

This is the last story in this arc. If you've come this far, I am sure you've read its related stories I've thus far recommended. If not, you need to go through them.

## [Milky way arc] [5] [Blissful death] [9613]

Rev 4.3 ( Last updated on April 23, 2018 | Creation date: Forgot )

### **Prerequisite stories**

All stories in the same arc

### **Related stories**

[Hermit arc] [2] [Serenade to Death] [9488] (Hint: Kerrard)

The ship was going down. Explosions were occurring everywhere and the whole rig was falling apart. Air was leaking and ship balance was long lost. People or what were left of them were bouncing off the walls violently before my eyes. Still, none of the brutal scenes concerned me. What concerned me right before my blissful death was Earth.

The mother Earth, the most beautiful planet I've ever seen.

We knew what we had gotten ourselves into. We knew we were all going to die. Still, when death was knocking at our doors, we panicked. Who wouldn't?

"Nooooo!" A woman nearby me started to dash toward a wall and started to hit it with her fists. "Help! Help!" She yelled desperately with tears flowing out of her eyes in zero gravity. "We are dying here!"

She wasn't alone in her futile attempt for rescue. There were a lot of people who were shouting for help. I knew it was futile. Hell, I am sure they knew it was futile. I suppose they just had to do something with death approaching them so swiftly.

But we knew what we had gotten ourselves into.

*We knew we were going to die.*

*We knew.*

## ***Year 9607***

"Hi, mom."

I was on a phone with my mother who was living on Creg's.

"Yeah, I am doing fine."

Living on Freebie wasn't as bad as I was told to be.

"Yeah, don't worry about me."

Okay, I was lying. It's pretty bad, real bad. I came to Freebie hoping to run away from credit collectors. I failed on a business and, even though I filed bankruptcy, private credit collectors still chased me for my organs. I had no choice but to run to somewhere ... safe & remote.

It was foolish, also at the same time smart, of me to have escaped to Freebie. Good news was that I was no longer bothered by private credit collectors. Bad news was that this planet was the Hell, literally.

"I will talk to you later, mom. Bye now."

I hadn't had three meals a day for how long, I've forgotten. In fact, no one on Freebie had the wealth to have three meals a day. However, an ironic truth was that people on other planets took less meal a day for diet purposes. People on Freebie took less meal because they could not afford them.

Freebie was a trade hub, or at least that was how this planet was supposed to function. Yes, the planet did function as a trade hub in planet orbit, but the issue was that all trade freighter vessels went through Freebie trade outpost. In other words, the planet itself was not a trade hub. There was no job created by being a trade hub.

Right, let me make this clearer, the inhabitants of the planet had little ways of careers. There were too few industries on the planet to support its population.

I hung up the phone. I was on a phone booth which was painted with pieces of papers indicating that they were looking for jobs and that they'd even work for a piece of a bread. Well, I'd work all day long if I can get a piece of bread for real. It made me somewhat bitter to even think that I'd really work for a fucking piece of bread, but that was the reality on this planet.

Normally, it should have been painted to ads and such, but it was the opposite on this planet.

It was six years ago when I stepped onto this planet. Everyone I knew was against the idea, and I saw why during my first season.

Though it had generally gotten better., let me rephrase. I adapted. People on this stinking planet adapted; they had to. Otherwise, they'd wind up being dead.

I went back to an alley where my cardboard home was.

I was looking down at my cardboard box home where another person had taken his residence.

"Hey, this is my place. Bug off," I warned him.

He looked at me lazily and went back to sleep again, completely ignoring me. If this were occurring 6 years ago, I would have picked a fight. Now though, I wasn't going to do anything because it wasn't simply worth my time and precious energy. Besides, getting wounded was a death sentence.

"Whatever-, fucking ass."

After giving the guy a good kick on his back, I walked away. It didn't take me long to find an empty cardboard box to settle myself in for the night.

I think it has been years? When was it the last time I had a decent meal? I did have decent meals when I just got here but little money I had with me soon vanished.

I sneered at myself as I was falling asleep. I hoped to eat well in dreams at least.

I didn't have a job, much less a career, but people on Freebie were able to afford food by taking on part time jobs given by various available stores on daily basis. Even taking a few errands for the few rich patched enough credits for a small meal. I was told that some weird cult had been giving people food and places to sleep. I didn't believe them though. I mean, who'd do that? For what? There had to be a catch. Everything had a catch.

"Hey."

Someone was calling me, and I was asleep.

"Come on, wake up," He persisted.

Robbing my eyes, I withdraw myself from my little, dark, world of imaginations.

"What brings you here?"

The guy's name was Millar. He was one of the first people I encountered when I arrived at this hellhole. Whether that was his real name, I couldn't care less. He claimed to be Millar, so he was Millar. Everyone on this forsaken planet had stories and reasons to often hide their real names.

"Come on, let's go," He told me.

"Go where?"

"The cult, they are giving out breakfast right now."

The cult, the cult, the cult, I've been hearing about way too often lately. While I didn't believe in whatever scheme they were planning, I was interested in the food at least. Come to think of it, it's been too long since I had a breakfast.

I dragged myself to stand up. Starvation kicked in as soon as I moved my muscles which begged for energy. Millar helped me to stand up and I followed him.

Where he led to was a sewerage entrance.

"Are you kidding me?" Shrugging, I asked him.

"You know I wouldn't kid about free food," He responded sincerely. And I must say he had a point. No one on Freebie would joke about food.

"Fine, let's just get this over with."

The sewer wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. It wasn't so bad. Perhaps, it's due to the fact that there are little to no household waste. It was hardly wet as well.

We went through several junctions as well as going down through few ladders. We eventually ended up in a large empty space where there was a leakage of bright light from a distance.

“We are here.”

I found it hard to believe that such a large empty space would exist in a sewer system. It was a gigantic huge hall where there are hundreds of people lined up for free breakfast. The hall was clean and had enough light sources. It also seemed to be heated well. Overall, it was comfortable to be in. No one would think they were deep within a sewer system.

For a cult, there was absolutely no sign of any cult activities. People were lined up for food and that was all I could see.

“Come on, we haven't got all day. Line up, dude.”

I stood in line for roughly half an hour before I could get a plate containing a bowl of soup, few pieces of roasted bread and a fried egg.

It would be some cheap unhealthy meal on other planets, but such a meal was more than anyone could ever ask for on Freebie.

Resisting drooling, I found a spot to sit down and literally threw food into my mouth. I felt faint satisfaction from my stomach. How long has it been since the last time I had proper, real, protein? Ach, I didn't care. I had a decent meal and that's all that mattered.

“Dude, you are crying,” Millar said to me with a chuckle.

Indeed, I was crying. I wasn't sad. But tears were just dropping from my eyes.

“It’s been so long...”

Yes, it’s been so long...

“That’s alright, dude, I cried, too, when I got my meal for the first time here.”

Some others around me responded, “Welcome to the Heaven, sir!”

They called the hall “The Heaven”.

Having regained my senses after my stomach gave me a green light, I looked around. People were peacefully chatting. None of them had any leftover food on their plates. Nobody would, considering how poor their normal diets were.

Millar also finished his plate and laid down, massaging his belly peacefully. “Ah, that was damn good. Fucking good, might I add. Better than sex.”

“I agree,” I responded. “So, this is the cult?”

“Yep, they give out a free breakfast every day. I think they hold some sort of sermon every evening, but I’ve never been to one. I am here for the free food.”

I wasn’t going to dig into the matter deeper, either. I did not want my source of free meal to be gone.

However..., I wondered: what am I living for? What are my goals? Am I simply going to rot in this hellhole forever?

6 years, I had been rotting. Perhaps, the credit collectors forgotten about me by now or maybe they are just waiting me to get out of this planet to launch an ambush on me.

I didn’t used to be timid like this... I swear I wasn’t like this... I mean I wouldn’t have started my venture if I was timid. I was brave enough back then... I was stupidly brave.

*Bravery is stupidity.*

I could no longer resist the free meals and visited the sewer hall every morning to get my meal. They rotated what they served, so it was pretty good. And eventually, I became interested in their “sermon”. After asking around in the hall, it seemed that attending to meetings and becoming a cult member had some benefits. They would receive evening meals and would be provided a spot in the hall to sleep. I didn’t care about being given a spot to sleep, but the extra meal was just too hard to resist.

I was told to visit the hell after 16:00 hour and I did exactly that. A part of me was rather excited because I haven’t had a decent event for so long. It was something new that fueled me into attending the meeting.

The scene at the hall was completely different when I visited to attend the meeting. It was quiet and people were organized. There were considerably less people in addition. Millar wasn’t with me. He said he wasn’t interested. He visited the hall for free meal, he told me earlier.

There was a man dressed firmly in a white robe. He was clearly holding a sermon of some sort. I was too far away to listen to his voice. People were gathered around him in an organized manner and they were as serious as they could possibly get.

When I gently approached, I started to hear what he was saying.

“We are not equal. No human is ever equal. Those who tell you that humans are equal are idealist who has yet to face the reality, or bureaucrats who lie to you to get votes.”

I managed to find a spot and sat down quietly.

“All of you would agree with me. You’ve faced the harsh reality for so long. While I dare saying humans are not equal, I insist that you all deserve better than this.”

He spoke calmly and quite convincingly. I mean it wasn’t hard to dispute with his statements.

“You do deserve better than this. You deserve a better standard of life. You all deserve better.”

Those who were listening to him nodded all at once, well, except for me.

“Then let us pave a brighter future for us. Let us work our way up.”

Ridiculous, I thought. We all knew that, but there was no way to “work our way up”. This was a hellhole. There was no way out. We all tried and eventually gave up.

He would go on and on about human rights and stuff. Honestly, what he spoke was right. In fact, he was too right. He was speaking righteous stuff we all would agree on but no way of achieving such. But I remained for the evening meal and I did get one. And I slept in the hall. It was better than sleeping in a cardboard box.

I felt magically better next morning. It was probably because I slept properly with my stomach full. I could no longer resist two free meals a day and chose to stay in the hall, effectively becoming a member of the cult. However, I chose not to listen to the preaching. I mean I would stay in the hall but chose to stay far away that I wouldn’t listen to what he said.

I spent quite a long time in the hall, never venturing out to above. The hall was better than anywhere on the planet. It was warm. It had a dry floor and it had

places to sleep and order was kept well. Everyone knew the place was a sanctuary and they intended to keep that way.

At one morning, Millar saw me and remarked.

“Hey, dude, you are totally into the cult, eh.”

I shrugged. I didn’t deny.

“You’ve been here for a season now.”

I knew I stayed here for quite some time, but I had no idea it had been a season.

“I am here for food, just like you are.”

He beamed a grin at me. “Yeah, but I didn’t join the cult like you are.”

He was trying to make a point to me and I didn’t try to argue my point because there was none to be honest. I was here for food and that was the truth. He tried to twist it either for fun or for something else, but that wasn’t my concern.

Noticing my intention of not fighting back, he tapped my shoulder and told me, “Have fun. I will see you later.”

On that night, the priest whom I had yet to find out his name or anything about him was doing his preaching as usual.

“A loser always blames.”

He was talking about a different subject on that night although overall theme of his speech was the same.

“A loser always blames,” He repeated, “Something or someone; let that be chances, let that be luck, let that be time. A loser always blames.”

I had turned my back against him and was trying to sleep. The hall was dead quiet, however, so his preaching got to me regardless. I was able to ignore usually, but in this night, it felt different.

“And you are all losers.”

My face twitched.

“Simply because you are all here and you are not trying to get out of here.”

We all tried. I tried.

“Excuses, excuses,” He said as if answering my thought.

I tried.

“I am sure you all tried, but did you really? Did you really try to get out of here or did you simply want to get out of here and yet to actually try to get out?”

I slowly opened my eyes.

I tried to get out but I couldn't because, if I did, I would be chased.

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To be honest though, I never actually attempted to get out of here. Actually, I am sure a lot of us here could get out if they really want to. It's just that they probably have stories and might be under danger if they do get out of here.

The reason I was safe on this planet was because the whole city was more less a lawless zone. But there weren't many crimes because there weren't much wealth to be stolen and the piss-poor people here knew that stealing would get them nowhere. They would rather work legitimately and earn their pay legitimately. If

someone or a group looted a store, that store would close and there would be one less store we could get a part time job from.

Less business in this city was the last thing we all wanted. Thus, we all knew stealing wasn't really an option.

“Don't just sit here and accept your ill fate!” His resounding voice echoed through the hall. I felt that his voice was a little odd, so I turned around and took a glance at him.

He was crying. His tears were flowing through his check. I was surprised. Why he would cry, I had no idea. Why would he care for people like us?

People like us who had absolutely no future. We were “losers”.

“Show them that you are not just the poor! Let's go to Earth!”

Whoa? To where? To Earth?! Does he even know what he is saying?

Regardless what I was thinking, over half of people roared in agreement.

“To Earth!” They roared powerfully and repeated, “To Earth!”

I felt they were out of their minds and probably caught in the moment of heat or whatever. There was absolutely no way for us to reach Earth. Hell, I was skeptical of our chances of successfully leaving Andromeda cluster even because, as far as I knew, we weren't legally allowed to leave the nation without proper permits.

We'd be shot down if we tried our way across without permits.

Regardless, the crowd was really going for it at that night and I was forced to leave the hall for a quiet place to take a nap. It had been a while for me to sleep outside again, and it clearly made me realize that I missed the hall.

Or “the Heaven” some prefer to call...

In my semi-conscious sleep, caused by the uncomfortable ground and chilly temperature of night on Freebie, I dreamt of days where I spent nights at clubs and danced with pretty girls. I felt I didn't exactly miss those days. Rather I felt I missed the joy and fire that still kicked around in my mind.

In other words, I was "alive" back then. On this planet, I was "dead". I didn't think much about this prior I went to the cult. But, as I heard more and more of his, whatever his name was, preaching for over a season, his words started to get to me.

And then there was this incident that changed my mind.

On the planet, weekly, a lottery was held. A lot of people purchased the tickets because winning it would be the way out of this hellhole. The prize wasn't that big, which was mere five million credits, but it was still enough to get out of here and restart comfortably elsewhere.

I chose not to purchase the tickets because the prize wasn't enough to get me out of my credit troubles. My pal, Millar, however, purchased tickets routinely and the lucky bastard won the grand prize.

He was clearly joyful when he rushed all the way down to the hall to inform me that he won the prize. Waving his ticket right in front of my face, he exclaimed with a voice that was full of excitement.

"I did it! I did it!" He repeatedly exclaimed with great excitement. "I can get out of this crappy place!"

People in the hall noticed his excitement and soon found out that he won the lottery. I could sense some jealous glares. As for me, I wasn't sure whether I was jealous, simply because the lottery prize alone wasn't enough for me to get me out of my troubles.

Yes, five million wasn't enough for me... Probably because of that, I was able to congratulate him with a truthful smile.

“So, you are finally out of here, jackass,” He told him jokingly who was holding his ticket with both of his hands. It was a small piece of worn paper with seven random numbers on it along with some bar codes on bottom. Edge of the ticket was heavily worn out.

“Yep, yep, I am outta here,” Nodding repeatedly, he answered. Turning around, then, he shouted, “I am fucking outta here!”

That was the last time I saw him until his body was found in depth of the sewer system.

The cult members had the sewer system mapped out for some time and they had been patrolling the system. Recognizing the face and knowing that I knew him, they informed me and brought me down to the spot where they found Millar's bloated body. I immediately covered my nose as soon as disgusting odor struck my nose. One of men used a stick to roll the body so that I can see his face clearly.

And, yes, it was Millar.

“That's him. How did he end up here? He was supposed to be out of here.”

My question was answered some time later when I was told by elders, who had been on this planet for hundreds of years, that lottery winners had a strong tendency to simply disappear.

In other words, to put it bluntly, the whole lottery was a scam.

“Why didn't you tell us then?!” I exclaimed at the man who told me.

“Do you really think people will listen?” He countered my fierce voice with what was called words of wisdom. True, I would have not believed his words, either. Not many would. Only those who had been on the fucking planet long enough knew

that the whole lottery was a scam to begin with. Those who won it was killed and was deposed into the sewers to rot. The Freebie administration was making money that way since there was so little tax income.

Truthfully, I wasn't horribly shocked by Millar's death. Yes, I hung out with him ever since I arrived on this planet. Yes, he was my pal, but our friendship was nothing more than just a fragile relationship hanging by a thread.

What I was livid about was how the administration was making money off the poor bastards like us. Granted, most of here were unwanted out there but that did not entitle them to treat us like cows to milk money out of.

Having such thoughts in my head, I was absolutely furious.

Regardless, the days went on and, on a night, the man in the white robe did his preaching as usual. On this night, he was repeating some of statements he made previously.

“And you are all losers.”

I heard that before.

“Simply because you are all here and you are not trying to get out of here.”

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“Excuses, excuses.”

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“I am sure you all tried, but did you really? Did you really try to get out of here or did you simply want to get out of here and yet to actually try to get out?”

Fucking hell, I thought. I stood up and pointed at him. “What the fuck is the point of all this?!” I shouted at him which prompted those who were listening to him turning to me. Regardless, I continued, “We can’t get out anyway!” I raised my voice even louder. “They’d rather have us die than leave!”

The hall became dead quiet as I finished my rant. They’d stare at me along with the man in the white robe. It was so quiet that it became uncomfortable for me to stay in the hall. I dashed out of there at once as a result.

“Fuck...”

Leaning against a dry sewer wall, I cursed.

“Fucked up world...”

The man won a lottery. They should have let him go with his deserved money. It’s never easy to win a lottery and the man won the fucking lottery. And it’s not as if the prize was mind bogglingly big. It was fucking five mil. Back in the day, I could have made that in a week.

Covering my face, I let out of a long frustrated and sorrow sigh.

Yes, “back in the day”... How far have I fallen? And how far will I fall? Should I continue to live on like this?

Should I? I am a human and I believe I have a right to choose how I end my life. Is this fucking planet where I will end up dead? If I can’t get out of here, what’s the point? I mean what would be the point? I live like shit on this damned planet. Perhaps, death is better.

I stayed away from the hall for a few days and, when I returned to the hall, I noticed that there were several people dressed in a uniform. It looked like a

corporate uniform with dark blue hue with light gray trims. They were apparently handing out something.

It was a necklace with a light green gemstone, a jade of some sort which was a common and cheap gemstone although it wouldn't be so cheap on this planet.

“What's this for?” I asked one of them who just handed me the necklace.

“A necklace goes around your neck,” He told me stoically.

“Well, duh, thanks for stating the obvious.”

Later I found out that the necklace was given to all cult members. I found it hard to believe that it was given out for free of charge, especially considering that the cult was large. I didn't know how large, but I found out that this cult on this planet was just one of cults. It had apparently spread well within Smuggler's Den.

Then it hit me that this cult business was shady. Actually, everything on this planet was shady from the top to the bottom. The administration was cheating on their lottery and who knows what this cult was up to. They gave out free food and a secured place to stay and sleep.

Who knows? The cult might even have a connection to the Freebie administration.

And then one day, out of nowhere, I was called by the man in the white robe. I was brought to a man where there was literally nothing but a desk with a laptop on it. The man in white robe was sitting on a fragile chair who stood up and faced me, nodding at the man who brought me.

“You may leave.”

And the man who brought me left at once. Having absolutely no idea why I was called, I became nervous. As far as I knew, I had done nothing wrong, perhaps other than shouting in the hall not long ago.

“Kerrard,” He softly said to me.

“Pardon?”

“That is my name.”

Who the fuck cares, I thought.

“Why did you call me?”

I didn’t have much respect for the man. I was grateful for the food but there was nothing more than that.

“Are you a human?”

His question confused me. I mean what kind of question was that? Narrowing my eyes, I wasn’t sure what to say, and he repeated.

“Are you a human?”

“What do you mean?”

For reasons unknown to me, I could hear the man sigh deeply. Why would he sigh.

“I expect a certain level of intelligence from human beings,” He said to me as he turned his chair, which was facing his desk, around and sat down.

I had no fucking idea what the man was getting to and decided to just listen.

“Being passive is fine,” He continued with a sorrow look on his face. He wasn’t looking at me. Rather he was looking down. “But doing nothing when there is no hope, doing nothing to improve their situation frustrates me.”

What did he call me for?

“Why have you called me here?”

He raised his head and looked at me. One would think his face would look depressed after all the nonsense he spewed, but he had a defiant glare.

“You do understand where you are, do you not?”

I frowned and answered honestly, “For the love of God, just tell me what you’ve called me here for. I haven’t got all day.”

“But you do have all day. What everyone on this planet has plenty is time.”

I sighed and shook my head slightly. I wasn’t here to play a war of words. Turning around at once, I had my hands on door knob. Then I heard him saying, “It is better for them to ... just die.”

Growling as well as gritting my teeth, I turned around at once and pointed at him. “You have no right to claim that!” I exclaimed aggressively. “Fine, we are all stuck here and have no future or whatsoever but...”

But...

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“A life that depends on lottery to bail out is as good as being dead,” He proclaimed.

“So? Is that what you are trying to do? Getting them killed by trying to lead them to Earth? Do you know how ridiculous that sounds? We have absolutely no chance to reach Earth!”

He fired up a confident glare at me and told me, “There is a chance. The price will be their lives, but they do have a chance.”

*Is this guy serious?*

“What makes you so sure?” And then it hit me. “And why are you even telling me all this?”

“I am telling you because you seem to have grasped the price of being here,” He explained with a soft voice, “Everyone comes here to escape from troubles. Yet they fail to realize that this place is a trap.”

I started to realize that the guy had a point. This planet did seem like a big trap. Once you get in, you can't get out. If that isn't a trap, I don't know what else is.

Still...

"But that still does not mean we should all die!" I exclaimed in defense.

"Do you not want to see Earth for once? It worth gambling one's life on," He said to me with a sorrow smile.

I became really frustrated. What does he think he is? What right does he have to decide fate of so many?

"Fuck you. Who do you think you are?!" I yelled at him and just left the room.

Since that day, I tried to stay away from the hall. I still came by for the meals but I was away as soon as I got the meals. It was also when the distribution of the necklaces became very active. Within weeks, I was spotting a lot of people on streets with the necklace which indicated that the cult was spreading rapidly.

Or perhaps they were already members; I simply may have not realized. As I kept my distance from the cult, I started to see things I wasn't able to see. It was the economy structure of Freebie. When I was trying too hard to get by, I could not realize but I could see when my meals were taken care of.

The current economy structure of Freebie seemed unsustainable. I wasn't sure why I wasn't able to figure that out far sooner. I mean it was so easy to see. The shops had barely any customers but they were open and still paying us for small errands we did.

"Fucking hell," I blurted from a distance of a bakery where some people like me were getting paid for getting their errands done.

Fucking hell indeed, I figured out; they were a part of the trap. Freebie administration had apparently set up a big trap. Their rigged lottery was probably their main income. The shops were their means of giving us scraps to hang on to.

Shaking my head while growling with angry words, I spent some days thinking how to break or even expose their ill deeds. Coming to a conclusion that it wasn't possible alone was easy, and it didn't take long, either.

It was clear that I'd wind up dead like Millar if I did try. In the end, I returned to the hall. I hated myself from returning but my stomach needs had to be taken care of. I wished I were an ESP. I read that those bastards don't need to eat much if at all.

The hall had changed a lot. It was no longer just a chaotic place with mindless people. They had uniforms and I even saw security camera on walls. There were desks and were computers. I felt like it was turning into some sort of HQ. And I was seized as soon as I entered.

"What the? What are you doing this for?!" I exclaimed and struggled. However, I felt a hit back of my neck and everything went black.

When I regained consciousness, I found myself in a jail of some sort.

"What the hell is going on here..."

Grabbing the metal bars, I shouted, "Hey! Is anyone here! I haven't done anything to deserve this!"

A moment later, Kerrad showed up.

"I haven't done anything to deserve this!" I shouted at him. "Get me out of here!"

He'd look at me lazily and told me, "You know too much."

"So? You are going to lock me up like this?! This is bullshit!"

"I am not going to lock you up for too long. In fact, I could get you out right now."

Taking a deep breath and a step back from the bars, I asked him, "What's the catch?"

"You will fully join the cult and go to Earth."

"You are asking me to die."

"You will eventually wind up dead on this planet either way. As I said, you know too much and it shows with your attitude. You won't go far now, trust me."

Sighing and shaking my head, I downcast my eyes. I felt he had a point as much as I hated to admit. Regardless, he was asking me to die eventually and there was no way I was going to accept that. Granted, my life may be screwed but I wasn't going to willingly go down.

Perhaps, this Kerrard guy read my mind. He beamed a faint grin at me and said to me, "Once you are away, feel free to sneak out if you dare. I don't care. But I want you to be aboard a freighter as an overseer while at it."

My brain started making quick calculations, and I quickly concluded that I would be able to sneak out at one point and I'd end up in Sol instead of Andromeda cluster in which case I'd have a new fresh life to start over.

I certainly saw enough loopholes in Kerrad's proposal.

"Just to make sure, you are sure that I can leave at any time I want?"

"Once the ships take off, yes, you will be free," He assured me.

"Fine, then. Count me in."

He'd beam a smile at me after getting me out of the jail and struck out his hand for a handshake.

“Welcome aboard,” He said.

While I didn't feel like shaking his hand, I decided to go with the flow.

Once I made the pledge, Kerrad kept me close by. I was basically becoming his right hand man in the operation. He'd tell me everything that was going on and often left me in charge of tasks.

From what I could see, Kerrad had a powerful backer who was providing him with money to do what he was doing. He also somehow got a hold of an updated blueprint of Mammoth class freighter with extremely high mineral efficiency.

He told me he was building hundreds of Mammoth freighters and I wondered who the mysterious backer was. That wasn't many individuals who would have the credit. A millionaire wouldn't even be able to build one of those. A billionaire should be able to build a few. Only a trillionaire would be able to build the amount Kerrad was claiming to build.

Now, as far as I knew, there was only one trillionaire in the clusters, and that would be the Crimson wizard. However, I felt it was not possible for him to be involved in this. Therefore, my next line of thoughts moved onto organizations instead of individuals. In the end, I had no clue on who his backer or backers might have been.

Few hundreds of days passed like that. I could tell Kerrad's plan was about to come to a successful end when he took me off Freebie to show me a completed Mammoth freighter.

There was something very ironic about the event because he took me off the planet. I had been trying to get off the fucking planet and bam! He took me off the planet just like that. To make it worse, I had to go back down to the planet after

Kerrad showed me around. He apparently had ways to completely avoid Freebie administration.

Or maybe he was a part of them, who knows. Regardless, things moved on swiftly and I was aboard one of Mammoth freighters as an overseer.

The job of an overseer was ..., well, overseeing the general operation within the job. Basically, my job was to keep order. I thought I'd have an access to the ship's bridge but I was proven wrong. The ship had a bridge alright but everything was locked down. The ship was going to sail on a predefined course with absolutely no way to alter anything at all. Everything was stored on protected single-cell ROM chips.

ROM was read-only-memory. Still, ROM could be written, given proper tools, software, and time. However, protected ROM meant it had additional layers of hardware encryption. Still, given enough time, I may be able to crack it.

However, this "single-cell" part was the killing blow. The term meant basically that the memory had only one write cycle. Once data was written, that was it. There was absolutely no way to modify such ROM. Heck, it didn't even need to be protected. There was no more write cycle available on the chip.

With no escape pods, there was no conventional way for me to escape from the ship. The easiest way would be an ESP's teleportation, but I wasn't an ESP.

And just like that, the freighters were away. Through the windows, I could see tens of other freighters within visual range. I simply could not imagine how Kerrard could have pulled this off without alerting the authorities.

I mean this was an event of epic proportions. From what I could tell, millions would be away from Smuggler's den. The administration would notice. No, Andromeda council would notice.

Who is he? How could he have pulled this off? Who's behind this gigantic mischief?

I knew no answer to any of them.

And just like that weeks passed witnessing the fucking event of the navy letting us pass while having internal fight between them. While I did not have any access to the ship's control, the comm. console was capable of receiving broadcasts. I heard what happened out there when Lord Ankle's fleet attempted to halt the freighters.

He was, in the end, murdered. This was the point when I realized I was in for something really big and that running away wasn't probably a possibility anymore.

In other words, I was going to die. Even if I somehow managed to get out of here, I'd be chased down and captured. And I'd probably end up far worse than my shitty life back on Freebie.

Besides, there really wasn't any way to escape. I tried, trust me.

Then a real chance arrived when the freighter fleet was passing by Freedom colony. By this time, the freighter I was on was having ventilation issues. The ventilation system was simply overloaded which wasn't a surprise. I clearly felt the system was inadequate. Thankfully, as an overseer, my place was the bridge and had little of ordeals that the others were going through.

Freedom colony sent thousands of shuttles to help us out and even this particular ship I was on received several medics and engineers.

When they came in for repairs, I asked them if I could tag along and leave the ship.

Long story short, my request was denied.

“What do you mean you can’t take me with you guys?!” I desperately argued with them. “I am just one person. Nobody will notice!”

But their orders seemed to be firm: Just repair, give medical assistance if absolutely required and take no one.

I was flabbergasted. I was absolutely flabbergasted. I even got down on my knees and begged them with tears in my eyes.

“Take me please! Please, I will do anything!”

Alas, they wouldn’t take me.

Out of pure desperation, I attacked them. I intended to take over their shuttle and make a run for it. But I was easily knocked out by one of them and, when I woke up, they were long gone. The ship’s ventilation was repaired and Freedom colony was already out of visual range.

I had to accept my fate; the end was nigh. There was no way United Sol would let us pass. They were likely to shoot us down. Kerrard seemed assured that we’d be able to see Earth at least. But I highly doubted that.

And it wasn’t just me who was becoming concerned. Those who were aboard the ship, nearly a million of them, were starting to become worried as well. I was receiving daily visitors in hundreds regarding their concerns of death and beyond.

Yes, you read me right. “Death and beyond”..., these people were crazy. Whatever Kerrard had done to them, he brainwashed them good. They were actually eager to visit Earth. Like the Bau will actually allow us set a foot on their home soil...

Still, I had to play along. Having heard hundreds of Kerrard’s “sermons”, I was able to loosely mimic his words to them.

And we continued to sail toward the border of United Sol.

To be honest, I fully expected to be shot down and die in flames once we got there. To my surprise though, we were escorted by a captain named Willste. In his shoes, I might have done the same. There was no easy way to shoot down hundreds of millions of people.

The painful thing was that I couldn't talk to anyone outside of the ship. I attempted to hack into other controls of the ship but whoever designed the ship's internal circuits knew what he was doing. Every single function was isolated from another and had its own single-cell ROM. For an example, the comm. system was programmed to listen only a specific frequency. Modifying it wasn't possible due to the lovely single-cell ROM. Hacking into RAM was another possibility which I had to quickly give up because it was using integrated memory cache within CPU. Basically, it had no RAM to hack into.

I was hoping that United Sol navy personnel would dock onto the ship but that didn't happen.

In the end, I must have looked like a frustrated monkey that was dancing up and down in middle of nowhere. To my absolutely surprise though, the freighter fleet continued its journey past Jupiter. Few random ones were shot down along the way but majority of the fleet was intact and were merrily sailing toward Earth.

I suppose Kerrard knew what he was doing. Well, the dude looked like he knew what he was doing in more ways than one.

And, when I saw Mars, I knew this fleet was going to reach Earth.

"Fucking hell, that's Mars... Kerrard, you beautiful fucking moron, you did it." I said to myself while I watched Mars from the bridge.

I had never seen Mars before. Well, I have from images but never the real one. The whole planet was covered with dull gray clouds.

Back on Freebie, when he told me that there was a chance for us to reach Earth, I scoffed him off. I really did because I felt there was absolutely no fucking way to reach there. But here we were, passing Mars peacefully, being escorted by a Martian fleet.

At this point, I snickered and said to myself on the empty bridge.

“United Sol should be having a massive headache.”

I still believed we’d be shot down because there was no way for any nation to take all of us in. We were basically illegal aliens. We came here without documents and our number was in hundreds of millions.

No sane nation would take us in.

**And they didn’t.**

What welcomed us as soon as I could see Earth in a visual range was a large fleet. And they fired at us as soon as we got into its range.

I could see other freighters being shot and immediately collapsed into itself due to pressure differential. What had gotten me intrigued was that the ship I was on was withstanding shots, which meant that the ship had armors while others didn’t.

Regardless, it was only a matter of time before this ship would either implode or explode. Either way, I was forced to leave the bridge as it gave me a warning to evacuate.

When I rushed down to the cargo module, it was when things really started to go south. The ship was losing self-balance and explosion was occurring everywhere.

The whole rig was falling apart. Air was leaking and ship balance was long lost. People or what were left of them were bouncing off the walls violently before my eyes. Still, none of the brutal scenes concerned me. What concerned me right before my blissful death was Earth.

The mother Earth, the most beautiful planet I've ever seen.

We knew what we had gotten ourselves into. We knew we were all going to die. Still, when death was knocking at our doors, we panicked. Who wouldn't?

"Noooo!" A woman nearby me started to dash toward a wall and started to hit it with her fists. "Help! Help!" She yelled desperately with tears flowing out of her eyes in zero gravity. "We are dying here!"

She wasn't alone in her futile attempt for rescue. There were a lot of people who were shouting for help. I knew it was futile. Hell, I am sure they knew it was futile. I suppose they just had to do something with death approaching them so swiftly.

But we knew what we had gotten ourselves into.

*We knew we were going to die.*

*We knew.*

- Fin