

[Shattered union arc] [3] [Blackbox] [9601]

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Yakov was in a room with sophisticated equipment to analyze the black box recovered from former President Mirren's vessel.

There was also a sound engineer in the room. The room was dim and the only light sources were a shining console that radiated greenish blue hue.

The engineer played what was recorded on former President Mirren's bridge before it was lost.

A voice of presumably a crew spoke. "Sir, an unknown craft is approaching. I am unable read its electronic signature. What should we do, President?"

"Hail the vessel." And it was President Mirren's voice.

"The vessel is attacking on us! Weapons array has been hit. It's offline. Their attacks are passing through our shields!"

"Evasive maneuvers. Get us out of here!"

"Direct hits to the hull! I just lost contact from the engine room! President?!"

"Sir! Your orders!"

"Sir!"

Their voices were desperate and demanded Mirren to give them orders. And Mirren's voice eventually sounded.

"Shake it off."

Mirren's voice was unexpectedly calm unlike others.

And then explosions were heard.

"Damage report!"

"Massive damage to hull. All decks are taking damage. Tactical system is down. Shields are no use."

Right after his report, sound of a large explosion filled the bridge. One after another ..., the bridge was soon filled with screaming, shouting and moaning.

"Is it the time?"

It was Mirren's voice. There was a moment of silence after his speech.

"Initiate self-destruction."

But his command was met with a silence as if there was no one left on the bridge and Mirren's sighing was heard.

And then everything went static.

Yakov twisted his head, waiting for further recording but there was none.

"That's it?"

"Yes, this is all I could get,"

He sighed. There wasn't much data on the black box. The short recording he had just listened to and some damage reports were all it had.

It was Yakov who advised Gvew to launch the assault on the Ark. And after Gvew became the president, he became his right hand man.

Since then he had been working tirelessly to solidify Gvew's position as the president of United Sol. It hadn't been easy however and he needed to get rid of a lot of ... obstacles. It was primarily due to the nature of Gvew's takeover and,

once the crisis and hostile takeover was over, the house and the senate voiced that Gvew's presidency was unlawful.

Of course, they had been votes to depose Gvew but he had been hanging in there by a thread, and Yakov had been attempting to give Gvew a ground to stand on.

One of his solutions was trying to find who was behind former President Mirren's assassination and he had been studying the black box recovered from the accident sight.

"Do you notice anything unusual?" Yakov sighed while being resigned to a fact that he may find nothing of usefulness. "Anything, just give me anything to chew on."

"Well, there is one thing that is quite suspicious,"

"Go on."

The engineer began to rewind the recording. "Listen to this."

"Is it the time?"

He repeated the part two times. "Do you notice anything unusual?"

Yakov shook his head. "Nope."

He then filtered several channels of sound and repeated the part again. Yakov was able to hear some sound.

"Interesting, what's that whooshing sound?"

"I believe such a sound can only be created when an ESP is teleported in or out."

Yakov groaned but grinned. He felt he had something. "Are you certain?"

"I am pretty sure. I've ten years of experience in this field."

"So, someone teleported in or out. Now, that's a valuable piece of information..."

Indeed, he had a case to pursue.

Teleportation was a common ability that ESPs used. However, teleporting long distances wasn't something many ESPs were able to execute. And considering Mirren's vessel was alone at the time, the closest source to teleport from was Venus or Venus outpost. It would require a class S ESP or a class A ESP with teleportation specialization to initiate such a long distance teleportation.

"I wonder what he meant by 'Is it time'?" The engineer questioned. "It's as if he knew it was coming."

"I was wondering about that also..." Yakov spoke vacantly. His brain was trying to make quick sense of what was going on.

"Can you make a copy of this record for me?"

"Sure," The engineer nodded.

The only person capable of teleporting into the vessel was Cecil to his knowledge. No one else had the necessary ability to have done so otherwise. It wasn't enough to push an idea that Cecil was the assassin. However, as long as he could make others believe that Cecil had a part in former President Mirren's assassination, it was good enough for him.

Yakov felt it was too good of a chance to let go. Pro-Cecil voices had been increasing at the Ark and this was a good chance to shut them up.

The problem was lack of evidences. Pushing his case with a simple hypothesis wasn't obviously going to work. At the same time, he didn't need to prove to the

world that Cecil partook in the assassination. He just needed to convince those at the Ark. For such a purpose, he needed support from others.

Yakov called Doukar. Doukar had been a bureaucrat for almost his entire life. He was probably one of the eldest bureaucrats available, who survived Gvew's onslaught roughly a year ago. If he could convince and gain support from him, it would be a great start.

"You wanted to see me?" said Doukar. Yakov called him to a cafeteria in the Ark.

"Have a seat please."

A waitress approached promptly. "Anything for you, sirs?"

"Nothing for me," Yakov replied.

"Black tea please," said Doukar. "So, what do you want?"

Yakov was a little surprised to see such a reaction from him. He sounded casual despite of the fact that he outranked him. Regardless, he explained to Doukar about the black box that was retrieved from former President Mirren's vessel and asked. "Who would be able to penetrate a ship's shield and teleport in?"

"What made you think something or someone teleported in?"

"What? Wouldn't that be obvious? I just told you about the record."

Doukar shook his head. "It's still not obvious to me. You are pushing the case, I can tell. That's for sure."

Yakov frowned. Realizing that he would not be on his side, he vented his frustration by using rank card; He was higher rank than Doukar. Yet, Doukar showed no respect. He smashed the table weakly.

"I want you to show some respect for your superior officer."

Doukar scoffed in return. "Don't make me laugh. You've become my superior officer only because you were chosen by the current president. Without him, you are nothing more than a pup."

"What did you say?!"

"Let me tell you what. If Cecil stood on his ground, Gvew would have never become the president. Be thankful for what you've got."

Yakov felt his blood flowing backward. It was the sad truth. Pro-Cecil faction was becoming larger because they felt Cecil was more fitted to be the president than Gvew was which was indisputable truth. Cecil had the experience and proper background and many at the Ark wasn't pleased how Gvew earned his presidency.

Doukar continued. "I bet you are trying to scheme something against him. I guess keeping hanging on by a bare thread isn't good for health, eh?"

"How dare you...."

"So what, are you going to do, fire me?"

Yakov gritted his teeth. "Damn right!"

"Ha!" Doukar replied with a laugh. "Good, I quit! I am going to Venus. Farewell," He stood up at once and rushed out of the cafeteria, bumping a waitress in progress.

Technically, Yakov wasn't in a position to fire anyone. He did outrank Doukar but that was about it. He wouldn't be able to punish him at all.

"Doh....," Gvew was loss at words for a moment. "You made him quit?"

Yakov reported the event to Gvew along with his report on the black box.

"Argh....," Gvew sighed deeply. "You shouldn't have really done that."

"Sir?"

Yakov was in Gvew's presidential office.

"You said he went to Venus..."

The last thing Gvew wanted was to let Cecil know that how badly he was doing. Doukar was certainly going to tell Cecil everything that had been happening at the Ark. Furthermore, Doukar was nearing his retirement and didn't have anything to lose by being fired. If anything, it appeared as if he wanted to be fired.

Reading Gvew's troublesome face, Yakov made a suggestion. "We could get rid of him, sir," He suggested.

Gvew groaned. He had to make a choice. "All right, send a man and get rid of him."

Yakov saluted. "Yes, sir."

"Oh and," Gvew stopped Yakov who was about to turn around and leave. "I want you to close this case for now."

He was talking about the black box case and Yakov's eyebrows quivered insignificantly.

Gvew explained, "We have more important issues right now. I hope you understand."

"Sir." Yakov approached closer. "We need this case. We need to press charges."

"Against who?"

Yakov hesitated but replied eventually, "Against the Crimson wizard."

Sighing deeply, Gvew shook his head. "No, you mustn't do that."

"Why not, sir?"

"First of all, you have no proof. A hypothesis isn't going to work, you know."

"Sir, we don't need to prove anything. We just need to convince the others."

Unlike Yakov who had deep dislike toward Cecil, Gvew knew Cecil as a person. It wasn't a part of past he was proud of and Cecil didn't leave any record of it.

He wasn't clear on what year it was. What he did recall was that he attempted to attack President Mirren. He was with Cecil at that time, and it was a shuttle port.

Unlike other presidents, Mirren did not have heavy securities around him. It was partially due to the fact that Cecil was acting as his personal guard. No one was better than him indisputably.

Gvew was with Adella, who became his wife later on, at that time when both of them attempted to attack President Mirren. They weren't planning to kill Mirren. Oh hell, no, Gvew may have been a spoiled rich kid but he wasn't insane. But then he was stupid enough to attack him while the Crimson wizard was present.

Long story short, Gvew and Adella were defeated by Cecil in a matter of seconds. And then they were thrown into a jail for few days before being released on a bail paid by his father who was a rear admiral at that time.

Gvew himself was to be disciplined and was going to be charged with treason. However, Mirren never pressed the charges and Cecil erased the record of his crime. In doing so, Gvew was able to work at the Ark as a security guard. If his crime record wasn't erased, he would have been barred from working at the Ark.

After that, he worked his way up the old fashioned way until he became a chief of security at the Ark. And, although he never thanked Mirren and Cecil for not charging him with the crime, he was grateful. In a sense, he felt he owed him a favor, a huge favor in fact.

And he decided to return the favor in his own way by preventing Yakov scheming against him.

In truth, there was more than just returning a favor which was never asked to be repaid. As he became a president himself, he started to understand some of Cecil's, or the Crimson wizard's, actions. There were times he needed to send messages across the hard way. There were times he needed to use physical forces and brutality to control others.

When he came to the realizations, he started to see Cecil in a new light. Cecil's actions started to make some sense to him.

"Just make sure you take care of Doukar, Yakov. We don't need to agitate anyone right now."

But Yakov refused to back off. "Sir, do you not realize your position? They want you out. They are scheming to denounce your presidency! They've tried to do it once. They will do it again!"

Of course, Gvew was fully well aware and he expected no less. After all, what he did was literally a coup.

"Listen, you follow my orders," Gvew finally raised his voice. "And I say what you are trying to do will only agitate more and place me under even worse light, so stop this. When my rating gets better, you will be welcome to try to bring that case up. Am I making myself clear?"

Yakov was clearly not pleased but Gvew pushed on.

"Do I make myself clear?"

Eventually letting out of a long sigh, Yakov answered, "Yes, sir."

"Just make sure Doukar is taken care of."

Yakov needed someone reliable to do the job and he called Devon for the job. Devon was Gvew's daughter and Reed's younger sister. Unlike Reed who couldn't stand his father and left as soon as he came of age, she remained with her father and became a chief security officer when Gvew became the president. She basically was given her father's former position.

Devon was a class A hyper human and she used a pair of custom designed pistols. She was a rare case of a hyper human opting to use guns instead of blades. Her pistols were unique and were named “Doombringers” by herself.

She was also known as “the boob girl” among younger and kinkier members of the Ark due to her glamorous body features.

She wasn’t pleased to have been ordered to assassinate Doukar because she had known him personally but an order was an order and she decided to carry it out. She found Doukar on one of landing pads on roof of the Ark. He didn’t have anything with him and was preparing a shuttle alone outside. Devon herself came in alone as well and she did not hide.

Doukar noticed Devon casually walking toward the landing pad.

“Yakov is so easy to predict,” He said with a smile his face. “I suppose he sent you to finish me?”

Devon said no words but nodded instead. She placed her hands on her pistols equipped on her belt.

“I am old,” Doukar said with the smile on still. “And I just want to retire. Is that too much to ask?”

Devon wasn’t going to say anything and pulled out her pistols which had four big barrels. It used special ammunitions and an ammo had to be loaded directly into a barrel, meaning it was capable of firing only four times before having to reload. Spare ammo was equipped on her belt itself.

He still had his smile on and shrugged happily. “Lass, I am not ready to die yet.” Just as he finished, a figure jumped from the other side of the shuttle and dashed at her.

“What the” Uttering, Devon had to quickly defend herself with one of her pistols against an energy blade. “Who are you?!” She demanded although she felt he wouldn’t identify himself.

“My name is Karl!” But he did identify himself. “Of the Hammers!”

“The Hammers?” Devon had no idea what that meant.

“Cecil’s team so to speak,” Doukar, knowing Devon was clueless, explained to her. “Now having said that, excuse me. I need to take my leave.” Opening a hatch, Doukar walked into the shuttle.

Gritting her teeth, Devon attempted to shake Karl off but she was at a disadvantage due to nature of her weapons. She had to jump backwards to keep a distance but, at that point, the shuttle was already taking off.

She aimed one of her pistols at the shuttle at once and fired which created huge recoil and her arm was pushed backwards. She was confident that her gun was powerful enough to go through the shuttle’s armor plating.

However, Karl jumped up and attempted to deflect Doombringer’s ammo which pierced through his blade and shoulder. By then the ammunition became too weak to have any impact on the shuttle and was simply deflected by its plating.

Karl didn’t seem to mind his shoulder which was pouring out of blood and dashed at Devon who was aiming her other pistol at the shuttle. His blade was broken, so he took out a replacement blade from his belt and slashed at Devon’s pistol. Her pistol was designed to withstand energy blades but her aim was disturbed.

“Ugh!” Devon became frustrated because Doukar’s shuttle was already ascending rapidly. She had less than ten seconds before the shuttle would be too far. She jumped backward again to keep a distance only to realize that she jumped off the roof.

“Ah, crap!” She uttered as she fell. The fall itself did not concern her because landing from such height wasn’t much of an issue for hyper humans. What the fall meant that she missed her last opportunity to shoot the shuttle down. To her surprise, Karl followed her, caught her in air and threw her back on the roof and he fell to the ground instead. She rushed to edge of roof and looked down to see Karl but he wasn’t there. A small pool of blood was present and that was all there was. Interestingly, there was no trace of blood, either.

She reported to Yakov that she failed.

“You failed?!” He exclaimed with anger. “How can you fail such a simple task?!”

She explained that Doukar had an assistance.

“Karl of the Hammers?! Did you at least get him?”

She shook her head.

Yakov was about to curse at her but restrained himself, realizing that she was Gvew’s daughter.

“Find that Karl guy at least,” He told her as he dismissed her. “You are the chief security after all.”

She was going to regardless whether Yakov ordered or not. But it was easier to be said than done. There was no trace of blood other than the small pool he made at the landing. The amount of blood loss indicated that the wound was severe. Still, he was nowhere to be found within the Ark itself.

Meanwhile, the house at the Ark was attempting to pass a legislation to place embargo on Venus and Mars both of which had recently declared independent.

The political structure of the Ark originated from United States of America’s political system. However, it evolved over 7.000 thousand years and numerous changes were made over the hundreds of centuries. It still retained the house and the senate. However, the house and the senate members weren’t entirely chosen by election. Furthermore, the size of both assemblies increased.

At the Ark, the house had roughly twenty five hundred members and the senate had roughly five hundred members. Majority of house seats were won by elections from planets but there were exceptions. For an example, a clan had a right to have a representative at the house level. And bigger a clan was, more

seats they could secure. The Bau, as the prime example, had roughly a thousand members in the house and a hundred in the senate.

Senate members weren't chosen by any form of elections. They were promoted from house members. Passing a legislation also changed as well. The house was entirely responsible for approving new and modifying existing legislations. Once passed, the president would sign. A president's ability to veto had been stripped away. He had to sign a passed legislation regardless his own opinions.

The senate came in effect only when a legislation vote was in tie in the house. A tie in the house did not mean the absolute tie as you know. It had a margin of 10% to be considered a tie.

United Sol politics dictated that a win at the house level required 56% of YES vote instead of 51%, meaning a legislation having 45% to 55% was considered a tie. And a tied legislation was allowed to pass onto the senate where the same tie rule applied. If a legislation was tied even in the senate, such a legislation was dismissed unless brought up by the house again.

The president's power was in the senate where his vote would be counted as a tie breaker if a legislation was still tied at senate level. He could still opt not to vote in which case the entire decision was up to the senate. The president also retained his exclusive orders.

Furthermore, during emergencies, only the senate and the president were active. The reason behind this was because of the size of the house. Organizing thousands of members wasn't an easy feat in emergencies. No legislation was allowed to pass during emergencies. It was for purely decision making purposes for immediate affects as well as issuing martial law.

A Bau house member was making his speech on the legislation to place embargo on Venus and Mars.

"We do not want us. I believe they've made it clear. Yet, they are still doing trades with us, which does not make sense to me," He said in front of thousands of

house politicians. “We need to place embargo on them and let them know that we do not want them, either. I feel it is crucial that we must make them suffer financially.”

A house politician spoke against his speech.

“Venus and Mars do not lose much over the embargo,” He insisted. “If anything, Moon will lose the most and it will have an overall negative impact on our economy as well. I repeat, neither Venus nor Mars will feel anything. It is us who will lose out more in long term. I advise you against this.”

All Bau house members were going to vote YES for this proposal. Non-Bau members were skeptical of the idea because they knew the potential negative impact of placing embargo on them. However, the Bau bribed few hundreds and the legislation received 57% of YES vote in the end.

Yakov brought the legislation to be signed to Gvew and he buried his head in his hands.

“You’ve got to be kidding me...,” He grumbled. “I cannot believe they passed this stupid legislation.”

Sighing, Yakov informed Gvew, “Sir, the Bau has been having field days. They control the house, sir. If they want to pass a legislation, they can, sir.”

“They have, what, a little over a thousand house members? That’s nowhere enough to reach 56%. Have they been buying the votes?”

Yakov nodded to Gvew’s question.

The balance was broken. The house used to have 4.000 members but, after Venus and Mars became independent, it was reduced to 2.700 members which enabled the Bau to control 45% of the house and it was easy for them to pass almost any legislations they wanted with some bribing. Furthermore, some of house members aligned themselves with the Bau as well.

All Gvew could do was sigh. He felt that the only reason he was still the president was because the Bau did not see him as a threat. If the Bau wanted, they could easily depose of him with relative ease. Of course, if the Bau really did attempt to depose him, he would have put up a fight.

Shaking his head in disarray, he inquired Yakov. "And Doukar?"

Yakov dropped his head slightly. "He got away, sir. Apparently, we have an agent from Venus here who assisted him."

"Oh, great!" Gvew exclaimed in a frustrated voice. "Just great! God damn it!"

Gvew wasn't in a position to do anything. He didn't have the support of the Bau; he didn't have his own political party members. All he had was Yakov and Devon. Yakov was a house member himself but a lone vote meant nothing. Devon was an Ark staff who couldn't vote.

"Say, Yakov, why don't I create my own political party now? I ought to attract some members," Gvew suggested in desperation.

Yakov had thought the same except that he didn't expect much of response. "It is certainly worth a try but I wouldn't expect a huge reaction, sir. In fact, it might not even take off, given your popularity among the house members..."

The reason Gvew was retaining his position was the president was primarily because the Bau had been refusing to cast him out. There had been an attempt to depose him soon after he took over the presidency and the notion ended in a tie at the house level. It also ended up a tie at the senate level as well. Gvew was barred from casting his vote at that time since it was regarding his own dismissal. And the ties were largely due to the Bau being against the notion.

“Fine, fine, let’s forget about it.” Shaking his hand, Gvew dismissed the idea of creating his own party. “So, what is the potential damage from the embargo they stupidly approved?”

“I did some quick math. Moon will be hit the hardest. We are talking about hundreds of billions of credits from Moon alone per year which means we will be missing out few tens of billions from import and export taxes.”

“Okay..., I am getting a headache,” Gvew growled as he spoke with a long sigh. “Any fucking solutions? Excuse my language.”

“Don’t mind your language, sir, because I feel it’s warranted. As for a solution, I do believe I did come up with you.”

It took a moment for Gvew to realize what he meant. “The blackbox?” To which Yakov nodded firmly.

“It’s one way to distract them, sir. We do need this,” He added.

“Fine, let’s say it does distract them but that still does not reduce the financial damage.”

Yakov was in thoughts for a moment and came up with a proposal. “Sir, we could create some more lotteries. It is a good way to get some of the loss back. Right now, Moon has two different lotteries that run weekly. One additional lottery should cut some single-digit billions from the total loss.”

Lotteries in Sol were all government-owned businesses.

It wasn’t a legit solution. However, it was a way to reduce losses. The poor would struggle and nothing would change. Still, on papers at least, it was a way to reduce the losses.

“Tax the idiots, eh?” Gvew muttered. “So be it. It will be better than having to enter financial crisis. I will use an exclusive order.”

They were going to enter an economy crisis nevertheless, but Gvew wanted to slow it down as much as possible.

“And the blackbox, sir?”

“Fine, go ahead. I haven’t got a choice. Do whatever the hell you want.”

Yakov smiled at last. “Thank you, sir.”

Yakov made a speech soon after calling for a house session. Not all members attended and he had only five hundred members in the house chamber.

Displaying the content of the blackbox, he brought on the technician he worked with and let him testify that the sound was in fact an ESP’s teleportation sound. With that established, Yakov pushed his agenda that Cecil must have something to do with former President Mirren’s assassination. His accusation was based on a fact that no one else would have been close enough and powerful enough to have initiated such a long range teleportation. Yakov made it clear that he was not accusing Cecil of the assassination. He was merely pointing out that Cecil may have had something to do with the assassination.

His aim in this campaign was to distract house members from launching yet another vote to depose Gvew and to weaken pro-Cecil voices. He did not need to prove anything as long as he sounded plausible.

The house members’ trust and support in Yakov was low because of his obvious position as Gvew’s right hand man. Regardless, he was making sense and those who attended the session were having discussions. It was going exactly as Yakov planned until Avicenna stood against him.

Avicenna was the eldest member of the house. By seniority, no one was higher than her. Even Doukar was below her by seniority. Yakov still outranked her but, due to Avicenna far superior seniority, he could not dismiss her easily like he did with Doukar.

Furthermore, Avicenna had worked with Mirren and Cecil for her entire political life. If she was to vouch for Cecil, Yakov's campaign was going to hit a wall or so he thought.

Avicenna's calm voice sounded through the chamber.

"I've known and worked with former President Mirren and advisor Cecil for my entire life."

As she spoke, the chamber became completely silent. She commanded respect, even from Bau house members.

"They've had differences, yes. They've argued, yes. There were times they growled at each other. But I assure you that they had always been as professional as they could ever be. Outside of work, they were good friends. And may I remind all of you that Cecil married his only child, Marat? Granted, Cecil isn't exactly a person with predictable behaviors, but Mirren was his father-in-law."

The chamber remained silent as she went on. Even Yakov couldn't dare to interrupt her speech.

"However, I will admit that their relationship became cracked during the Andromeda independence. Still, I assure you that Cecil would have not even thought about assassinating Mirren. And to add, there is one more person I know who could have done the teleportation."

The members in the chamber murmured for a moment before becoming completely silent for her answer.

"Cecil has a pupil named Kisia. She is a class A ESP with teleportation specialization. She could have also done it. My point is that the ESP database is very often out of date. Yes, Cecil would certainly be capable of performing teleportation but someone else could have done also. Kisia on the ESP database says she is a disabled class B ESP with a brain tumor. See how outdate it is? Who knows who else could have made teleportation? The possibilities are literally endless."

Yakov's eyes were downcast, knowing that his attempt failed. He gritted his teeth in silence.

"I shall not say out loud, Yakov, but I think all of us here know what you are trying to do today. And I shall say that you've failed. I shall even say that it was a weak attempt."

Having said so, Avicenna stood up from her seat and walked out of the chamber. Few house members followed her and more house members started to leave, eventually leaving Yakov all alone in the chamber.

Yakov walked into Gvew's presidential office with his shoulders down.

"So, you failed," Gvew said after seeing his gloomy mood and behavior.

"Avicenna spoke up, sir."

"Say no more. I can picture what happened. That old hag can speak like Masu the sage when she gets going."

All Yakov could do was apologize.

"There is no need. Like I said, I didn't think it'd have much of an impact." Having said so, he struck deeply into his chair while rubbing his eyes. "We are literally at the Bau's mercy. As long as they don't see me as a treat, they won't depose me. Let us see how long I will last."

Fin