General Creg, sir," A crew replied promptly, "Who defended this planet with his life."

Another added, "He had 200 ships. Earth defense fleet had 2,000."

“General Creg was a close friend of Acshell the liberator,” Another added.

Acshell was a truly revered figure among Andromedians, for he was the one who built the foundation for their nation. But Creg was a relatively unknown figure until his sacrifice. Even then Creg remained relatively unknown.

“You guys know awfully well about him. I certainly don’t recall learning about him in the class.”

Smiling, the crew who answered the first explained, “Probably because most of us here on this bridge are from Creg’s, sir.”

Being employed by Adnromeda navy was a decent career to have. The wage was certainly very attractive for middle and low class citizens, and middle to low class citizens inhabited mostly on Creg’s and New Creg’s due to inexpensive living expense.

“Is that so,” Juron responded with disinterest.

Not many questioned Acshell’s complete disappearance. He did announce he’d retire but then he simply disappeared one day. Nobody saw him ever again. Obviously, rumors circulated soon after his disappearance, some of which were conspiracy theories. Richard Bau eventually made an announcement that Acshell left the civilization and headed into asteroid sea, meaning he wasn’t likely coming back and nobody was likely going to find him.

Speaking of which..., Juron had never met Richard Bau. He knew it was going to be hard to meet him in person since Richard Bau was very seclusive. Still, he had never met him in his life.

“Have any of you seen the emperor lately?” Juron threw the question, and the crews were silenced momentarily until one answered.

“I haven’t seen him for a long time,” He said, “I think I saw him the last time on TV like ... 20 years ago? It was a brief appearance also.”

Juron decided not to think too much into the matter for the time being because it wasn’t the right time but he had some suspicions.

However, he decided to throw a bone.

“Greetings, honorable Knights.”

In his quarter, Juron called the Knights association. He called Wemer, and his frown indicated that he wasn’t pleased to see him.

“What do you want, Juron,” Wemer responded, looking obviously displeased.

“Oh, Mr. Knight. I seek only harmony with you.” His tone was clearly jeering.

“Harmony my ass, get to the topic unless you want me to shut this channel.”

With a crooked grin, Juron continued, “When was the last time you saw the emperor?”

“The emperor? What? Why?”

“Just asking.”

Wemer looked clearly suspicious. “Why would you contact me and ask such a question?”

“What.” Juron shrugged. “I can’t ask you a question?”

Wemer growled and looked clearly frustration. He simply shut the channel off in the end. It didn’t matter to Juron either way. He threw the bone and he believed Wemer would look into it.

Richard Bau was a mystery figure. Despite of declaring himself an emperor and renaming Andromeda republic to Andromeda union shortly after Acshell’s disappearance, he kept a very low profile. The public knew very little about him, and it was the same even for Juron as well. The council had been doing all of political works that Richard Bau hardly made any public appearance. It was understandable to some degree, but not having a public appearance for over a decade was something Juron decided to look into.

But that would be after this war.

After the missile supply was complete, the fleet swiftly moved on from Creg’s and headed toward Freebie trade outpost.

Ever since Milky way incident that took 99% of population off Smuggler’s Den which Freebie station was located in, the region had mostly been virtually empty. Freebie administration reported only few thousand locals on the planet and few hundreds on other planets in the region. With such low population, Freebie

administration declared bankruptcy soon after. In response, the council restructured the administration and as of year 9633, only three staffs were working at Freebie administration.

The council also refused to play a blame game and kept their silence over the Milky way incident. They spent no efforts in trying to bring anyone to justice and also made no attempt in making excuses for the tragedy. The council's stance meant that Imperial news of Andromeda also made no coverage of the tragedy.

Only Freedom letters from Freedom colony attempted to discover what truly occurred with no real result.

Time eventually buried the event into history.

"We've arrived at the outpost, commander." A crew informed Juron who was more or less slacking in his commander's chair.

"You know what to do," Juron said as he stood up. "Excuse me." And walked out of the bridge.

Final fleet checkup was in order which, given the size of the fleet, would take days. As much as he was eager to get going, he wasn't a man who'd skip proper steps just to get there. For next six days, Juron collected intel from the neutral zone where Freedom colony was currently dominant.

During the first invasion, Juron simply threatened the colony to gain a passageway and silenced them. He knew that it wouldn't be that easy this time however. He

had been informed that Freedom colony had assembled a sizable fleet although it was still nothing compared to his twenty six thousands fleet.

What made Freedom colony an obstacle was its tie with Nebula pirates which had an unknown amount of firepower. Juron simply had no reliable way of determining true powers of Nebula pirates. For all he knew, they might not even assist Freedom colony. Their unpredictable nature was a huge problem in his plans.

He did consider attacking and conquering the colony but eventually scrapped the idea. He wasn't afraid of the colony. He was rather afraid of feedback from Nebula pirates and someone else. The "someone else" was Sae. To be precise, it was her vast connections. To be even more precise, it was her connection to the Crimson wizard. Cecil wasn't someone Juron was ready to take on.

He had studied Cecil's behaviors and came to a conclusion that, as long as Cecil was confronted politically, he did not use his otherworldly powers. In other words, it was wise not to earn his ire. Attacking Freedom colony had a good chance of enticing Sae's ire which could involve Cecil.

In the end, leaving Freedom colony alone appeared to be the best solution for the time being, and even in this second war, Juron's plan was to leave the colony alone as long as they'd allow his fleet to pass unmolested. Intel he had collected indicated no suspicious movement from the colony.

He was fully aware that he would eventually have to deal with Freedom colony at one point. But until they made their move, he was going to wait.

At this point however, even he failed to see that Freedom colony would strike at the worst moment.

Six days passed and fleet checkup was complete. Without further ado, Juron ordered the fleet to move out at once. Their next destination was Freedom colony to gain an authorized passageway.

Which proved to be virtually painless. The fleet reached Freedom colony in two weeks and there was complete radio silence. There was no traffic in the vicinity of the colony as if they had secured the area.

“Nothing at all, commander,” A crew reported. “The area is very clean. I can’t even detect civilian channels.”

Juron understood their silence was an acknowledgement to pass through although he certainly did not like their silence. He believed that they were being defiant because there was nothing they could do to stop them.

“Bitter losers,” He remarked. “Let them have their silence. We are passing through.”

The fleet’s journey to the border of United Sol was smooth. In fact, it was so smooth that it was downright boring. Juron did keep eyes on any movement from Freedom colony but there was none. He was informed that traffic resumed after the fleet was out of the colony’s immediate vicinity and that was the only worthwhile update.

“Arrived at the border, commander.”

“About damn fucking time,” Juron responded with a yawn. “Now there is going to be more waiting.”

Indeed, he promised “a fair and square victory”, meaning he needed to wait for United Sol’s response which occurred surprisingly fast. He expected days, if not weeks, before his fleet would be noticed. It took less than a day before a squad of scouting fighters scanned them down.

At the moment they were scanned, Juron wasn’t present on the bridge because he was expecting it to be a long wait. When he arrived back on the bridge, he was notified that they had been noticed.

Juron’s immediate reaction was a mild frown. “Already?” He replied bluntly. “The hell? Are you sure?”

“Yes, sir. We were scanned down by USF fighters.”

He didn’t like it. The fleet should have been found much later. A swift response wasn’t what he was expecting from declining United Sol.

If it wasn’t for the stupid promise he made, he would have chased them down. Actually, he wouldn’t have waited at the border to begin with. He would have simply barged in and swept out Uranus outpost even before they’d knew what hit them.

Despite of the urge, Juron intended to keep the promise. He had to in order to earn the council’s trust. His status as a councilor was on a borrowed time. Once every 25 years, a national wide election was held in Andromeda union. Juron

wasn't going to win an election, for he was virtually an unknown figure to the public and he had no home district to run for. He had kept his councillorship by the council's recommendation alone. In order to earn his next recommendation, he had to do what the council wanted which was a fair victory against United Sol. If he were to lose his councillorship, he'd also have to give up on his fleet which he obtained from deceased Lord Ankle. Too much was at stake to act on his own idea.

"Send out frigates and secure the area," Juron gave out his order.

It didn't take long enough to learn that Earth defense fleet was on its way. It was unconfirmed whether Jupiter fleet would join but Juron was absolutely positive that Jupiter fleet would come along.

"What makes you so sure?" Garrik inquired.

Wong, Garrik, and Juron were on a conference call in their quarters. Garrik was very interested in hearing Juron's tactics and his plans while Wong was looking indifferent.

"It's not hard to understand, sir," Juron explained, "If he doesn't come, he will be charged with treason."

Garrik responded promptly, "He does have the powers to take on United Sol though, aye?"

Juron also responded promptly, "Aye but he isn't someone who wants to be seen as a blatant traitor."

Garrik nodded along slowly although he didn't look too convinced. "And it goes back to this again," He wondered, "How can you be so sure about these things?"

Juron responded, "Research, sir. Spying and intel gathering. Know your enemy and plan ahead."

And there was his high intelligence which was a huge factor on its own.

As for Wong, he had little interests in the conversation. He was there only because Garrik asked to join. Truthfully, he had a lot of problems with Juron and his ways. But he knew that he and Juron didn't click and the best way for both of them was just staying out of each other's way.

For Garrik, it was a different story. He was interested in Juron for his quick rise in status and how an unknown man took down Lord Arnkle as well as escaping the council's punishments. Garrik was supposed to simply lend the fleet to Wong but he decided to join in order to get to know Juron.

Meanwhile, the fleet was suffering from mild boredom syndrome when Earth defense fleet joined by Jupiter fleet were detected by sensors.

"About fucking time," Juron uttered when he was informed. "Wake up everyone. Red alert."

Boredom syndrome was nothing to scoff at. If not handled and treated properly, it was the number one cause for suicides. It also affected crew efficiency. The best

cure was recreations, such as drinking and playing games and such. However, since this was a war time, Juron had forbidden such activities.

A crew reported, "Two fleets; Earth defense fleet 14,000 strong. Jupiter fleet 10,000 strong."

"Line formation," Juron commanded, "Wong to lead the front. Garrik stays in the second row."

However, Garrik insisted to take on the front.

"Denied," Juron responded firmly. "Wong to take the lead."

Wong was a veteran captain whereas Garrik had yet to fight in an actual battle. Therefore, Juron's choice wasn't met with criticisms and Garrik couldn't insist further.

"Now, time to be honorable."

Juron opened a public channel and began a mutual ceremonial conversation prior the battle. It was all a part of being "honorable".

"I am Andromeda councilor Juron and also the fleet commander of this fleet."

"I am Admiral Gareto in charge of Earth defense fleet."

After exchanging their names, it was Gareto who talked first.

"You are an honorable man. Not many would wait at border."

I had to, moron, Juron thought. He promised the council “a fair and square victory”. Therefore, he had to act honorable and had to wait at border for United Sol to respond. It wasn’t his intention but he took the credit regardless.

“As a councilor of Andromedian people, I shall be honorable,” Juron responded firmly, “Therefore, I shall give you a chance to surrender.”

Gareto didn’t look amused as if he expected Juron to demand surrender.

“I respectfully refuse,” Gareto responded also firmly and then saluted. “Best of luck.”

Juron saluted back and the channel was closed and then he commanded, “To ships, engage your targets of opportunity at will. Those under the generals, follow your generals.”

And just like that, one of largest space battles in the history of space age commenced.

It was a dull battle. If anything, it was more like a training battle where everyone was afraid going forward and risk their lives. Over 40,000 cruisers shooting at each other but they weren’t focus firing and damage dealt to each other was minimum. Focus fire wasn’t utilized in large fleet battles because it was seen was a huge waste of energy. For an example, 26,000 ships focusing on a single ship would have been ridiculous. There were ideas to break down fleets into smaller groups in order to utilize multiple targets for focus fire but fleet command structure became an issue.

In the end, the simplest way was engaging targets of opportunity.

“Might as well throw rocks at’em,” Juron remarked as he observed how wasteful they were. But he didn’t bother pushing anyone to attack more aggressively.

The battle went on for hours with minimum casualties. At one point, a crew picked up a loose public channel and notified Juron who was almost nodding off in his commander’s chair.

“Commander, I picked up a public channel which originated from the enemy fleet.”

Juron startled at first because he was nodding off.

“Say that again?”

“I picked up a public channel which originated from the enemy fleet. Let me replay it for you, sir.”

The reply began with Gareto’s voice.

“Do you realize this is a public channel?”

“Are you having problems with the Mice?”

Juron narrowed his eyes immediately.

“That is it, commander. The channel was shut off.”

He had heard of the Mice. It was a light cruiser that was developed by United Sol. To be more precise, the Bau had allegedly developed it in house. He did take a

quick look at the ship and it wasn't rocket science to figure out the nature of the ship's development; it was to save costs.

And it wasn't also rocket science to figure out that there was likely a design issue with the Mice and that Jupiter administrator Emuel chose to expose it on purpose.

A tint of smile emerged on Juron's face briefly. His decision with sticking with Emuel was paying dividend.

"To all ships, forward," Juron barked an order. "Push forward and crash them!"

As soon as his fleet pushed forward, Jupiter fleet broke off from Earth defense fleet, leaving the defending fleet just 14,000 ships with a fair amount of them were malfunctioning due to whatever problems were with the Mice.

At this point, Juron laughed his lungs out as a screen showed Earth defense fleet cruisers were being wiped out dozens after another. But they did not go down without a fight and instead of withdrawing, they pushed forward as well, clashing directly with Juron's fleet and did a fair amount of damage before the last few surrendered.

"Damage report," Juron stoically demanded.

"We have 19,283 ships, sir, with 180 being former USF ships."

It was far more casualties than Juron expected. Regardless, the bridge crews cheered.

“Sir, we’ve defeated them!”

Juron sneered to put a dent on their cheerful mood. “It’s far from over,” He stated. He was indeed correct that it was far from over. He had always expected to defeat Earth defense fleet. The real challenge was yet to be confronted. Jupiter fleet was still there and, if Emuel played a defensive battle by Jupiter assault station, it wasn’t going to be easy. And, although he wasn’t terribly concerned, there was Uranus outpost led by Commodore Kain.

“Repair if needed. We are staying here for a few days before moving out.”

Juron, Wong, and Garrik were once again in a meeting. This time, however, they were seeing each other in person. Wong and Garrik had apparently landed down on his ship to meet him.

Wong and Garrik exchanged handshakes with Juron in the captain’s quarter.

“Good job, Juron,” Wong stated. “I may not like you but you’ve done good service today for the nation.”

Juron smiled. He did not like Wong, either, but respect was due for a man who acted professionally.

Garrik reacted with glee as well. “Earth defense fleet defeated! The feared EDF defeated! Our people shall remember this day.”

“I am sorry but this is far from over,” Juron explained his thoughts regarding Jupiter assault station as well as Uranus outpost.

Wong and Garrik nodded in acknowledgement.

“Indeed,” Wong responded, “Far from over. I see why you didn’t promise that you were planning to defeat United Sol in this war.”

“Theoretically, number wise, this fleet is strong enough to push all the way to Earth,” Juron continued his explanation, “But I am expecting Jupiter battle to be too hard. Therefore, my primary objective is to weaken Jupiter before withdrawing.”

Wong nodded along. “Sounds like a plan. I shall go back and oversee the repairs.”

“Aye, General.”

Wong rushed the repairs and they were ready to move out in 24 hours. And they duly moved out and headed toward Uranus outpost.

“Kain..., eh.” Juron whispered to himself while tapping his index finger on a chair arm. “Let’s see how good you are.”

In his plans, there was a big question mark on Kain. He couldn’t find anything about him. In fact, there was nothing. Background search revealed nothing and a report he received from his agents when spying on Kain was comical at best. They referred him as “a clueless man with hot chicks”. Since Juron had no information about him, he couldn’t come up with any plan to attack him tactically. His only plan was win the battle with numbers. That was the only tactics he could come up with.

For the better or the worse, he chose to duke it out with Kain.

“Uranus outpost in sight, sir.”

Juron looked over at the station on main screen. The station was surrounded by a small fleet which meant Kain was going to play a defensive battle which he expected.

“Open a hailing channel,” Juron ordered.

The main screen blinked and Kain showed up on screen. Neither of them spoke right away and would stare at each other for a moment. When Juron was about to speak, Kain bellowed.

“Well, you do look like a motherfucker. Cut the channel!”

And then the screen went blank.

A crew reported, “They are attacking us, commander.”

It was unexpected. He expected Kain to react similar to Gareto. He expected him to have a mutual conversation prior the battle.

“Fine, attack back,” Looking uninterested, he replied.

He was taken back a little by Kain’s reaction but it helped him to understand what kind of person Kain was: A man who didn’t care for formalities. It was a simple clue but it was a start. If he didn’t care for formalities, he was likely going to cross lines as well which would make him a far more dangerous character than someone who followed rules such as Gareto.

Therefore, he decided that the faster this battle was over, the better. Even if it meant more casualties.

“Push forward,” Juron barked an order. “I want them crushed!”

The battle was, at first glance, a one-sided battle. Juron’s fleet had a vast advantage in numbers and it looked like Uranus outpost wouldn’t stand a chance. However, as the battle went on, it turned to be not so one-sided fight.

Although the offending fleet pushed hard, the defending fleet did not budge. Using their station tactically, they were avoiding losses while Juron’s fleet had no way of avoiding losses.

For someone like Kain who previously had no military experience, the guy was defending well.

“He knows what he is doing...,” Juron said to himself while watching the main screen on his bridge. Wong’s ships pushed hard but were pushed back. However, he had little concerns. The vast numeral advantage meant that the station would go down if given enough time.

What he did not expect that both Uranus station and its defending fleets were surprisingly resilient.

“Somebody explain to me why that station isn’t going down.” Pointing at main screen, Juron complained. “Its shields had gone down hours ago.”

It took a crew a moment to answer. “A quick scan shows that it has got very thick armor plates and it looks almost as if they designed their armor specifically for this battle.”

Uranus station armor was what the Maeka called “Wax scale armor”. Because the main weapon was laser which was thermal energy, the clan designed and installed armor plates in layers. When a laser beam hit on a layer, it’d melt and then the next layer could take the damage. Since a laser turret would need to cool down before firing another shot, the melted layer would solidify by time it fired again.

The concept was not suitable for ships because they were mobile. Molten layers would simply be swept away. For a stationary object like a station, the concept was solid. The Maeka never used this technology previously however because no one bothered giving them a chance.

Juron growled after hearing the explanation. The battle was dragging on which was the last thing he wanted.

“Sir, a small fleet is on sensors. It’s coming from direction of Saturn,” A crew reported a raised voice. “The number is ... 1,700, sir.”

It was a small reinforcement. But it angered Juron. In the scenario he planned, Saturn administrator Gaer would never mobilize his fleet. He was supposed to simply surrender when demanded.

This was NOT a part of his plan.

“Sir, General Wong is reporting that he has lost half of his fleet and is asking Garrik to assist.”

Juron’s eyebrows twitched. Half of Wong’s fleet meant five thousand ship losses. It took a whole Earth defense fleet to cause such damages.

“Permission granted. Let Garrik’s fleet join.”

The fleet pushed even harder to break through but even with Uranus station partially in flames, neither its fleet and the station was going down. They simply did not budge.

It was what one would call steadfast defending. Normally, in such dire situation, few ships would blink and defect which was what exactly happened to Earth defense fleet. However, in this case, no one was defecting. No one was fleeing. It was as if they were prepared to die defending their post.

Juron did not want to see such mentality from United Sol and realized that it was his biggest mistake to let Kain live.

“Commander, nine ships have broken off.”

Juron smiled at last. He assumed that they were defecting.

“Sir, uh, the ships are sailing directly to us at a very high speed. A quick scan shows that they are on a suicide run with their reactors heavily overloaded!”

His smile quickly faded.

Juron barked, “So what, it’s just nine ships. Stay put!”

And it wasn’t a good decision which was reflected by Wong’s decision to disobey and attempted to move away. When the ships blew, they were deep into Juron’s fleet. They created powerful shockwaves which knocked hundreds of ships out of balance. The immediate damage was minimal as only few tens of ships were destroyed but the overall damage lingered.

“Hundreds are reporting minor to moderate damages, sir,” A crew reported and another added, “Sir, General Wong wants to withdraw. He says his fleet formation has been badly affected by the shockwaves.”

Juron felt he could use a break as well. “Very well, withdraw. We will be in a visual range but let us withdraw for an hour.”

This was when an urgent message was delivered. Juron was informed that Freedom colony had mobilized its fleet and was heading toward Uranus outpost.

And there was more. Apparently, Nebula pirate mobilized as well and a fighter fleet of 200,000 was on move. The trouble was their destination was unknown at this point. They were likely to join Freedom colony’s fleet but there was also a possibility that they were heading straight to Andromeda system.

Overall, the council was ordering them to withdraw.

Initially, Juron was shell-shocked when he heard the news.

“What the fuck,” He uttered. “Is that message genuine?”

“The keys match, sir. I have to say it is genuine.”

Growling, he was silent.

“Sir, General Wong wants to talk to you.”

“Put on screen.”

Wong spoke as soon as he was on screen. “Juron, I heard the news. Give me few more hours. I think we can break them down.”

Unexpectedly, Juron responded with a smile, "If you so desire, so be it, General. But we will withdraw when I say the word. Are we clear?"

Wong nodded and the channel was dead.

He decided that this war was a failure and he actually found the unexpected enemy a blessing in disguise. He now had the perfect reason to withdraw and his failure to get past Uranus outpost wouldn't be blamed as much.

The battle resumed after an hour and Wong attacked with everything he had but the defenders weren't still budging. Eventually, Juron decided enough was enough when a report came in that 90% of Wong's fleet was gone and Garrik's fleet had suffered significant losses.

"Hail the station," Juron ordered. "Voice only."

"It's on, sir."

Taking a deep breath, Juron spoke, "Do you feel like surrendering now?"

Kain responded promptly, "Have my men acted like those who are about to surrender?"

Juron growled weakly but there was a smile on his face. His war may have failed but he felt he gained something valuable; he now had information about Kain.

"Close the channel," He declared calmly, "To all ships, withdraw at once."

The fleet made a swift and graceful retreat.

Wong, Juron, and Garrik were on a channel together to discuss the matter at hand.

“The council sent more info about our new enemy,” Juron stated, “As you know, we were told that 7,000 ships from Freedom colony are heading to us and they don’t know what 200,000 Nebula pirates are planning to do. Now they are telling us that the fleet has withdrawn to the colony and is joined by Nebula pirates. Currently, they are gathered at Freedom colony.”

“What does that mean?” Garrik wondered while Wong remained looking uninterested.

Juron explained, “What that means is that they know that we are withdrawing and that they expect to see us at Freedom colony.”

Garrik certainly did not look pleased with the idea and asked, “Are we to fight them?”

“I don’t see us winning the battle, so no.” Juron’s answer was firm. “Nebula pirate fighters are of frigate strength and there are 200,000 of them. We don’t stand a chance especially when there is so little info.”

“They are waiting for us at the colony though, aye?” Garrik stated.

“Allegedly, yes.”

“What are we going to do?”

Juron scoffed. “Just because they are waiting for us, it does not mean we have to comply. I have no intention of facing them. We are going straight to our home system.”

“But...” Garrik didn’t finish his sentence. It wasn’t honorable, he was going to say.

Juron knew what he was trying to say but paid no attention.

“The council asked us to withdraw and we complied. There is nothing more,” He concluded.

Juron wasn’t terribly concerned with the newfound enemies. He was almost certain that Freedom colony wouldn’t actually attack even if encountered. Attacking others wasn’t the spirit of Freedom colony. On the other hand, the Nebula pirates posed a concern and their strength, as shown with 200,000 fighters, was certainly something to think about.

Regardless, Juron held onto his thoughts until he had more info to work with and promptly directed the heavily damaged fleet toward Andromeda system, by passing Freedom colony in progress.

However, in midway, sensors detected huge swarms of vessels.

“A very large amount of ships is on course to intercept us,” A crew reported urgently. “The computer is telling us that the number is near 200,000.”

“The Nebula pirates,” Juron whispered.

“They are a lot faster than us. We cannot avoid them.”

The problem with Nebula pirates was that it was nigh impossible to find out what they were thinking as it was nigh impossible to send spies into the Nebula. One

thing was clear however. It was that Nebula pirates weren't commanded by Freedom colony.

Naturally, Juron's next big question was who was their leader.

"Heya, kiddo."

Sae was on main screen. Her cheerful face wasn't very fitting in the current mood of the bridge.

"I should have known," Juron replied with a sigh. "The Witch."

Her cheerful expression faded away and she responded, "You forgot little."

Juron would have normally ignored her complaint but the situation called for a compromise. "Fine, the little witch."

Sae's smile came back on her face. "Good, kid."

"So, what have you come here for? More importantly, what do you intend to accomplish?"

Juron had always known that Sae had deep connections but her accomplishment of enticing Nebula pirates to react like this was beyond his imagination. It prompted him to erase everything he knew about her.

He needed new input.

"I should ask the same to you. What do you intend to accomplish by attacking United Sol?"

Juron shrugged with a smile. "The Bau deserves this."

Unexpectedly, Sae agreed. “Well, yeah, you do have a point. I doubt many can argue with that.”

“If so, do you mind stepping aside? We are heading back home, you see.”

“Fine, go. It’s not like I wanted to do this.”

Juron didn’t like it; he couldn’t read Sae’s mind at all.

“Then who made you do this?”

“My mom did.”

As far as Juron knew, Sae’s biological parents were dead. She had an unknown father and a mother who ran a prostitute hotel called “Mosaic passion” on Heaven of Order a thousand years ago. She wasn’t adopted by anyone also.

“Who is your mother?” Juron dared asking although he didn’t expect a result.

“What.” Sae shrugged in return with a delightful frown. “Sorry, kid. I am not introducing you to my mom. I can’t marry you cuz your penis is too small.”

Few crews grinned at her joke. As for Juron, he had enough of her non-sense.

“Resume the course,” He barked an order. “We are going through them.”

The Nebula pirate fleet simply watched Juron’s fleet sail by them. They didn’t take any actions at all and kept their word. Although there was no battle, it felt like a defeat for Juron. The defeat back at Uranus outpost had merit. He found out what kind of man Kain was and he was going to plot new plans to tackle him in the next war. But the new enemy in Nebula pirates they remained a mystery even after an encounter. No matter how strong an opponent was, as long as he had enough

information, he could find a way to tackle them. But if there was little or no information, it would be a different story. And the last thing he wanted was attacking an unknown opponent.

“Scan the ships. Let’s bring something at least,” Juron ordered.

Nebula pirates operated mostly with heavy fighters. They were classified as fighter crafts because they were one-manned. But its size and firepower was nothing like what one would expect from a fighter craft.

For an example, a USF fighter featured dual gatling guns which would simply be deflected off a cruiser’s armor. The guns hardly put a dent on frigate’s armor even. Application of USF fighter was extremely limited. It had no shields and paper thin armor, all of which meant a single hit was enough to take it down.

In contrast, a Nebula pirate fighter craft was five times bigger and featured dual lasers on front and an automated turret on rear. While it did not feature shields, it had far thicker armor to compensate. A USF fighter operated on batteries whereas a Nebula fighter operated with a small ACM reactor fueled by its pilot’s own waste. It also had the maneuverability of a fighter. While its firepower was weak, due to it being laser, it was capable of dealing damage to any form of armors. And 200,000 of them meant even Juron could not write them off.

In the end, he could not risk a battle, especially when his fleet was down to 12,000. Furthermore, Wong’s fleet was gone and he was the veteran of the field. He wasn’t going to trust Garrik.

The council welcomed the fleet with a parade. After all, they did defeat Earth defense fleet and it seemed that fact alone was enough for celebrations. Juron was hailed as a national hero who masterminded the victory. Wong and Garrik were credited handsomely as well.

All in all, the council was satisfied, on surface at least. The council refused to reveal to the public that Freedom colony intervened and threatened the media outlets to keep quiet on the matter.

A special council session was opened to debate on the matter at hand while the parade was still going on. Wong and Garrik were involved in the parade while Juron was summoned to the council chamber.

“Freedom colony is not a threat,” Juron explained, “They intervened because they were afraid that I’d crush United Sol. It is the balance they seek and I was about to destroy the balance.”

A council member responded, “But you were not going to destroy United Sol.”

“Indeed. As I stated at the beginning of the campaign, my goal was to reach Jupiter. Of course, they had no way of knowing our true intention, and it’s good that they failed to know. It means our security was firm.”

Another councilor spoke up, “You sound confident but the fleet damage is massive. Only 12,000 returned. I highly doubt you’d be able to get past Jupiter with the fleet.”

“Which is exactly why I promised that I would not go past Jupiter. I kept my end of bargain. Granted, the fleet withdraw at Uranus outpost but it was at the council’s request.”

Which was more or less the truth. The hard truth was that Juron’s fleet was unable to conquer Uranus outpost quickly enough especially given the fact its defending fleet was small. But Juron had a firm excuse: The council requested withdrawal.

The council panicked when they received information that Nebula pirates was getting involved. They called the fleet back without thinking much into it.

“A few hours more and the outpost would have surrendered,” Juron insisted firmly, “The fleet damage shows that we were pushing hard to conquer it.”

The council members had the battle report displayed on their holographic monitors. Some of them were whispering to each other and few looked unconvinced by Juron’s statement. However, the overall assessment was that Juron wasn’t given enough time and that he was recalled before he could produce a result. They also could not discredit the fact that he did mastermind the victory against Earth defense fleet.

Overall, he passed, barely.

Meaning he earned his second term as a councilor.

The council speaker, Mich-Don, stood before the speech deck Juron once stood. There was a holographic monitor displaying information on the desk and he was

sincerely looking down at it. After a moment of uneasy silence, Mich-Don began the verdict.

“Councilor Juron, arise.”

Juron promptly stood up from his desk.

Mich-Don continued, “Councilor Juron, first of all, I on behalf of Andromedians, thank you for teaching the Bau a lesson. Many will be able to sleep soundly tonight. Earth defense fleet haunted us during the rebellion era. Our hero, the liberator, did defeat them but it was never a sweeping victory. You, however, achieved a decisive victory.”

Some councilors gave Juron an ovation and Mich-Don continued, “You did well in the war. You planned it. You executed it. Unfortunately, the result leaves much to be desired and fleet casualties are heavy. At the same time, we recognize that the situation was out of your control. An unexpected entity entered the scene, namely Nebula pirates.”

Mich-Don made a short pause before continuing.

“Councilor Juron, we extend your councillorship to the second term. However, we will not extend the fleet aid package. You shall find your own means of supporting your fleet.”

It was a compromise that the council reached. They felt Juron was too talented to let go but at the same time they found his methods highly questionable. Some argued that he was too dangerous to keep around. But they generally agreed that

it was their best interest to keep him under their watch, thus the extension of his councillorship.

At the same time, replenishing Wong and Garrik fleets were going to require significant budgets and they decided to make Juron's life a little harder by withdrawing financial support for his fleet which he gained from Lord Arnkle. This was also due to a fact that Juron's fleet suffered absolutely no casualties.

"That is the verdict we've reached. I must note that the financial aid decision is effective immediately," Mich-Don concluded.

The verdict was a big blow to Juron's plans. Granted, he did secure his second councillorship but no longer having the financial package for his fleet meant he needed a sponsor or else. His immediate concern was paying crew wages which he'd have to pay out of his pocket.

Apparently for Juron, he found new enemies in and outside of his nation.

Fin