

Kain may stand alone but he is with good women.

[Kain and Suu arc] [5] [He who stands alone] [9616]

Rev 2.2

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The distance between Uranus outpost and Earth was massive. It'd take three to four weeks for a high speed cruiser to reach Earth from Uranus, provided that the journey was smooth.

Such a distance from Earth meant that the influence of the Ark was relatively thin within the outpost.

In other words, whoever was in charge of the outpost was literally the God within its sphere of influence and the outpost covered a vast area. The outpost was the first line of defense for Sol system and its sphere of influence went beyond Pluto.

If someone ambitious had taken the outpost, he may have been scheming to get the most out of his time as the administrator of the outpost. For an example, the administrator of Uranus outpost could impose a fee for merchant freighters passing through. It had been done before. He could also charge extra "taxes" from its residents and businesses: it had occurred before.

However, none of that occurred with Kain. Furthermore, he actively interacted with the local businesses and residents. He acted more like just a friend who happened to have the authority.

Therefore, his popularity rose swiftly in just few years.

“Sir!” Two guards saluted at him once as he and his wife, Ritsuki, walked casually toward the command bridge of the outpost.

Upon entering the bridge, the view of casually working crewmen came to the view. All of them were seated in front of their consoles and were responding to calls or requests.

The traffic that went through the outpost almost tripled ever since he became the administrator. The previous administrator imposed fees on passing the safe area. Therefore, a large portion of freighters avoided the direct route which caused pirates to go rampant.

Since there was no more fees, merchants used safer routes again which also had a factor in decreased pirate activities. However, decreased revenue for pirates meant that they became far more active in areas that weren't patrolled well which had forced merchants to use the safe routes even more as a side effect.

And there was also Suu who vigilantly patrolled the immediate vicinity of the outpost. She ignored all sort of protocols to protect merchant ships. Their safety came first and her vigorous efforts was a part of the incentives which pushed to merchants to use the outpost more. Coupled with no more hidden fees, the Uranus outpost was seeing rapid growth in its population and business.

Kain continued to walk toward to the front end of the bridge whereas Ritsuki stood still by the exit. Kain then turned around to face the crew once he reached the end.

“Hello, everyone,” He casually began his speech. “This bridge will be under a regular maintenance from 16 to 24. You are to leave half an hour prior and relocate to the secondary bridge.”

The secondary bridge was for backup purpose but, before Kain came along, the bridge had never been utilized. However, ever since the Maeka arrived, they actively renovated vast portions of the outpost and the backup bridge was no exception. Regular maintenance had never been done, either, until Kain and the Maeka came along.

Therefore, it was a breath of fresh air for local crews to know that their workplace was being looked after which ultimately meant a better work environment and better safety standards.

The crew responded by nods and went back to their work, and Kain walked back to join Rituski and left the bridge.

Samuel was waiting just outside.

“Sir,” He greeted Kain and Ritsuki. Samuel had been promoted to Assistant deputy administrator. Basically, he was Kain’s sidekick. “Captain Suu has just returned from her patrol mission.”

“Oh?” There was a sneaky grin on Kain’s face. “What’s the damage this round?”

“17 damaged ships, two lost, sir,” Samuel told him gravely with a glaring gaze pointing at Kain as if he was expecting a certain kind of response.

With a slight shrug, Kain responded with a mild grin, “Well, that’s better than before, isn’t it?”

“Sir, she needs to be disciplined.”

“Disciplined for what? Loss is expected when pirates are rampant.”

“That may be true but you do realize that we cannot afford to keep losing ships like this. We can’t really afford to keep repairing ships at this rate, either.”

Samuel was talking about financial issues at Uranus outpost. The population of the outpost was just a shy of fifty thousand. Taxes from the local population wasn’t obviously enough to support the operations that the outpost was involved with. Therefore, the outpost was on a support package from the Ark and received two billions annually, AKA “2bn aid package”.

However, that wasn't enough. According to past records, it used to be enough, primarily because past administrators did not spend much on improving and maintaining the outpost. Samuel compiled a detailed report just few weeks ago.

Frustrated, he made a suggestion. "Sir, I know you won't like this but..."

"Don't start that again." Kain shut him off. "I am not going to impose fees on passing merchants. That is the final decision, I kept on telling you."

Samuel pressed however. "We need to boost our income. We cannot go on like this."

A part of the issue was Emuel's involvement or rather lack of. Jupiter had assisted Uranus outpost in patrolling, thus securing, Outer Sol. Ever since Fraser became the President, however, Emuel confined himself within Jupiter's sphere of influence. As a direct result, Uranus outpost workforces were stretched thin. More patrols were required, thus more ships, more crews, more supplies, more repairs, and more maintenance.

The "2bn aid package" given by the Ark wasn't enough. For Kain's part, he did seek a solution with Fraser. Fraser did understand the issue but his hands were tied. Furthermore, he revealed to Kain that United Sol coffers were empty literally and that he had far more pressing issues at hands.

At first, Kain was shocked to see the state his nation was under. After giving it some thoughts, he came to understand why. It wasn't a rocket science although he never thought as a civilian that his country was on brink of going bankrupt.

"Hon, I think you should talk to Gaer," Ritsuki suggested. "He may have an idea or two."

Kain and Ritsuki's relationship was platonic at worst. They married under understanding that they needed to get married for their own benefits. For Ritsuki, it was silent pressure from her clan. She needed to get married and it didn't matter who. For Kain, he needed the connections due to his rapid increase in social status.

Because they married under such reasons, they got along well, not as lovers, but as friends under mutual understanding. Neither of them was overly interested in starting a family and it turned out that their personalities matched fine. Therefore, naturally, they got along well.

“Yeah, I was thinking the same, Samuel, I want you to make a paper copy of the report you gave me earlier.”

Samuel gave him a firm nod. “You got it.”

As soon as he had the report, he took off in his personal fleet to Saturn. Of course, Ritsuki was with him.

A shuttle skillfully landed on a private landing pad by Gaer’s manor. A couple approached as the shuttle made its landing. As soon as it landed, its door slid open.

“It has been a while,” Gaer greeted Kain and Ritsuki formally. Natsuko was also with Gaer but, as usual, she stood silently behind him.

“Few years, yes,” Kain responded as he exited his shuttle. Ritsuki followed.

“How is the married life treating you?”

Kain shrugged. “Nothing much changed.”

“Same,” Ritsuki also responded casually.

Gaer smiled. “That means it’s working. A married life should not be too different from your usual life. That’s the way for a long marriage.”

“Shall we go in?” Natsuko suggested with a gentle and soothing voice.

They were invited to the same private bar which Kain once had a drink with Gaer. Natsuko started to break a large ice cube behind the exquisite bar while Gaer was preparing for drinks.

“So, what brings you here?” He asked while preparing drinks.

Ritsuki handed a paper file over Kain and he placed it gently down on the bar counter. He opened it and repositioned it so that Gaer could read while preparing drinks. He skimmed through it quickly.

Placing down drinks for Kain and Ritsuki, he said, “I see.”

“I am unable to source any further funding. I already consulted the President.”

“United Sol has been broke for some time,” Gaer explained. “But it has been getting far worse too quickly ever since the independence of Venus and Mars.”

He explained that it all began with Andromeda exploration and its subsequent colonization. Too much upfront credits were required for terraforming and developments of colonies. The Ark was never able to earn back its investments due to the rebellion.

“I know Andromedians will hate me for saying this but there was a reason the former President Mirren was hiking the taxes up. He knew too well that the nation’s coffers were getting dried up.”

Ritsuki wondered, “Wasn’t he the one who started the colonization though?”

“Yes, it was a hinder sight but nobody expected Andromedians to rebel.”

Sipping his drink, Kain inquired, “Do you have any advices for me? We can’t last another year without having to shut down some of essential services.” He couldn’t care less about history lessons.

Grinning, Gaer asked Kain. “Have you played lottery in your life?”

“Nope.” His reply was instant.

“And why not, if I may ask?”

“My chance of winning is virtually nil. Why would I waste my time and money for it?”

Natsuko smiled and Gaer clapped weakly few times. “Bravo. It’s a simple logic, isn’t it? But one of the rules to extort...” He cleared his throat. “Or gently force more taxes from citizens is lotto.”

“Taxing the fools, so to speak,” Natsuko added softly.

Gaer explained, “The logic is simple. Your chance of winning is, as you say, virtually nil. However, the size of its prizes makes desperate people to override the simple logic of overwhelming odds.”

“You cannot win if you don’t play,” Natsuko cited gently, “Somebody has to win. Why not me?”

Gaer continued, “It is a win-win choice for those who are involved. Even if somebody wins, they tend to waste all that money and go back to where they once were in few years. In other words, the prize money generally ends up being re-distributed to the economy.”

Kain gave the idea a thought and his first question was, “Do I even have the authority to create a new lottery in the outpost?”

“You don’t.” Gaer’s answer was instant. “But I don’t see why Fraser would reject your proposal.”

“I see.” Kain was done with his glass and asked for more.

“And there is something else,” Gaer said. “You may not know since you do not hail from a political family but we always rig lotteries.”

Ritsuki giggled as she heard, and Kain twisted his head in confusion. “You rig it? What for?”

Gaer explained, “We don’t choose who gets to win, but we do choose when there will be a winner or winners.”

Quickly Kain understood what he was saying. He frowned as he answered, “Are you serious?”

Gaer, Natsuko, Ritsuki, all nodded at once.

“You mean all the lotteries on Moon... or anywhere else..., it’s all rigged?!”

“I’d say partially rigged but rigged nevertheless,” Gaer said.

Kain uttered, “Holy crap...” He added, “No wonder people claim that politicians are crooks.”

Gaer had a good laugh. “You will soon join us. You do see why we do this though, don’t you?”

Kain was silent for a moment before he nodded. “Yes, I can see why. I had friends who couldn’t get enough of lotteries. They were always talking about winning the stupid thing which they never did. If you can get people to fork over money like that without them never realizing it was rigged, yes, I’d do that.”

“It’s not completely rigged. People do win.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever you say.”

“The jokes aside.” Gaer cleared his throat. “The low population on the outpost is also an issue. It’s only fifty thousand, yes?”

Kain nodded.

“Which means you won’t get enough profit from running a lottery. It will help but it’s not the solution you are looking for.”

Uranus outpost started off as a military installation. It never meant to generate any sort of taxes which was why the 2bn aid package was in place. However, the significance and function of Uranus outpost altered gradually over hundreds of years. Its population increased and it started to become a trade hub.

Essentially, the outpost outgrew the aid package. Even if Emuel’s behaviors didn’t change, the aid package wasn’t going to be enough in few decades.

Gaer added, “You are looking to generate an additional 500mil. The lotto isn’t going to help you much, and quite frankly, Saturn breaks even barely which means I cannot afford to give you aid.”

Kain shrugged at which point Natsuko spoke.

“There is someone who might be able to help you further.”

“Oh?” Gaer seemed surprised. “Who?”

“Mr. Core.”

Core T was the CEO of Core software corporation which specialized in military OS software. The company was responsible for all operation system software for every ships in clusters. Frigates, cruisers, transports, they all used OS software from his company.

“Oh, right.” Gaer seemed to have realized something. “Mr. Core currently has a sponsorship with us which brings in a hundred million annually. He may be able to help you a little indeed.”

“In what way?” Kain wondered.

“The Maeka is an engineering clan,” Natsuko answered. “And Mr. Core is very interested in the clan and its talents. Uranus outpost is under Maeka influence right now. I am unsure how, but he may be able to assist you further.”

And that concluded their meeting. Gaer arranged a meeting with Core at Uranus outpost and Kain and Ritsuki departed Saturn few days later.

In a captain’s quarter, there was a king size bed where Kain and Ritsuki were laying down in their undies. Kain was laying sideways and was casually touching her breasts over her bra which she didn’t seem to mind.

“I’ve met Mr. Core, yeah. I remember now,” Ritsuki said. “A nice man. He was mostly interested in technologies we were experimenting with.”

“Ah, take the bra off. It never feels the same with it on,” Kain said and she duly took her bra off without a fuss. “I don’t know why but it calms me down when I touch boobs.”

Pouting, Ritsuki complained jokingly, “Yeah, yeah, whatever.”

“You can touch mine if you like.”

“Like hell I will. You’ve got nothing but hair on your chest.”

“Girls must have something they like to touch. Testicles?”

“I don’t know what you’ve been watching from porn but women don’t really like to touch or suck those. It’s gross for God’s sake.”

“Oh well, it’s your loss.” And he continued touching her breasts.

Soon, he got up from the bed.

“Done?”

“Yeah, I am going to talk to the President.”

He dressed up afterwards and sat down at his desk while Ritsuki got under bed and decided to take a nap.

Pointing at her, Kain exclaimed, “Hey, hey, will you quit sleeping in a confined space like under the bed? You could choke yourself to death!”

“Leave me alone! I like sleeping in a dark and suffocating space!”

Sighing, Kain shook his head. “I never get her.” Clearing his throat anyway, he established a secured channel to the Ark.

Eventually, Fraser came up on a floating holographic screen on his desk.

“Commodore,” He greeted Kain formally. “Anything to report?”

Kain explained that he wished to create a lottery and wanted his executive order.

“I see what you are trying to do there.” On screen, he started to busily type something. “I am going to send you my electronic approval. I suppose you need just my approval?”

“Yes, sir.” Kain nodded. “I have the Maeka with me. They will program stuff.”

Fraser’s face darkened slightly. If he knew it was possible, he would have gotten Kain married to a Bau woman. The situation could have been far worse. Therefore, he wouldn’t complain but it could have been better. If Kain married a Bau woman, he felt the nation’s stability would have been much better. He even felt that he would take on Emuel head on if Kain was fully on his side.

“My approval has been sent. You now officially have my permission to create a new lottery at the outpost.”

Kain saluted at the screen. "Thank you, Mr. President."

"Commodore, I feel bad that I was unable to help you with the aid package but you must understand that our economy is in a very dire condition."

"Therefore doing what I can, sir."

"Yes, of course. Fraser out."

After the channel was closed, the holographic screen faded away, eventually completely vanishing from sight. Kain struck his deep into his chair and relaxed.

"Riki, you there?"

It was a nickname Kain made for Ritsuki. Basically, he took the first and last two letters of her name.

"Riki?" There was no response. "Fine, have your sweet nap."

When Kain and Co arrived back at the outpost, Samuel reported that Core Corporation contacted and informed him that their CEO was already on his way.

"That was fast. I like that."

Kain and Samuel were walking down a hallway toward the station bridge.

"Why is he coming here?"

"Gaer mentioned that he might be able to help us. I don't know how exactly. We will find out soon enough."

Samuel groaned. "I take that he was unable to help you then?"

"Nope."

"Bummer."

"Where is Suu?"

"She went on patrolling again."

“She’s doing a good job, you know,” Kain said. “Losses are expected.”

Samuel clearly did not want to admit but nodded along. “If you say so, sir.”

If money wasn’t an issue, it would have been fine indeed. The losses were fairly minimal. However, at the moment, Uranus outpost was posed to be in very deep red. They were going to be 500 million short by end of the year. And, unlike governments, the outpost did not have an ability to borrow credits. It needed to pay bills on time.

Ritsuki did some calculations and claimed that a lottery should be able to patch approximately 50 million credits of profit annually if it wasn’t rigged. If rigged, she reckoned 150 million. Long story short, they decided to rig it. Still, for the first year, they decided to run it fair and square.

Core T arrived not long after the arrangement was made. He arrived in a heavily modified cruiser along with a small fleet of fifteen ships which was bigger than Kain’s personal fleet, which also showed how powerful the man was. Core Corporation wasn’t exactly well-known due to the nature of their business of selling military-grade software. But the company size was the largest in clusters. Even Andromeda union navy ships used Core Corp’s software.

“Welcome, Mr. Core,” Kain greeted him who was with his accountant. Core was dressed in a dark gray formal suit while his accountant who was holding a datapad was dressed in black formal wear.

“Commodore Kain.” Core offered a handshake and they shook their hands. “You are one of the most talked man as of late.” His attention moved behind Kain and noticed a man and a woman who were Samuel and Ritsuki.

Noticing his attention, Kain explained. “The man’s Samuel, the second-in-command. The girl is my wife.”

“I see.” Core beamed a grin. “She is of Maeka, I assume?”

“Aye.” Kain gestured inwards. “Shall we go in? The docking bay is chilly.”

The guest quarter resembled that of a five star hotel room. There were two beds and essential furniture. The only distinctive feature was a large round table in middle of the room which was meant for negotiations.

Core and his accountant promptly sat down while only Kain sat down. Ritsuki and Samuel didn't join him and they left at once.

Core cleared his throat and went to the topic. “Administrator Gaer has already informed me the situation. Therefore, you don't need to tell me anything.”

Kain nodded and Core continued on.

“Allow me to explain the nature of the deal I have with Administrator Gaer. Commodore, we deal with military operating system software which means the price is heavy for even a small bug in the software. Therefore, we perform extensive testing prior releasing it for Sol and Andromeda navy.”

At this point, Samuel entered with a plate of several cups of tea and coffee. Kain took a cup of coffee and so did Core and his accountant. Samuel left at once.

Dipping into his coffee once, Core continued, “I like working with the Maeka. They are hard-working and decent people unlike the Bau who try to scam and bully everyone. I'd also like to work with the Dietrich since they are also an engineering clan but.” He shrugged. “They've gone independent which doesn't exactly make working with them easy.”

“I see,” Kain responded stoically.

“Now, our deal with Administrator Gaer is a hundred million annually. I know it sounds a lot on paper but you need to understand the risks that come with testing beta and even alpha software in spaceships.”

Kain narrowed his eyes. He understood what Core was trying to say.

“If you don't mind answering,” Kain inquired, “What kind of casualties am I expecting here?”

“If Administrator Gaer’s report is trustworthy, he had lost seventeen people last year. The causes were mainly unexpected collisions caused by malfunctions of thruster control. That is the kind of risks I am talking about here.”

“I see.”

Core crossed his fingers as his accountant was nervously looking at him. “Now, Commodore Kain, I cannot give you the same deal as I did with Administrator Gaer. We have a budget and we need to stick by it.” Grinning, he glanced at his accountant. “The reason he is looking nervous is because he doesn’t know what kind of deal I am going to give you. And quite frankly, my company isn’t doing exactly well, either.”

Kain smiled in return. “I feel the whole nation is in recession.”

“Precisely. Now...” His accountant was looking even more nervous at this point. “I am thinking 50m per year.”

“...Sir!” The accountant quickly whispered at him. “We are way over...”

“Not now,” Core said calmly. “That is apparently the best I can do for you.”

Kain sighed. It wasn’t enough although it wasn’t expecting him to be able to solve his financial issues. Core read his mind.

“I assume that is nowhere close enough. Why do you require such credits? If you can tell me, that is.”

“It’s mostly ship losses and damages.”

“Isn’t the 2bn aid package enough?”

Kain was pleasantly surprised that Core knew about the aid package. He thought it was confidential information.

“Commodore Kain, I have deep connections,” Core said with a crooked smile.

“If you know that much, I suppose I can tell you the rest,” Kain responded with a shrug. “I am 500 million short this year. At least, that is how much I am going under by computer calculation.”

“And how much have you secured so far?”

“With your aid, a hundred.”

Core tapped his finger on table with vacant gaze into the air. He continued to tap his finger until he seemed to have an idea.

“What I am about to tell you may surprise you, and I doubt it will solve your issue but there is one more way to squeeze some money out.”

“Oh?” Kain looked definitely interested. “Surprise me.”

Core pointed at a random direction. “Freedom colony.”

His idea was daring, given the shaky relationship with United Sol and Freedom colony. He suggested contacting the colony for commercial partnerships.

Kain’s jaw dropped. “Will that even work? I mean, am I even authorized to do that?”

Core laughed weakly. “Commodore, you should know better than me. After all, I am just a civilian. Although...” He cleared his throat. “I know for a fact that the Ark doesn’t moderate Uranus outpost.”

Indeed, the Ark never really paid attention to Uranus outpost. They passed the 2bn package and that was as far as their attention went. Whoever was in charge of the outpost had complete freedom in what he could do with the aid money.

“I knew the previous Uranus outpost administrator,” Core said, “He was quite a crook. He used the aid package for mostly his own benefit.”

Kain answered with a weak sigh. “The outpost was a mess when I moved in. A lot of repairs were needed, so I assume you aren’t lying.”

“Historically, the importance of this outpost had been weak. Now that we’ve been invaded once, the situation may change.” Core shrugged. “Not that the Bau will care. Good news is that you care which is the most important thing.”

“Is that so...”

“The corruption runs deep, Commodore. I am afraid you are on your own.” Having said so, he stood up and so did his accountant. “But on a bright side, you have freedom.” He offered a handshake which Kain duly accepted. “Core Corp will send

you paper works for the deal as well as instructions. Show it to your chief engineer and he or she will know what to do.”

It was a brief meeting overall but Kain learned a lot about the situation which United Sol was under. Soon after Core and his accountant left the quarter, Samuel entered.

“How did it go?”

Kain relaxed. “I’ve got 50m.”

“That’s ... not enough.”

“Tell me something I don’t know. But he did give me an advice.”

Samuel grinned nervously and sat down at the table. “I have a strong feeling that you are going to surprise me.”

“Oh, I think I will. Freedom colony.”

Samuel looked confused. “What about the colony?”

“We are going to talk to them for a deal.”

Samuel’s eyes widened and his jaw dropped. He was speechless for a moment before he started to blink. “You did shock me to my bones.”

“So, you think we can do this?”

Samuel dropped his head on the table and bashed the table a few times. “I wish I knew. I swear I’ve been growing few gray hairs ever since I came here.”

“Oh well.” Kain placed his feet onto the table. “Do it. That’s an order.”

“Aye, aye, sir...”

It started with sending a simple comm. signal to Freedom colony. It was a simple greeting and the colony greeted back. And the Samuel sent a longer message

asking if they were interested in a deal which wasn't responded by the colony for a week until a reply came in.

"They want to meet in space," Samuel reported to Kain in his office.

"Well, that's going to be a short meeting."

Samuel shook his head. "That's not even a good joke. They basically want to arrange a meeting in safe area since they aren't willing to come here."

"Well, that makes sense. Anything else?"

Samuel hesitated a little. "They want only a single cruiser to come." Which meant that it could be a trap. However, Kain didn't seem to mind.

"Alright then. I will leave you in charge."

"This could be a trap."

Kain exclaimed with a laugher, "I should be happy then. I've become so famous!"

"Come on, like or not, you are the administrator of Uranus outpost. You are important now."

"Meh!" Kain uttered. "If they get me, then United Sol will have a reason to attack them. I think not." He actually had a point but Samuel still didn't feel secure about the whole situation.

Not that it mattered of course.

Kain left the outpost in his lone cruiser along with Ritsuki aboard.

Kain was in his captain's seat and Rituski was by a comm. console. There were few other crewmen on the bridge who were minding their own business.

"By the by, Riki."

"Yeah?"

“Did you get the instruction Core Corp sent you?”

She replied promptly, “Sure, did.”

“What did it say?”

“Just basic mumbo jumbo stuff, what to do, what not to do kind of stuff.”

“Yeah? Anything else to note?”

“Why are you so curious?”

Kain scratched his chin. “Just wondering whether it’s too dangerous.”

“And if it’s too dangerous?”

“I’d pull the deal.”

“No, no, it’s not that dangerous.” Ritsuki stood up from her chair and approached Kain. “I know about it. The clan has had the sponsorship as long as I remember. Most of clan members have good know-how in this.” She hugged his head and he spoke no more.

It was true that the Maeka clan had know-how to deal with extremely early and buggy versions of space vessel OS software. But it was only after they suffered numerous accidents and setbacks. Even so, the clan had to go for the sponsorship. Unlike the Bau and the O’ren who had virtually indefinite income, the Maeka’s ability to source funding was very limited for numerous reasons.

First of all, their clan size was too small for large funding. They had slightly over three thousand members and it wasn’t enough for large funding.

Secondly, their small size meant less influence over local government which also meant they could not avoid being taxed which the Bau and the O’ren were able to do so. Additionally, the Bau members didn’t pay taxes to their government. Instead, they were taxed by their own clan. A similar rule applied to O’ren. Such luxuries weren’t possible for the Maeka.

The Maeka had been doing far better ever since Gaer’s marriage with Natusko Maeka. Still, they could not afford to abandon the sponsorship with Core Corp.

All members of the Maeka clan were educated with their troubled situation, and obviously Rituski was no exception. She was actually positively surprised that Kain was willing to abandon the deal for the clan.

“We are fine,” She told him softly as she patted his head in her chest. “We are fine.”

Being underdog would have its merits but the price was heavy. Many Maeka members gritted their teeth to have risen thus far.

The journey was smooth until they arrived the coordinates given by Freedom colony. At first, there was no ships waiting for them.

“Nothing in immediate vicinity,” A crew reported, “But I do see a small fleet not too far from here. It is currently en route to this coordinates. Your orders?”

Kain wasn’t horridly surprised. “We are staying put,” He ordered.

“Captain, this is a trap. We need to leave ASAP,” Another crew spoke up.

But Kain was firm in his stance. “If we leave now, there won’t be any chance for deals.”

Rituski was silent. While it did seem like a trap, she agreed with Kain that backing off now would mean no chance for any sort of deals.

Soon enough, a small fleet of twenty cruisers appeared in front of Kain’s lone cruiser.

“They are hailing us.”

Kain responded stoically, “On screen.”

A man showed up on a holographic screen. He had gelled hair and was wearing a black leather coat. “Hello, you have guts,” He said with faint scoff.

Kain seemed as cool as cucumber, at least on surface. “And you are?”

“My name is Reed. I’ve come on behalf of Lila who is currently in charge of Freedom colony.”

Ritsuki quickly stood up, approached Kain, and whispered to him, “Reed is Gvew’s son.”

Kain didn’t show any reaction to the information and spoke to Reed. “I see. I was told to come alone. I was under impression that you’d come alone as well.” He shrugged with a crooked smile. “Because, you know, to be fair.” And Ritsuki went back to her chair.

“We could not confirm whether the message was genuine,” Reed said indifferently. “And you are?”

“Kain, a deputy admin of Uranus outpost.”

“And who was that female officer?”

“My wifey.”

“What did she tell you?”

“She told me you were the former President’s son.”

“And any thoughts on that?”

“Nope.” Kain shrugged. “Should I?”

Reed glared at Kain for a moment and eventually loosened his stoic face in the end. He told Kain, “So, you did come alone. I suppose you kept your end of bargain for the start.”

“Actually, I have no idea why I came here,” Kain said. “I came to make deals and I have no frigging idea on what kind of deals.”

“Hah!” Reed let out of a laughter. Clearing throat, he continued. “There are lots of deals to be made because there has been no deals between United Sol and Freedom colony. Speaking of which, do you even have the authority to go ahead?”

“I am the administrator of Uranus outpost. I’ve been told that no one cares what I do.”

Reed grinned. "Sounds about right. Well, unless you are revolting of course. So, why are you looking for deals?"

Kain briefly explained his situation as well as his need to come up with 400 million to break even by end of year.

"No way can Freedom colony give you that much money for any kind of deals," Reed answered as soon as Kain was done explaining his situation. "We are looking at few small short-term deals worth some millions and so on. Are you still interested?"

Kain was obviously disappointed although he didn't expect them to be able to tie up deals that were big enough to worth hundreds of millions. It wasn't just logical.

"Let's hear it," Kain replied.

"You should be receiving some info," Reed said.

"I am getting it," And Ritsuki reported and she displayed the content on left side of the screen which Kain skimmed through. The deals were indeed mostly insignificant. They were commercial ad proposals along with a ferry route proposal.

Kain twisted his head faintly. "A ferry route? I thought there was ferry routes to the colony?"

Reed explained, "There was never an agreed ferry route. United Sol simply sent ferries and we received it. This would be the first official ferry route agreed by both parties if this goes through."

Skimming through the proposal, Kain realized the current relationship between United Sol and Freedom colony. There was simply no relationship to speak of which was why the deals were basic. He saw no immediate benefit from any of the deals. However, he did see long term benefits.

"So, this is just a beginning," Kain concluded. "A beginning of a mutual relationship."

"Exactly," Reed said with a nod. "There will be more deals to be made. But there has been no history between us. It first has to begin."

Rltsuki typed a message on the screen so that Kain could read without letting Reed notice. The message said that the deals were fine, and that even though there won't be an instant flow of income from the deals, they had good long term benefits such as a progressive boost in travelers. Kain agreed with her points as they were his first impression as well.

"The missus says yes." Kain beamed a grin at the screen. "So, I accept the deals."

The list of deals was more than ten but most were commercial ad deals with the biggest one being establishing an official ferry route. No deal was worth a million, and the ferry route deal wasn't about money. Money would come from ticket sales.

Using his index finger, Kain put down his electronic signature and so did Reed.

"We will promote the official ferry route from now on," Reed said.

"So should I," Kain said.

In United Sol, there were two ways to reach Freedom colony. The common route was from Moon shuttle port and it was operated by Moon administration. It wasn't an official route and Moon administration simply sent out transports toward Freedom colony and the colony received them. The same transports took willing passengers back to United Sol.

Another route was from Uranus outpost. This route was operated by a third party space cruise company and the passenger volume had been minor. The official ferry route deal meant that Uranus outpost administration would be taking over. Kain would have to pay a compensation to the cruise company but it wasn't going to be much.

From Freedom colony's perspective, the official ferry route meant a small but a big step in right direction. United Sol had been ignoring the colony and never attempted to establish any diplomatic talks. The ferry routes operated but they were done unofficially. With the official route, they would heavily promote their official ferry route over unofficial ferry routes. It was going to bring heavy traffic into Uranus outpost in very near future. The ferry route deal ultimately meant

that United Sol accepted the existence of the colony as a legal entity. Granted, the Ark wasn't involved in this but it didn't matter to Freedom colony because the deal was made official and on surface that was all they needed.

Kain was on his way back when a crew urgently reported.

“Sir, I have a fleet on sensor. A small one, maybe a hundred at most. It's approaching us fast.”

Kain frowned slightly as he had no idea what was happening. “Is Mr. Reed chasing us?”

“Actually, the fleet is coming from Sol, so it's probably one of ours. Too far to read ship signatures yet, sir. What is your order?”

The distance was far enough that Kain would be able to alter his course to either avoid or run to the other direction.

“I don't see why anyone from Sol would want to attack me.” He beamed a crooked grin. “It's not like I am that famous.” He emphasized, “Yet.” Still, he took a moment to give out his command. “Keep the course. Whoever it is, it should be friendly.”

Sailing in a neutral zone with a lone ship posed certain risks. This was such a case. And the crews nervously waited until they were close enough to identify the fleet.

“It's one of ours,” The crew reported again. “Actually, it's being led by ... Captain Suu.”

And as soon as they were close enough for a secured communication, it was Suu who opened a channel and started to virtually spit her saliva through the screen.

“What the hell were you thinking?!” She shouted right through the screen.

Kain was utterly confused as to why she was even angry. “What? What are you talking about?”

Suu gestured her arm and pointed sideway violently. "Going off alone like that! It could have been a trap!" She continued to shout.

He let out of a brief laughter. "It was a calculated risk I took. It worked out well."

"Samuel was worried so sick and he literally begged me to assemble ships and go after you! That was the kind of risk you took!"

He had no more to say and simply remained silent as Suu continued to shout and scold at him. "You aren't alone. You are a leader! You may feel suicidal and brave but you must know that there are people who are depended on you now! You shouldn't be making rash decisions!"

She was basically telling him what she was taught back when she was being educated as a leader. A leader must be able to foresee events. A leader must protect his subjects. A leader must be the last one to fall for his people's sake.

Her statements sounded correct, at least in concept. When she was done scolding him and was lightly panting, Kain told her, "Say, is that what you were taught?"

She didn't answer at first, so Kain pressed. "Answer me."

"Yes, so what?"

"If that is what is being taught at the Bau, why is this country so damn messed up?"

Suu was struck hard by his words and was at a completely loss. She simply could not answer him because she had no answer. It was her first time being talked back in such a manner. No one had dared doing so.

"The history clearly shows how Bau treated their subjects," Kain continued, "It doesn't add up. Or are all Bau hypocrites?"

"H, how dare you!"

Kain stood up from his captain's chair. Ritsuki wasn't sure what to do and remained in her seat nervously and so did rest of the crews.

"At least, the Crimson wizard does what he claims. He kills people when he says he would. He stepped down when he said he would without a fuss. What does the

Bau do? They don't say anything and act in shadow." And then he raised his voice. "I had to take the risk for the sake of my own people and that includes you!" He pointed at her. "You are fully aware that we are going to be in deep red. If you truly understand my situation, then cut back on patrolling!"

Frustrated by his own words, he stomped once and crossed his arms. "I get it. You are a perfectionist but set priorities for God's sake! The reality can't be perfect, so do what you can within your limit. Don't go over the limit but you keep going over it!"

As a man who had hard time getting by, Kain was always vividly aware of his financial limits. Although painful, he learned how not go over his limits. However, for Suu, she never really knew the concept of overspending and debt. Money was never an issue for her. Therefore, she failed to grasp the situation that her over-zealous patrolling had been costing too much.

Suu was completely, utterly, at loss of words and there was an extremely uneasy silence dominating the bridge. No one knew what to do and was afraid of speak up. Eventually, Suu closed the channel and bridge crews signaled a relieved sigh at once.

"Well." Kain got back into his captain's chair. "Hopefully she gets the message. Let's go back."

"Yes, sir."

The little fight was done over a secured channel. Therefore, only bridge crews from Kain and Suu's ship heard the war of words. However, words spread and there were positive reactions. Mainly because it was a recurring topic among Uranus outpost navy members.

Once they returned, Kain called for an emergency meeting with Samuel. Ritsuki was also ordered to attend as a chief engineer along with Suu as a chief patroller. There was no such a position as "Chief patroller" although she had been indeed leading patrols. It was just an excuse to bring Suu into the meeting.

“Alright, let’s begin,” Kain said. They were in his office which was more or less a luxury office. It was a large quarter with high quality furniture along with a table and a sofa in addition to his own desk. They were gathered around the table, standing.

Samuel placed a datapad on the table which displayed a cash flow graph. It clearly displayed going below by 500 million credits.

“As you can see, we are going to have a debt of 500 million by end of this year. We have about a season and half before that,” Kain explained. “I’ve secured some deals but they will show up in next year’s accounting, so we are going to be hit with 500 million debts for this year.”

“There is no way for us to avoid this,” Samuel added.

“Have you talked to the President? Surely, he can assist you?” Suu suggested stoically.

“The first thing I did was talking to the President. His hands are tied apparently and we are on our own,” Kain answered.

“We are not a government entity. Therefore, we do not have the ability to borrow credit from the national coffers,” Samuel explained. “Which is why we must break even or go into green.”

“The 2bn aid package was supposed to be enough,” Kain added. “It has been enough according to the history. However, Jupiter aided this outpost in the past.”

Suu crossed her arms and sighed deeply.

“Currently, our forces are spread thin,” Samuel stated, “We just don’t have enough ships to cover the entire Outer Sol on our own. And there have been more ship losses than expected.”

“Meaning?” Suu inquired.

“We cannot reduce the debt. Therefore, we will have to cut corners,” Kain declared. “The easiest way to cut corners is not replacing ships we lost for this year.”

Suu frowned; she did not like it although she refused to speak so due to the fight she had with Kain back in space.

Kain glanced at Suu for her reaction. "Next year, we will still be in red but hopefully we will cope better with new deals I've tied up recently."

"Next year will be better for sure," Samuel stated. "The deals you've tied is worth at least a hundred million."

Clearing throat, Ritsuki spoke, "The problem is that a single cruiser costs a hundred million and, by next year, we will have few tens of ships to replace."

After a short silence, Samuel said, "I know there is a new variant of cruiser which is cheaper."

Ritsuki shook her head. "The Mice, huh. I know. That ship sucks."

"How so?" Kain wondered.

"The Maeka clan studied the blueprint. Even I did," Rituski said with a shrug. "Granted, it is half price of a regular cruiser but there are too many sacrifices. Paper thin armor, no ACM reactor replaced by three plasma reactors. It's cheap but it will require more crew and more maintenance and more chance of accidents for having whooping three reactors. And three reactors mean less stability when being hit in battles."

Scratching his chin carefully, Kain inquired her, "So, you don't recommend it even though it retains cruiser firepower and half price?"

"No, I do not. From an engineer's point of view, the Mice is an accident waiting to occur," She replied firmly.

Samuel added, "I believe Earth defense fleet has some of the new cruisers. I haven't heard reports of accidents."

Ritsuki responded promptly, "Of course not. Like I said, it will be less stable in battles. Do you see Earth defense fleet getting into battles often?"

Samuel couldn't argue; she had a valid point.

“Listen,” She added, “Employing the Mice will make us lose more ships and that will mean more loss of lives. Loss of lives is not something the Bau cares, so I am not surprised that they chose to replace the lost ships from the first Earthian-Venusian war with the Mice.”

Suu narrowed her eyes. She was Suu Bau after all which Ritsuki knew but had forgotten at the moment of her speech. She quickly realized it and nervously looked at Kain nodded at her slowly, silently signaling her not to worry.

Meanwhile, Samuel looked at Kain, waiting for his decision over employing the Mice to reduce debt. Kain shook his head slowly.

“We are not going to employ the Mice,” He declared. “We are going to cut corners for the time being. I will find ways to source more funding and possibly develop the outpost for more taxes and commercial income.”

“It’s the right choice,” Ritsuki agreed. “We will be playing a hard game, but this is the correct choice.”

And the meeting was concluded.

Aside from yelling back at her from the verbal fight in space, Kain never did strictly order Suu to ease on patrolling. However, she did ease up on her patrolling and progressively reduced damages and ship losses. She also learned to pull out of battles if it would prove to be too costly.

Furthermore, not long after the deals were made with Freedom colony, Uranus outpost started to receive a progressively increasing number of travelers passing through the outpost which boosted commercial aspect of the outpost which translated to more income for local businesses.

The overall mood of the outpost was positive, and it was the beginning of Kain’s small empire in Outer Sol.

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