

Parallel story is [Kain and Suu arc] [13] [3rd invasion] [9652].

Just as Kain is running out of options, so is Juron. He, too, is running out of everything.

[Juron arc] [7] [3rd invasion] [9652]

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On year 9652 76th day, Juron formally declared a war on United Sol. This was 3 years after the non-aggression pact was signed between Andromeda union and Freedom colony.

At last, all obstacle appeared to be gone and Juron felt confident about the war this time. However, he made no promises to the council other than he will do his best to defeat United Sol.

Previous two invasions taught him lessons that there would always be some unseen factors disturbing his grand plan. Therefore, making bold promises would damage him.

"We are passing Freedom colony, General," Juron informed Garrick who was more than happy to finally lead a full invasion on his own.

With General Wong declining to join the invasion due to personal reasons, Garrick was put in charge of the entire fleet.

"We are taking United Sol down this time surely, yeah?"

"Indeed, we shall."

However, despite responding positively, he was no longer certain. He did his bits and concluded that there were very little variables left. However, he also had very little variables left on the second invasion as well.

In other words, it seemed that a war of this scale had far too many unpredictable factors to make an accurate prediction out of.

One of "very little variables left" was Venus. Cecil had yet to act in the previous two invasions but he was always a question mark. With only a fleet of 7,000 ships, on paper, Juron had little to fear even if Venus acted in defense of United Sol. At the same time, the very same fleet defeated Earth defense fleet with a single digit loss during former President Gvew's reign.

He had spent fair bit of credit to acquire all reports for the battle. His conclusion was that the fleet was highly trained and their ships were superior in spite of having the same USF Courage hull.

In short, if Venus acted, he would sail into an uncharted territory.

Another concern of his was Garrick himself. He was young and eager which Juron considered a recipe for disaster. He would have preferred Wong to lead the line. However, Wong was reaching his retirement age at 687 years old. His reason for declining to join the war was due to that reason. There was no blame or shame placed on him for refusing to join the war from general public. The man deserved rest or so Juron was told.

He lamented the fact that Wong was missing. Alas, there was nothing he could have done to revert the situation. One can't defeat the flow of time after all.

Deep down inside, he felt this grand plan was slowly breaking apart.

Once Garrick's fleet crossed the border sector, the real show was about to begin.

"We are ignoring Pluto this time," Juron informed Garrick on the bridge.

"Agreed. That planet serves no purpose."

"Once we defeat Admiral Kain, Emuel will join us and United Sol will be over."

Garrick rubbed his hands and said in great anticipation. "At last."

Garrick's fleet formation was Juron's own invention. It was called "Triple spheres" formation. The formation was consisted of three spheres of fleets. A fleet belonging directly to Garrick would be the inner most circle. An aggressive fleet would sit in the middle and the outer circle being meat shields. Each layer rotated in order to migrate damage. The formation was defensive one and it was the one he felt the most suited for a prolonged siege from an attacking position.

There was no surprises along the way and the fleet safely arrived at Uranus colony.

"A fleet is 3,200 has formed a sphere formation around the station," A crew reported, "No other fleet in range."

"They are waiting for a reinforcement from Saturn. We need to keep that in mind," Juron told others.

Garrick chuckled and joked, "That reinforcement is, what, 2,000-something according to our informats. That's nothing."

Several crews on the bridge agreed by sliently grinning. Indeed, there was nothing to worry about. However, past experience taught Juron that a war was never easy even in good adventage. Still, he refused to say anything further; he didn't want to dent moral as well as risk his reputation among others – Something he would have never bothered when he began his grand agenda.

In other words, Juron grew as a person. He longer spoke too bluntly. He no longer acted selfishly in front of others. He learned to keep a public face.

"Fire once all ships are in range," Garrick commanded.

Thus, the siege commenced and a week passed without much progress.

Juron was becoming frustrated. Kain's fleet was going down. Yet, there was absolutely no sign of chaos among their ranks. It had been a week since Uranus colony was besieged and their defense fleet was down to 2,000.

The pattern had been the same. No matter how hard he hit Kain, his side had always remained calm. There was no defection and no disorganization.

An ordinary commander in his position would have surrendered or at least come up with an escape deal. Or those under him would have buckled.

Then the expected Saturn reinforcement arrived.

"General, two small fleets from Saturn," A crew reported.

Garrick twisted his head for confusion. "Two?"

Juron replied, "They must have split their fleet. I suppose they aim to tackle us from more than one front."

The crew exclaimed, "General, Uranus fleet is also mobilizing!"

"Keep calm. This was expected," Juron replied.

Indeed, he did expect some sort of offense from Admiral Kain. After all, there would be no reinforcement from Earth, meaning simply taking a defensive stance would get him nowhere. He needed to attack and this was his chance when the fresh reinforcement arrived.

Garrick's fleet did take some damage in the end, but the attack was successfully repelled. A battle report was made shortly after.

"Our loss is 1782 ships, sir. Their loss is about 1200."

Garrick couldn't care less and neither could Juron. Granted, the defenders got away

with a minor victory but, in the big picture, the victory meant nothing.

Uranus and its defense fleet steadfastly defended. Juron had to admit one thing.

Kain was a master defender. However, he firmly believed it was only a matter of time before he'd either have to surrender or be destroyed along the colony.

Yes, Juron had full intension of completly wiping out Uranus colony. The lives of civilians didn't cross his mind. They were simply obstacles for him.

"Um, General, sensor is detecting a medium-size fleet, approaching really fast from behind us," A crew reported.

Juron's eyes twitched.

"A fleet? How large?" Garrik inquired.

"About 5,000, I believe. Too far to read their signatures."

Garrick narrowed his eyes and questioned, "Behind us..., so they are not from Sol? They can't be from Freedom colony, can they?"

"I doubt that," Juron replied.

"Where are they from? I wasn't informed of this, Juron."

Juron had a vague hunch but didn't speak about it since there was no evidence to back it up.

In an hour, the fleet was identified.

"They are from Venus, General. They are from Venus!"

Upon hearing it, Juron closed his eyes. He lamented a strange tendency of unlikely variables becoming a reality in the wars.

Garrick stood up from his chair and looked at Juron who had his eyes shut. "Juron, they are from Venus?! What does this mean?"

Juron opened his eyes at once and told Garrick. "No matter, there are only 5,000. We will crash them."

Assured by Juron, Garrick sat back down and nodded repeatedly. "Of course, we are 16,000 strong. We can take them."

How wrong they were.

As soon as the battle with the Venusian fleet began, things started to go south. Juron's triple spheres formation used a damage calculating algorithm to rotate ships to prevent them from taking armor and hull damage. The algorithm worked fine against other opponents. However, when incoming damage was too great, the algorithm started to backfire. Ships were taking armor damage by time the algorithm called out which ships must rotate. It was already too late then.

Juron and programmers attempted to alter the algorithm on the fly, but the damage was already done.

Once moral was trashed, it went only downhill from there. The worst of all was, however, Garrick's reaction or the lack there of. He acted like a scared puppy in his chair, shaking in fear and randomly barking commands such as, "Don't' let them get near me!"

With a leader like that, it was doomed to fail. Juron didn't even bother. He wished Wong were here. He'd have taken control of the situation. They may still have lost, but fleet wouldn't have shattered, causing far greater loss than needed and would have treated properly.

Juron was on his bed in his quarter when Garrick's fleet or whatever left of it was

fleeing. He didn't care about the status of the fleet at the moment. He needed to assess the situation and come up with excuses to present to the council.

At the same time, he felt awe when he watched the Venusian fleet take on them head-on. It was a sight to behold. The fleet was so organized that he felt it was operated by A.I.. Their weapons and shields were out of spec as well. Finally, there was no doubt in his mind that the fleet was led by a talented and experienced commander.

When everything was combined in one package, it came to little surprise that Garrick's fleet of 16,000 ships crumbled so fast against 5,000. The defeat was painful but he felt that the defeat was deserved. *'Who wouldn't have lost?'* was his line of thoughts.

Which brought him an ultimate question: can he defeat United Sol?

His gut feeling was no. This was his third attempt. His chance was running out.

Whatever excuses he would come up with, the core fact that he started three invasions wouldn't change.

"One more time perhaps and probably the last," Hes said to himself on the bed.

He was no longer confident however. Garrick proved that he wasn't worth of a fleet commander. Alas, he was the only one who had the finance and was also the only one willing.

"Perhaps a different approach..."

Espionage and sabotage would have been his preferred choice over destroying United Sol. But it wasn't easy with Kain in charge. Emuel easily fell for the tricks but he was in Jupiter. Outer Sol, in other words Kain, must be defeated for Emuel to dance along him.

There was no different approach to make against Kain. He wasn't someone who fancied wealth. He didn't fancy fame, either. Additionally, his inner circle was very tight-knit and no one around him was going to defect. The only way to defeat him was via brute force.

"So be it," He concluded.

Once his mind was re-assured that there was no other approach, he began to fire up his brain, scheming a new plan to attack Kain.

Freedom colony was what stopped the second invasion and Juron did what was necessary to stop them from meddling in again. Venus stopped the third. He will do what is necessary to stop them.

Who could stop him for the forth invasion?

As far as he was concerned, there was no one else for certain this time.

"The forth will be the last," He said to himself with a grin on his face.

The council was actually lenient and laid-back when Juron presented himself in front of them because his defeat was what they truly desired.

They were progressively more concerned with Garrick growing influence. Any sort of victory even if they failed to conquer United Sol would have been bad news for them. Garrick's total defeat meant the council could comfort them and say, "told you so."

Juron stood alone surround by elevated antique wooden chairs. The council speaker, Mich-Don who was the only one standing, addressed Juron with a soft voice.

"We are sorry that the third invasion did not go as planned. However, we are glad

that both you and General Garrick made out safely."

Juron realized, at this point that, that council desired their defeat. His inner self smiled ominously while he responded to Mich-Don.

"I thank you for your kind words," He said, "This defeat has taught me valuable lessons. I will not disappoint you next time."

Council members whispered to each other. Mich-Don himself stared down at Juron for a moment.

No matter how justified the three wars were, each war cost credit. And each war progressively cost a lot more than its previous one. The third war, due to the major defeat, would cost trillions of credit. The council's coffer was starting to show its bare bottom.

The wars needed to stop; they needed to stop Juron and keep him in check at the same time.

At the same time, Juron campaign was hugely popular with the public as well as the media. Cutting him loose would be costly enough to risk a minor civil war. Therefore, the council needed to keep Juron in the picture which also meant keeping his war alive.

With everything in mind, Mich-Don replied after clearing his throat. "The council supports your cause, Councillor Juron. For now though, please get some rest. We shall discuss this later."

He apparently deflected Juron's attack by postponing to answer. For now though, this was enough for both of them.

"I see. I shall excuse myself." Lightly bowing, Juron walked out of the chamber with swagger.

Then he visited Garrick at his manor on New Creg's who was soaking himself in liquor out of shame and embarrassment.

"I was fucking a moron out there, wasn't I?" was what he told Juron as soon as he walked into a balcony overlooking an alien scenery of New Creg's.

Light green sky and barren white rocky terrain, yes, the scenery was as alien as it could get for anyone who were used to Earth environment.

"You don't need to put all the blames on yourself," Juron comforted him, "To be fair, not many would have withstood Venus' fleet."

"Gods..." Garrick drank a shot of whisky at once. "I didn't feel like we were battling a fleet. It was ... It felt like something else."

Taking a deep breath, Juron, too, recalled the battle. He somewhat agreed with Garrick's assessment.

"General, that was a proper fleet," He said to Garrick, "Properly updated ships, properly trained crews, good captains, and a good commander. That was the kind of fleet I wished to create."

Garrick stared at an empty glass intently. "Updating ships... R&D is too expensive, Councillor. I have a choice, either invest in R&D which I may or may not get a result on or reinforce the fleet."

With the defeat, the choice was obvious.

"I will make sure that Venus won't bother us the next time. You have my word on that," Juron claimed.

"We are going to invade United Sol again?" Garrick sounded surprised.

"As long as you are willing, yes. Were you told otherwise by someone else?"

Garrick filled his glass of whisky. He held the glass in front of him and started to swirl

it slowly. "Mich-Don came by and told me that I did well and I should take a long vacation. He assured me that the council was convinced of my ability as a general."

That raccoon...

Clearing throat, Juron told Garrick, "General, you are still young. If you give up now, you will be a loser. If you expected no defeat in your career, you are mistaken. You learn from your defeats and come back stronger next time."

Garrick sighed deeply but seemed in agreement overall. He said no more, though, and continued to drink.

Juron felt he was best left alone at this point.

Leaving his manor behind, Juron was walking on a street. Despite the green sky, there was no green tint in the air. Thus, it wasn't too bad. Personally, he preferred black sky of Second Earth.

Yes, on A.D. 9652, Andromeda council passed an act to rename Heaven of Order to Second Earth. Juron was indirectly responsible for the act to have successfully passed. His war campaigns brought a strong rise of patriotism within the nation which gave a birth to suggestions that their capital planet was clearly better than original Earth and that their planet should be renamed accordingly.

Juron's "reckless" wars brought vigor to the nation and the council was making full use of it with high approval ratings. At this point, both Juron and the council needed each other despite growing friction.

It was a very fragile balance between them.

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