

[Hermit arc] [3] [Moon refugees] [9637] is a recommended story prior reading this one.

United Solar system Federation, or United Sol in short, is deteriorating quickly without any signs of recovery.

[Shattered union arc] [9] [Regression] [9641]

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A verbal fight was occurring in the house chamber of the Ark. Fraser was present in a special seat but no one seemed to mind his presence at the moment.

They were discussing budgets and it didn't take long for a verbal fight between house members to break out. There were shouting as well as finger pointing. It was hardly a scene of supposedly highly educated politicians. Nevertheless, the verbal fight went on with Fraser shaking his head with a pout. He soon left his seat and the chamber.

“They are panicking. They really are turning blue.”

Fraser remarked in front of Len in his office as he entered.

“Another budget debate, I take, sir?” Len guessed but he was right. Lately, all house had been debating was budget or rather lack of.

It had been 8 years since the war waged by Andromeda union and it had been 8 years of budget debates. Before the war, the budget was manageable despite being deep in red. However, sourcing the credit necessary to rebuild

shattered Earth defense fleet had been a tall order. The money had to come from somewhere; tax increase was made. Budget realignments were made.

And it wasn't still enough.

"It's been 8 years, Len, and we haven't still restored one third of Earth defense fleet."

The overall situation of United Sol was, to put it bluntly, *fucked up*. Social benefits, civil services, and other services provided by the government had been reduced or, in some cases, ceased fully.

However, Earth itself was exempt from such since the Bau was running the infrastructure. Moon was hit the most by this as a public transit service from Moon to Earth was discontinued despite strong protests from already deeply fed-up and troubled Moon residents.

Len beamed a bitter and tired grin. There were so many issues to deal with and nobody knew where to start tackling. But Fraser's aim was to restore Earth defense fleet first and foremost and he had been pressing the house to make it happen. He had been ignoring all other issues in spite of Len's plea.

He was originally a puppet president, chosen by the Bau. However, from the last war, his political position was strengthened by a completely unexpected event.

"How is Magenta doing anyway, Len?" Sighing and rubbing his tired eyes, he changed the subject.

"My men have been able to observe her only from a distance, sir. She's the second in command and holds far more authority on the station than we do."

Fraser let out of a snicker. "Officially, she has no rank at all though."

Len argued, “Well, Admiral Kain did assign her to be his first officer. That’s a rank.”

Ever since Kain’s outburst 8 years ago, Magenta cut her tie with her uncle completely. She had never contacted Fraser since then. Despite that, it did not change a core fact that Fraser was her uncle, and the Bau council saw their connection as something dangerous.

Whether they liked or not, Admiral Kain held sizable powers within United Sol at the moment and his sphere of influence continued to grow progressively. 8 years after the war, Kain held de-facto authority in the entire Outer Sol. The Bau council became somewhat afraid of ever-growing influence and subsequently they could no longer just look down on Fraser, who had a strong connection to Kain’s “unofficial” mistress, Magenta Bau.

Therefore, Fraser was no longer a puppet president. Unofficially, he had the backing from Kain and that was enough for the Bau council to silently grant him actual political powers.

Fraser snickered in shame. “Still I cannot believe how it turned it out. How Kain stopped the invasion..., how Magenta cut her ties to me..., and then how the council sees me now.”

He was shameful because he was involved in none but benefited greatly.

“Sir, you can’t keep dwelling on that. You are a real President now. You longed for powers and you have it.”

“I know, Len. I know! But it still bothers me.”

There wasn’t much for Len to say anymore. It had been 8 years and, for 8 years, Fraser failed to get over it. But he knew that Fraser’s failure to get over it was partially due to their relationship. The two weren’t a father and a daughter but they were really close enough that Fraser did actually consider her his own daughter when Magenta was young. She became progressively

colder toward her uncle as she matured but Fraser never felt their bond would be in question.

Until she met Kain at least.

Len felt it would be best to change the subject. "Anyway, sir, I have some documents for you to look over."

One of the documents was a full page plea from Moon administrator Karveel. He was literally begging for financial aid.

"Karveel again?" Fraser muttered as he simply skimmed over the document. "He doesn't give up, doesn't he."

"His plea is warranted. Even I hear horrid stories about Moon, sir."

Over 35% unemployed rate spoke volumes regarding Moon's atrocious situation. Nonetheless, Fraser was firm on his stance.

"Moon cannot be saved. Any resources spent on that planet would be wasted," He contested.

Len agreed with him in some ways but it didn't change the fact that those on Moon were suffering badly. Rightfully so, he believed that the planet needed aid, the sooner, the better. But Fraser was adamant; he had been adamant. He had been clear that his primary goal was to restore Earth defense fleet.

He insisted, "I know what you are trying to do. But I won't budge."

In the end, Len backed off, as he always did eventually, and informed him of the day's schedule.

"The house speaker will be visiting you shortly to inform you of the outcome of their debate and then you have an invitation to a fundraising party tonight."

"Another fundraising activity? This is the third one in this week," Fraser complained.

“I am just a messenger, sir,” Len replied coldly.

Fraser sighed deeply and eventually responded with a mutter, “Fine, so be it.”

It was an hour and half later when the house speaker arrived in Fraser’s office. His name was Abell and was elected to become a new house speaker just few weeks ago.

As Abell stood in front of Fraser’s desk, Fraser told him.

“Abell, yes? I believe this is the first time we talk in person.”

Abell nodded and added stoically, “Yes, Mr. President.”

“Alright, let’s hear the outcome.” Fraser cross his arms and laid deep back into his chair. He braced for the worst.

And it was bad news indeed.

“Mr. President, right now United Sol is losing approximately 17 trillion credit per season and the loss is increasing at a rather alarming rate. We estimate that, by year 9642, the loss per season will increased to 19 trillion credit.”

Fraser nodded along. Len crunched numbers and also reached a similar conclusion.

Abell continued, “Increasing tax had virtually no effect at all as if credit was leaking from somewhere. Therefore, we’ve been gradually ceasing public services in efforts to save every credit possible.”

“Futile efforts,” Fraser said to which Abell agreed.

“Yes, sir, it was futile attempts. Meanwhile, we reached an agreement with Bau council to divert some of their tax earnings to the Ark which should reduce the alarming loss per season to 15 trillion.”

“That’s not good enough,” Fraser claimed and Abell, again, agreed.

“I do have a suggestion.” Carefully Fraser brought it up. “Lift the embargo.”

Abell’s face saw no alternation but his cold silence spoke volumes. Fraser added, “There is no point in increasing tax when there are people leaving Inner Sol all together. We need to rejuvenate Moon and its exports.”

Eventually, Abell broke his silence.

“Sir, the Bau council is firm on this. They do not want any sort of trade pacts with neither Venus nor Mars.”

Fraser raised his voice. “Yet they are fine with sucking blood out of their own citizens?! It’s been more than four decades since the embargo was placed. Look at Moon and look at Venus and Mars. Who’s suffering more?!”

“Mr. President, it is out of our hands.”

Fraser gritted his teeth and growled. Lifting the embargo would definitely solve some of the issues United Sol was facing. As a Bau, he understood where the council was standing. They were holding onto their fragile pride. Lifting the embargo would mean they were wrong. They didn’t want that obviously.

Frustrated but being used to it, Fraser calmly told him, “Is that all?”

“Mr. President, I’ve brought a suggestion from the house in addition to the report I’ve just explained to you.”

Fraser snickered. “I have a weird feeling that I won’t like whatever you are going to tell me.”

Ignoring his comment, Abell continued, “Currently, Uranus outpost is exempt from any federal taxes. It had to do with its low priority and extremely low population. However, we’ve noticed that the colony has substantially grown

since the last war. The house has decided that it is the time to start taxing them.”

“The reason-” Placing both of his hands on his desk, he slowly stood up while raising his voice once more. “The colony has substantially grown is because Moon residents has fled their home!”

“Sir, there is no record of Moon residents acquiring permits to relocate to Uranus outpost.”

“They’ve smuggled themselves. I did have a report from Karveel about that.”

Fraser turned away from Abell and stared through a transparent wall.

“Do whatever you want,” He said, “It’s not like I have veto power or anything.”

He saw little point in arguing with Abell and Abell felt the same and quietly left the office.

Fraser felt the house and the Bau were out of touch with reality while Abell felt Fraser was being a delinquent. It wasn’t going to work out for both of them and it did not matter either way. As Fraser made clear, he had no veto power. He would have to sign whatever bills Abell would bring.

Sighing deeply, he turned back to his desk and pressed a button.

“Len, I am going home. Are you coming to the fundraising party?”

Len responded promptly, “I will sit this one out, sir. They specifically asked you only.”

“Fine, see you tomorrow then.”

“Have a good day, Mr. President.”

A fundraising party was a way for politicians to amass money. Majority of politicians relied on such activities to raise money for campaigns. However, there was an issue with such activities. To put it bluntly, if one was willing to sponsor another, there would have to be merit.

Simply put, it was give & take.

When Fraser drove his car to a parking lot of a grand manor, guards in the vicinity ran toward the car and escorted him to the manor. He was guided to a small hall where it was packed with few tens prominent people.

“Welcome, Mr. President.”

A bald man greeted Fraser formally. His name was Enrique and was a member of the Ark house. He was the host of the party.

“Enrique.” Fraser gave him a firm nod as he called his name.

“Feel free to enjoy the party.”

There was no election going on. Therefore, the meaning of this party was to raise private money for Enrique himself. It also meant that something dirty was going to happen; Fraser had seen it all too often as he was invited to every important fundraising parties.

The people who would donate credits to Enrique would ask him favors. The favors were almost always special tax exemption for their companies. In other words, Enrique invited corporate CEOs or rather CEOs flocked to such parties. Every fundraising party was first come first serve. Therefore, CEOs had to be swift.

Once he had his money, he would propose special tax exemptions in the house and it would pass not because it was necessary but because they knew it was for fundraising.

Fraser had seen it all but there was something, actually someone, different in the party. Giovanni was among the guests. He was the CEO of ENN. He wasn't a well-known face in the parties. His presence actually made Fraser curious of his intention.

When the party was well into an hour, Enrique made a short speech about how he had devoted much of his time into politics and whatnot. His overall speech made Fraser chuckle in a corner. Most of his speech was downright lies but they wouldn't care as long as they got their tax exemptions.

Once his speech was over, it was donation time. One after another, Enrique brought people into a private room. Fraser did notice Enrique guiding Giovanni into the room at one point and realized it took unusually long for them to come out. Enrique was all smiles while Giovanni looked stoic. Once people made donations, the party went on although people started to leave gradually. When two third of them had left, Fraser was informed by one of the guards that he was allowed to leave and was escorted to his car by five armed guards.

"Mr. President."

A man called him out in the parking lot and the guards drew out their guns at once.

"Easy, easy, I am no assassin," The man raised his hands and made clear that he was not a threat.

"Mr. Giovanni," One of the guards recognized him and blurted. "Our apologies." He told others to lower their weapons and they complied.

Lowering his arms slowly, he inquired, "I would like to speak to the President if that is permissible."

The guards looked at each other with confused faces.

“It’s alright,” Fraser said, “You may leave actually.”

“We will be around,” One of the guards said and they spread out.

Leaning against his car, Fraser signaled Giovanni to approach which he duly did.

“So, Mr. Giovanni, what brought you here? As far as I know, you are not a common face in this activity.”

Giovanni let out of a pleasant laugh. “Correct, sir. I do not normally participate in this kind of fraud.”

“What brought you here tonight then?”

“The Ark has been zipping our mouth way too often. I wanted to improve that.”

“Did you get what you wanted?”

Giovanni beamed a cheeky smile. “You will see tomorrow morning, sir.” Then he turned around and left.

It was a vague encounter and Fraser wondered Giovanni’s intention to talk to him. In the end, he decided not to pay too much attention on the event and moved on.

While he flew his car, which was basically a small luxury shuttle, he considered how rotten the whole system had gotten. The increased frequency of fundraising activities was one of clear evidences.

Leaking taxes and deteriorating economy...

Corrupted politicians and system...

He had tried hard to rejuvenate the nation but he alone wasn't enough especially when everyone else couldn't care less.

"Would it get better?" He talked to himself in the pilot's seat. Letting out of a snicker followed by a long sigh, he muttered, "Yeah, right."

It wasn't going to get better and he knew it.

Len stood up from his desk and bowed lightly toward Fraser as he walked into his office in morning.

"Len," Fraser said indifferently with a weak nod.

"Sir, you should load up ENN website."

He wasn't too surprised. "Oh, really."

ENN had apparently revealed tax fraud of several high profile corporate CEOs along with one Ark house member. ENN claimed they had been working hard to reveal the corruptions. Subsequently, the CEOs had been formally arrest and the Ark house member was suspended by Bau council.

Fraser understood how the CEOs were caught. It was apparent that Enrique sold them out. It was not an unusual case. If some CEOs fail to make continuous "donations", they could be ratted out. But a house member being caught in a corruption case was fairly rare.

Pressing a comm. button on his desk, he inquired Len.

"Len, do you know anything about the house member that got caught? There are no names in the ENN article."

Len responded promptly as if he was waiting for it, "Ramhart is the name, sir. He is a house member who is soon going to be cast out and be replaced."

It made sense at this point. Enrique was given a greenlight to rat him out. Fraser believed it was Bau council's intention. Revealing corruption cases were actually a good way to lessen tensions and discontents from citizens. The citizens would direct their anger to them and forget about the bigger picture for a while. It wouldn't have been cheap for Giovanni to make it happen however.

"Meh, who cares." Whispering to himself, he called Len. "Len, what is my schedule today?"

"There is going to be another house session today regarding seasonal budget. They will also debate regarding few bills and vote for them later today. The bills are expected to pass but you are allowed to attend if you wish, sir. And you have another fundraising party to attend. I will be tagging along tonight."

"I see. I won't be attending. Why bother."

"As you wish, Mr. President."

Standing up from his chair, he walked around in his office at a slow tempo. Despite being the president, there wasn't much for him to do. He usually killed time browsing the web and falling into deep thoughts but he wasn't in mood this day.

He eventually ended up at the glass wall. The scenery was decent. The Ark was located in heart of a dense forest and he often fell into thoughts while staring at the scenery.

At this moment of the day, he was thinking about historical records he had read at school in his much younger days. In history books, it was very easy to tell which nation was going down. The signs were so obvious that he wondered why those who were in charge of ailing nations failed to revive their countries.

Ironically, he was elected to become a president of such an ailing nation. The signs were obvious. Or at least he thought the signs were obvious. Yet those who were running the nation were seemingly oblivious to the signs. He did see the signs but it did not matter as he had little powers to veer the country away from a path that'd bring them into certain doom.

His next question was why they couldn't see the signs. Maybe, they could see but couldn't care less? But they were politicians and house members. How could they not see?

United Sol was divided. It was corrupted. It was leaking taxes here and there. It was invaded twice. Its economy was in downward spiral of total breakdown.

And there was absolutely nothing he could do even though he was the President. The nation was run by the house, not the President.

A faint clicking sound was heard from his desk which pulled Fraser out of his deep thoughts. It was Len.

"Sir, the house speaker is here."

Apparently, Fraser had been in thoughts for hours. He was basically in sleep, daydreaming in the presidential office.

Abell entered the office and informed Fraser of outcome of the day's debate as well as upcoming legislations.

"No clear outcome has been reached from the debate," He said, "And we will be passing two bills later today."

Fraser wasn't surprised at all that "no clear outcome" was reached. They had been at it for 8 years and still had nothing.

"What are the bills?"

“The first bill is imposing a new tax for Outer Sol. This will effectively force Uranus outpost to pay taxes while replacing current existing taxes for other planets. The second bill sets the tax rate.”

He had a bad feeling about the tax rate.

“What’s the rate?” He dared asking.

“We’ve decided on 47%, sir. This additional tax from Outer Sol will deduct 1 trillion off.”

It was 20% increase. The Ark did increase the tax by 7% recently from 20% to 27%. Obviously, that wasn’t nowhere enough.

Fraser didn’t like it. 47% tax was fucking crazy, he felt, especially when it was just 10% in year 9599.

“Is taxing the only way to generate money?”

“We could create more credits, Mr. President but we’ve done enough of that and inflation is taking its toll.”

Fraser wanted to tell Abell how Venus government ran. Venus government ran like a company. They sold products and services and had been making surplus. But he knew it would not go down with the Bau well.

“Very well, I will sign them once they get here.”

As much as he hated the massive yet-another-tax-increase, there was no other way around. The deficit had to be tackled.

And later that day, he signed the bills.

Fin

