

# [Milky Way arc] [1] [The beginning of tragedy] [9613]

Prerequisite arcs/stories:

1. Ashuta arc
2. Juron arc
3. The Hammers arc

When wishes are consist of wills,

When hopes are consist of wills,

When they think of the very same thing,

When wills gather,

They can make a change.

A poem by Detur, submitted as royalty free material on 9652 at Heaven of Order.

Time was 9613.

Everything started in Smuggler's Den region.

A group of six planets were called "Smuggler's Den".

A-2541a, A-2541b, A-2541c, A-2541d, Jupiter II, and Freebie were in the region called Smuggler's Den.

The region was called "Smuggler's Den" due to its high smuggling activities across the region. There was also high influence of the Nebula pirates within the region, meaning the region was poorly controlled by Andromeda union.

Freebie trade outpost was heavily guarded however due to its importance as a trade hub.

Standard of living was poor. Public security was poor. Mortality rate was high.

Nothing about the region was attractive to anyone. Still, there was a sizable populace within the region. Most of them were stuck there for reasons that they wished to conceal.

It all began in an underground chamber on Freebie. The chamber was originally an abandoned sewage facility. It had been long forgotten by Freebie authorities and a cult started from here which spread at speed of light throughout the region.

The hall was filled with people. The hall was damp and was dark. On floor, all of prayers knelt down on cardboard pieces and were praying in silence. In front of them, there was a man who also knelt down but facing the prayers. He was in a white robe of holy aura. Behind him, there was a crudely crafted stone altar where there was a small display device that was displaying an image of Earth above it.

"I see a vision ...," He mumbled. He had an exquisite wooden rod in his right hand. His hands shook weakly as he spoke out.

The prayers paused at once and looked at him.

"We are ... going to Mother Earth!" He spread out his arms and shouted vigorously.

His voice echoed and the prayers cheered.

Sevn and Juun were sent out to investigate some unusual activities over Smuggler's Den region. They were asked by Freebie administration to perform an investigation. Wemer dispatched the two to investigate. They were given a cruiser to work with.

“Freebie administration has been concerned of their civilian activities...,” Sevn was reading through a petition they had sent to the Knights. “Bullshit,” He concluded, “They are worried only because their lottery sales had gone down too much.”

Juun chuckled. They were on the cruiser given by Wemer. It was a loaned cruiser from Andromeda royal navy. He also had a copy of the report on his hand.

“Can’t really blame them,” Juun responded. “The report says their lottery sale went down by 99.9%. That certainly warrants an investigation.”

“It does,” Sevn said, “But it doesn’t give me a good feeling in my mouth that they opted to call us instead of doing their own investigation.”

Juun asked genuinely. “Does Freebie administration even have men power to do their own investigation?”

In fact, they did not. Freebie administration had a total of one hundred employees and population was Freebie was over four hundred millions. They were always backlogged to do anything.

When they arrived at Freebie trade outpost, a female agent welcomed them.

She extended her hand for a handshake. “Hello, I am agent Ehka.”

“Greetings, I am Sevn and this is Juun.”

Ehka almost startled when she saw Juun but she soon moved on. “I’ve been briefed on the situation. Let us talk in cafeteria.”

She was leading the two to a cafeteria. The station condition was poor with missing panels for electronic circuits here and there. In some of worse cases, there were wires sticking out which were clearly live which could electrify and cause death.

And when she led them to the cafeteria, it wasn’t any better. Some of tables were very unsanitary and there weren’t many people.

“Any drinks?” Ehka asked them as she led them to the cleanest table she could find at the moment.

“This is a hellhole,” Sevn stated bluntly. “Did you opt to work here, agent?”

Ehka’s eyebrow twitched. She did not opt to work here. She never opted to work here. She was supposed to be an undercover agent until Juron came over and ruined her life.

“I’d rather not answer that,” She responded after a short moment of hesitation.

“Any drinks?”

“No, thanks, let’s get to the topic,” Sevn said.

“Fine by me.” And she sat down. “There are some things that Freebie administration chose not to tell you,” She said. “I know only because I’ve been stuck here for nearly ten years.”

Surprised, Sevn responded, “Oh? Very well, go on.”

According to Ehka, Freebie administration made all of its income from selling rigged lotteries.

Sevn immediately stopped Ehka and demanded, “Rigged? Do you have any proof or evidence against your claim?”

“No, I do not. Even if I did, I would not make any formal claims,” Ehka responded somewhat fiercely. “Listen, Mr. Knight, when you see a lottery jackpot not being won for a whole year, you know there is something fishy going on especially when almost everyone on Freebie purchase lottery tickets every week. We are talking about hundreds of millions buying tickets.”

“That is the nature of lottery. Jackpot may not be won,” Sevn argued.

“True but I’ve seen jackpots being won to people who don’t even exist on Freebie or anywhere else for that matter. I’ve done my fair share of research on this. Trust me, it is rigged.”

Yet, she claimed she had no proof or evidence.

Sevn felt they were horribly misinformed. At the same time, he felt they were being derailed from the task they were originally given.

“Why are you telling us this? If you aren’t going to file an official claim, you might as well have not told us,” Sevn said.

“Because.” Ehka weakly smashed her fist onto the table. “In order to really understand what the hell is going down there, you need to know what the fuck is wrong.”

Sevn glared at her. “Watch your language, agent.”

“File a complaint if you will. I care not,” She muttered. “I can’t get sent to worse places, so it won’t work.”

Sevn was going to lecture her, but Juun stepped in. “So, what is going down there?”

Ehka’s eyes widened as if she had just realized he was there. She cleared her throat and answered, “Ok..., let me organize my thoughts. Yes, I realize I went too far... My apologies.”

According to Ehka, a cult appeared on Freebie few years ago. At first, nobody paid any attention to it but at one point it became a huge hit among the populace and spread out so fast. The cult actively asked for donations and asked its members to stop relying on lotteries for their future. At first, Freebie administration ignored the cult and advertised their lottery stronger. This was also when suspicions of rigged lottery emerged.

“A coincidence? Or planned? I don’t know, but that was also when I took a dip into the matter as well,” Ehka added.

Ehka’s original plan was to make a formal case out of it and earn her ticket out of Smuggler’s Den but quickly realized that playing a devil’s associate wouldn’t help her case and gave up. She pulled up a device and popped a holographic datasheet.

“This is Freebie administration’s secret ledger. You see those big deposits here? Those are the rigged jackpots. In short, they’ve been stealing money out of already piss-poor people. They either steal the jackpots or don’t let jackpots to be won.”

“I sense someone big is at play here,” Juun said weakly. “One of the generals?”

Ehka shook her head and responded, “I have no idea but Freebie inhabitants no longer trust Freebie administration and rightfully so. Since then, the cult has dominated the planet and the region.”

“What is the cult’s goal?” Sevn asked. “If you know, tell us.”

Ehka made a pause, a long pause at that. For some reason, she looked around as if making sure that no one was listening to them.

“They want to go Earth,” She eventually whispered.

Sevn laughed. That was ridiculous but Ehka’s sincere silence said otherwise.

Sevn went down to Freebie and formed his own investigations while Juun made brief situation report to Wemer and asked for further orders.

Sevn came back to their cruiser after a day.

"Most of attempts to gather information have failed. But I did manage to get some information. And..., it's disturbing," He said.

"Go on," Juun replied.

"There are approximately six hundred millions of people inhabiting in the region. What would you say if all of them go out of control?"

"Go out of control? In what way?"

"You heard the agent. They are wanting to go to Earth."

"How, I wonder."

How, indeed. This wasn't about few hundreds of illegal immigrants. They were talking about six hundred millions.

Sevn did some calculations on a console. "They might have the finance," He concluded. "If the cult or whatever it is has been getting money from hundreds millions of its followers, I'd say they have more than enough credit."

Groaning, Juun asked, "Were you able to verify the agent's claims?"

"No, but I'd say we can trust her. I did talk to a Freebie high rank officer and he was pretty nervous when I brought up the rigged lottery topic."

"This might be too big for just the two of us."

"Agreed. What did Wemer tell you?"

Juun sighed weakly. "He told me to wait. He wasn't sure what to do when I told him the scale and gravity of the situation."

“Waiting might not be a luxury we have,” Sevn told him gravely. “I know what I saw down there. There were hardly any people on streets. It reminded me of a ghost town.”

Juun crossed his arms. “They have the money. And it seems likely that they have the means. If they are trying to use transports to bring all these people to Earth..., wouldn’t somebody have noticed something by now? It’d be thousands of transport ships, wouldn’t it?”

In the end, they had no clue and had to wait Wemer to contact them for further instructions.

Wemer eventually contacted them four days later. He was on main screen on the bridge where Sevn and Juun were standing by an empty captain’s chair.

“Andromeda council does not believe what I’ve presented,” Wemer stated. “There is no solid proof or anything.”

Sevn cleared his throat and spoke, “I believe we can prepare some evidence against Freebie administration at least. It shouldn’t be hard but will take some time.”

“If what Juun told me is correct, time is of essence,” Wemer replied with a frustrated voice and face. “We need to track down the cult. Freebie administration can wait.”

“Don’t we need some kind of warrant to go down there?” Juun asked.

“Getting a search warrant is the easy part. What I can’t get you fast enough is a trained squad. I can send a team out today but it’d take at least a week to get there,” Wemer said. “So, you will have to wait.”

But Juun pushed on. “Can’t we use the security personnel from the outpost?”

Sighing, Wemer replied, “The council sees this matter delicate, meaning they don’t want too many others to know which is why they are sending a team of

trained guards who will keep their mouth shut no matter what they see and experience.”

Wemer told them to wait and closed the channel shortly afterwards. A search warrant was sent to them electronically in few hours.

Juun downloaded the warrant and told Sevn. “Ok, I have the warrant. Let’s go.”

Sevn was obviously surprised. “Woah? What? Where?”

“To Freebie. Let’s search for the cult.”

“Did you not hear Wemer? He told us to wait.”

“Yet, he sent the warrant so fast. I think he wants us to act on our own.”

Sevn considered what he said. He had a point. The channel may have been watched. “Ok, I see your point but we have no authority to summon Freebie outpost guards.”

“We will ask agent Ehka. She seems to have the authority.”

When they asked agent Ehka, her answer was no.

“I have the authority to call reinforcements within the station. I can’t bring them down to Freebie,” She said over a secured comm.

Juun asked, “How many are off-duty?”

“Why do you even ask that?”

“I am sure they can go down on their own accord, yes?”

Ehka crossed her arms. “Sure, they may go down but why would they do that?”

Juun beamed a smile at her. “Because you can ask them. You’ve been here for a decade. I am sure they will listen to you.”

Ehka blushed momentarily when Juun smiled at her but she quickly regained her composure. "Why would I do that?"

"You want to get out of here, no? The Knights can recommend you. I am sure the council will listen," Juun said.

Ehka remained still and silent on screen for a good ten seconds. She eventually replied, "Fine, I will get a team ready."

In the meantime, on Venus,

Ksa walked into the vice president's room without knocking. Gair was signing digital documents for final approval. He was surprised by Ksa's sudden entrance.

"What's with you? Have you forgotten knocking?"

Without answering to Gair's complaint, Ksa went directly to subject.

"Maeve has sent information, and it seems she's in danger," she then inserted a disk into a displayer on Gair's desk.

"Hello, this is Maeve," Maeve's voice sounded in the office. "I don't have time to include video. Sorry about that."

Gair glanced at Ksa.

"I am on run. I am currently being chased by some unknown guys. They seem to be elites. I lost most of my crew. Fortunately, my ship is being held by authorities at Freedom colony. So, they can't touch my ship. The reason I am on run is because I obtained information that was not meant to be taken by anyone. It's top security information.

I found out that the Nebula pirates has sold hundreds of Mammoth class freighters to someone in Smuggler's Den. There is something huge going on there. I am not quite sure of what really is going on but ...."

Glass breaking sound was heard from the message.

"I've got to go."

And the message ended.

"Mammoth class freighters?" Gair wondered. "I've never heard of them. Is that a new class?"

"No, it's an ancient design that was retired thousands years ago. Nobody manufactures them as far as I know."

Mammoth freighters were named so due to their sheer size. It was eventually deemed unsuitable after docking bays were standardized and automatic loading system was designed. The mammoth class freighters were simply too big to fit in a docking bay. The ship was also very hard to sail, requiring highly skilled captains.

Gair groaned a moan of concern. "She does seem to be in danger. What do you suggest we do?"

"I will go," Ksa replied firmly.

"What? Are you serious?"

"I am the only one who is capable of finding her in a short time."

Ksa's specialization was teleportation. She was able to teleport out of Sol system in just one attempt. It would still take her few teleportation attempts to reach Freedom colony but she would reach there in few hours.

"No," Gair denied firmly. "You have an important project going on right now. I will send Karl."

"No matter what you say, I will go."

Gair found it strange. It was his first time seeing that Ksa ever insisted on a matter.

"No, I am not allowing you to."

Maeve and Ksa were close friends. Gair had known Maeve for many hundred years but they barely saw each other. He respected Maeve as a member of the Hammers but that was as far as their relationship went. She was pretty much a stranger to his eyes.

For Ksa, Maeve's problems were almost her own. But Gair wasn't aware that they were close.

Gair frowned. He was confused of sudden change in Ksa's personality. "What has gotten into you?"

Ksa urged and explained. "Unlike you, Maeve is my close friend. In fact, she may be my only friend. She needs help and soon. Karl will take weeks to get to Freedom colony. Time is of essence."

Gair considered his options. The truth was that, if she insisted to go, he was powerless to stop her. After all, all members of the Hammers were under Cecil's hierarchy. She'd just go to Cecil and Cecil was likely approve her request.

However, it wasn't to say that Gair was powerless. Cecil made it clear that Gair would take over when he'd retire and asked the Hammers to be cooperative with him. They generally had no problem with taking orders from Gair.

"Tuhina can care of the task while I am gone."

Realizing she wasn't going to be persuaded, Gair reluctantly allowed Ksa to go. And she vanished on spot.

In the meantime, at Freedom colony,

Ashuta was put in charge of some data digging. Lila had received words that a huge suspicious transaction was completed under dark. Normally, they wouldn't care but it was a transaction between the Nebula pirates and an unknown individual.

“Holy smokes, some guy paid three hundred seventy five millions to the Nebula pirates!” Ashuta was in front of a console and Lila was behind him.

“Who'd paid that much for what, we must find out,” Lila said with a greatly concerned face.

One of major income Freedom colony had was receiving fee for authorizing seemingly-illegal transactions. The colony acted as a safe haven for shady parties to meet and finalize whatever trading they had in mind.

Freedom colony never revealed any details of such transactions and the colony eventually became the de-facto place to do illegal trades and transactions.

But this case was different. An individual paying an astronomically amount of credit to the Nebula pirates for unknown reasons. It was too shady even for Freedom colony.

“His name is not here. It's unknown,” Ashuta said. “Which is weird because they are supposed to put in real names for the transaction to be complete.”

Lila narrowed her eyes. Yes, despite of the fact that Freedom colony allowed illegal transactions, they still required proper information from buyer and sellers. They were required to put in their real names and associated info. Which meant-

“Someone overrode the system,” Lila concluded. And there weren't many who had powers to override the system.

In fact, there were only two people who could override the system. The first person was Lila herself. The second person was the founder of the colony, Aedy Freedom.

“Overrode the system? Who could have done that?”

“Nevermind that and find out what was traded,” Lila demanded.

“750 mammoth class freighters?” Ashuta shrugged because he had no idea what a mammoth freighter was. “Ma’am?”

Lila shrugged. She had no idea as well. Touching a spot right below her left ear, she spoke. “Sae, are you there? Sae?”

There was no answer.

“Find out what a mammoth freighter is. I will be right back.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Aedy Freedom.

To Lila’s knowledge, he was the most powerful ESP. She had heard of Cecil from gossips but, at that time, she had never confronted Cecil and she firmly believed Aedy was the most powerful ESP ever existed in human history.

She believed in him; she believed that he could make a sense and blow a fresh wind across the clusters.

However, all that changed when Cecil confronted Aedy. Ten seconds their fight lasted and it all changed.

There was a reason that Lila never left the colony. She was the central nerve for the colony system. After careful manipulation of her ESP, she was able to map out the entire colony under her watch. She was the brain and heart of their

operations. Consequence of it was that she could not leave the colony. If she did, the colony would shut down.

She knew where Sae was although Sae refused to respond. When she arrived where Sae was, she was sitting on a pile of eight dead bodies, some of which were dissected brutally. She had a bloody eyeball in her hand apparently taken from one of the bodies. A vein or perhaps nerve was dangling which she used like a string to perform yoyo with it.

“Would you please stop killing people in this manner...” Sighing, Lila shook her head.

Giggling, Sae joyfully replied, “Why not?” She threw the eye away and cited, “It is my divine right to kill.”

“Who are these people anyway?”

“Nebula pirates, carrying some important information.”

“Important information?”

Sae pulled out a disk from a small leather pouch from her belt. “Very important info, big enough to change the balance of the neutral zone.” She then started to wiggle the disk. “Something you’ve been waiting for hundreds years. The chance has arrived, the chance we can finally kick their ass out of this place.”

Ever since Kakari Ra assassinated Masu’s wife, Affie, Lila had always wanted to kick the Nebula pirates out of the colony. But for the colony, the Nebula pirates had been a necessary evil. Not anymore, however. The colony had exponential growth for hundreds of years and they were capable of defending on their own.

Freedom colony no longer needed the Nebula pirates for defense. But it did not mean they had to distance away from them. But Lila wanted them out and no one was going to argue with her.

Meanwhile.

President Gvew was overseeing a fleet training on his bridge. His right hand man, Yakov, came onto the bridge with haste.

"Sir, this is emergency. I need to talk you in private," His distressed voice indicated the gravity of situation.

Gvew ordered the bridge crew to leave until further notice. Once everyone except Yakov remained, he asked, "What is it?"

"There have been an increasing number of patrolling vessels on border."

"Is that it?"

"No, there are more. Inside sources told us that Lord Arnkle is mobilizing his entire fleet."

This time, Gvew narrowed his eyes and Yakov continued. "We have yet to find out his intention. But it can't be good."

"Any suspicious movement from Venus and Mars?"

Yakov shook his head. "No, sir. At least, not yet."

Lord Arnkle wasn't someone who'd mobilize his entire fleet for fun or to show off. However, neither Gvew nor Yakov had any clue as to what he was up to.

"What do you suggest that we do?" Gvew asked calmly.

If Andromeda union was preparing for a war, all three generals would have mobilized. And, if there was an internal conflict, at least another general would have mobilized. Yakov was really at a loss.

"Nothing for now, sir. Something is definitely going on but it may not involve us," He concluded.

Juron stood proudly next to Lord Arnkle. They were on a bridge of Arnkle's commandship.

He told him, "Sir, you will lose nothing but only gain even if you fail, Lord Arnkle."

Arnkle was in his throne. His fleet was currently on course to the Smuggler's Den.

"I've better," Arnkle grveled. "I've lost too much already."

"Hence, I am here to assist, you sire," Juron flattered masterfully.

"Why have you given me the information? What do you gain from my success? Most importantly..." Arnkle scratched his chin carefully. "How did you come across such information?"

"Are you doubting me, sir?"

Arnkle had to. Juron was known to be reckless. At the same time, he was the only class S ESP in Andromeda system. His powers were valued greatly by Andromeda union.

"I will trust you... for now."

Juron grinned. "A wise choice, sir."

He had delivered critical information to Arnkle. The information was that citizens of Smuggler's Den were about to revolt and leave the system at once. If Arnkle put a stop to it, he would score big and perhaps stand above General Wong and Louis. He was willing to do whatever it'd take him to stand above them.

However, Arnkle got along with General Wong fairly well, for they graduated on the same year as classmates from the academy. They were sort of friends although they hadn't spoken to each other for a long time ever since they became the generals.

And there they were...

A very large group of mammoth freighters emerged from clouds of nebula by Dawn. It was the largest group of freighters in the history of mankind. It slowly left the colorful clouds of nebula and headed forward.

**Part 1, the end**