

Cesper's new beginning.

[Warring era arc] [4] [Spacefarers] [9671]

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The fall of United Sol and the consequences, nobody thought about it.

I, even just few years ago, had no bloody idea that United Sol was going to fall. I knew the federation wasn't doing well but I had no idea that it was on verge of total collapse. Apparently, the media, specifically ENN, had been doing a damn good job covering the shit up.

Only when Earth was bombarded along with ENN headquarters to smithereens, truth started to come out of gaps left by the company via smaller, and independent, media outlets from Moon and Saturn.

As far as I am aware, nobody around me shed a tear that United Sol fell. In fact, I rejoiced it. The Ark was pure disgrace. Election was heavily rigged and God knows what went on behind scenes.

I was a Lunarian or "Moon resident" which the Ark officially classified us as. Native Lunarians hated the term "Moon resident". But what choice did we have? Anyway, I was one of those who smuggled ourselves out of the planet when things got really rough by help of the Gypsies.

Eventually, I ended up on Saturn and settled down fine. That was like 40 years ago or so.

When I heard the news that United Sol finally fell at the hands of the Crimson wizard which was ironic by itself, mixed feelings hit me. Would the Crimson wizard rule Earth & Moon then? Couldn't be worse, could it?

How wrong I was.

It did get worse. The crimson wizard did not take the two planets. The snake did instead and the situation on Moon got a whole lot worse. Material law was declared on Moon and there was complete radio silence from the planet. I still had few friends on Moon and they stopped responding soon after material law was declared. Quite frankly, I feared the worst.

I wished I could do something but I was a mere civilian with no powers to alter the universe.

Then enter "Spacefarers" which changed my life, probably for the better, I want to believe. They were an organization formed to assist those in need. However, it was not a charity group. It did not exist to help the poor. Instead, it existed to help those who were stuck get out. It sounded good on paper but there was a catch, a big one at that.

Those who were in this organization were on their own, meaning they were required to earn credit by their own means in order to support whatever ships they were aboard. The ships were provided by Saturn government and that was it. Their involvement ended there, period.

Ship maintenance and supply were completely down to its crews. It was certainly easier to be said than done.

Before I came to Saturn, I was an engineer for a shuttle rental company. Thus, I knew a few things about this. Even for a small craft such as a shuttle cost upward of 50,000c for basic maintenance per year and a frigate was at least 10 times large in volume and probably about 100 times more sophisticated.

I personally didn't see how it'd work, so I didn't pay much attention to this.

Until I was selected for a startup operation.

Apparently, being a Luna migrant as well as being an engineer, I was the perfect fit for this. I wasn't too shocked to have been selected. I had an option to refuse but decided to go along to see how it was like. My life was fairly boring and I said to myself, "why not?"

I was really surprised to see Cesper Bau as the chairman of the organization though. Apparently, it was his idea.

It was a giant mass hall I was standing inside and there were probably about a hundred people called upon. Given how I was selected, I assumed most, if not all of them, shared a similar root as me.

“Greetings, everyone,” was what Cesper said as soon as he got on a stage in front of us. And it was clear that some of us were not very pleased with him. He was a bald middle-age man in his black formal suit. He was a well-known bureaucrat back on Luna who frequently clashed with other Bau bureaucrats. He was highly popular but his popularity saw a sharp downturn when he left suddenly to Uranus outpost. Many Lunarians voiced that he fled and called him names.

I, too, wasn't excited to see him but, in my memories, he was one of the more decent politicians back on Luna who tried to change how the Bau worked. Alas, he was just a single dude.

“Fuck off!” A disgruntled voice was heard from somewhere in the back.

“Yeah, fuck off!” Another voice agreed.

Following the two, more people began to agree with them and almost started to chant. They wanted him to be gone.

But Cesper was no coward. He stood firmly and, despite the loud chant, he raised his voice to be heard.

He spoke with a loud voice, “I do understand you've lost a lot to be here. But I guarantee that none of you has lost more than I've.”

It was somewhat of a provocative statement which case some to start booing loudly. Regardless, he continued on.

“I’ve lost my daughter. I’ve lost my admiral. I’ve lost my clan. I’ve lost my home planet, Earth. If any of you have lost more than I’ve, please come forth because you are entitled to punch me in the face.”

The chanting and booing progressively died off.

Indeed, if you think about it rationally, no one in the hall had lost more than he did, probably. Even in my case, my loss was entirely just credit.

In short, after making his point loud and clear, the hall quieted down and no one stepped forth. Having gained the control of the crowd, Cesper cleared his throat and spoke to us again with a softer voice.

“The purpose of this group is to rescue those who are stuck. The federation is no more, and each planet has gained their own sovereignty which has made it virtually impossible for those who wish to relocate to move away. In particular, I’d like to focus on Lunarians who are currently stuck under the snake’s rule.”

I figured that the majority of people in the hall were Lunarians and it was clever of him to actually refer us as such. A typical Bau member would simply refer us as “Moon residents”. In short, he clearly knew which buttons to press.

People murmured and their voices were in agreement. I, too, had little complaints on the issue itself. If the news was to be trusted, I heard that there was 50% tax on everything on Luna. That was insane. I had been feeling the need to do something about them but had no means to actually help them.

Until now.

Cesper, then, reminded us of potential dangers of the job with death being a possible outcome. He also informed us that there was no insurance of any kind, meaning if I had a family and died in action, my family would be in a serious trouble. Being told such, some had walked out and I couldn't blame them.

I, having no family, had a much easier decision to make.

In the end, about one third of us stayed on which was about 30-something. This was enough to man two freights or a one cruiser. Of course, I did not expect the organization to field a cruiser, considering how expensive one was.

Once it was clear that those who remained in the hall were up for the job, Cesper made us sign our names and obtained our digital signatures.

He, then, told us to wait for a while which turned out to be about 20 days.

Indeed we were given two heavily used USF Stiletto class frigates. Considering how much damaged they were, I figured that they had seen war and were meant to be perhaps scrapped. There were numerous melted holes created by lasers and its internal was a mess as a result.

We were told that we needed to patch them up on our own but repair materials would be provided.

"Gosh, this is going to take long-ass time to fix this girl," I said while looking down from a docking bay balcony. A badly battered USF Stiletto was secured with two pairs of docking arms.

But those who were working on the ship were quite content with mountains of work, quite simply because it was quite rare to work on proper spaceships unless one was a navy engineer. For many ordinary engineers, working on a starship was something of a life long dream.

And I wasn't an exception to that dream. Having worked on mere shuttles for all my life, working on a proper spaceship like a navy frigate would have been a wet dream.

So, with glee, I began to work on it along with about 14 of us. The other half would work on the second frigate.

We were paid for hours we'd put in, meaning that we had a choice of being lazy and get paid more. However, as I and the others began to work on the ship, we couldn't help ourselves and became really invested in the repairs as well as renovations.

By time, we were almost done, I was looking down on a sparkling ship from above from the same balcony I saw her for the first time. While I was looking down at her satisfied, someone initiated a conversation with me. It was Cesper.

"The repair has gone a lot faster than expected," He said as he entered the balcony and stood next to me, also looking down at the ship.

"Give a broken starship to bored engineers, and this is what you will get."

"True, though I wonder whether they will be willing to risk their lives for this."

I wasn't certainly willing to risk my life for this. However, the feeling of danger wasn't present at that time. In other words, I had no idea what I was getting myself into and considered Cesper's statement nothing more than just a scare.

When the day came and we were about to take off, it took everyone by a surprise that Cesper himself took a captain's chair. I was at one of the consoles on the bridge when he walked in and took the chair.

"I am captaining this vessel," He declared and added, "And I am leading the first operation."

There was no objection to be made. He was the boss after all. It took him about 10 minutes to set up his login credentials which required several cross confirmations between the bridge and a control power.

"STR Cake... is the ship's name? Bah," He remarked.

STR stood for Saturn Republic, and it was the first time I learned about the ship's name as well. Who in the right mind would name a ship Cake was beyond me but whatever.

He ran a diagnostic scan on the ship and everything returned green.

"Anything to add before we take off?" He asked us.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Our first trip will be Luna."

It was a sort of bombshell because it was understood that Luna was heavily guarded by a Jupiter fleet. Some of us began to murmur at which point Cesper told us, "I, too, am going. And trust me I am not ready to die yet. I know what I am doing. Put your faith in me."

His speech shut us up. Indeed, he was going with us. At least, we took comfort since he seemed to know what he was doing.

The journey to Luna was a smooth one. Despite United Sol falling, the vicinity of Jupiter remained secure. Jupiter sector had always been secure regardless how badly Outer Sol did.

To me, that meant they were always in their comfortable bubble while the others suffered. I was sure that many others on the Spacefarers would agree with me on that point although few, if any, would speak out on that.

Normally, on a journey like this, we would run into several patrolling fleets. We did run into few but we were cleared to proceed. It was almost as if Cesper had everything set up to have our passage granted.

I certainly wouldn't have known how it all worked. I was never a bureaucrat. Never even worked in an office, either. I was an engineer.

When the two frigates were a day from reaching Luna, it was when tension began to arise.

“The sensor is detecting a fleet of approximately one thousand cruisers, sir,” A crew on the bridge declared.

Rumors said the planet was guarded by a fleet and that no one was getting in or out. It appeared that those rumors were indeed true.

“Fear not, proceed. I will deal with them,” Cesper told us which made us skeptical on exactly how.

“How, sir?” Another crew inquired while looking clearly skeptical. He quickly added with a grave tone, “It’s our lives on the line. We deserve an explanation.”

I looked around and saw others silently nodding in overall agreement.

Cesper must have gotten the same vibe as well and explained, “The fleet commander is my old acquaintance. She owes me one.”

I wasn’t sure how that’d work out but he sounded pretty confident and, thus, we proceeded to Luna.

At least, death would be instant was my only comfort.

It certainly didn’t take long for them to shout out a stern warning as soon as we entered a direct communication range.

It was when Cesper told us to open a public channel which meant that anyone could hear what he would say.

“Aroa, it is I,” He proclaimed. His voice had swagger.

“Sir, an incoming private channel,” A crew told him to which he nodded and said, “Fine.”

A holographic screen popped up in front of Cesper and a beautiful blond woman with bob hair appeared on the screen.

“So, it’s really you, sir,” She said, looking mildly surprised.

Of course, we had no idea what was going on. What was clear was that those two had a history.

“It has been a long time, Aroa. You are doing well, it seems.”

The woman, Aroa apparently, took a deep breath and looked somewhat troubled.

She said, “Normally, I’d be happy to see you. However, under this circumstance, I do have to wonder why you are here.”

“Allow us to pass and land down on Luna.”

She didn’t seem too surprised by Cesper’s demand as if she expected so.

“Do you intend to pick up possible refugees?”

“Yes, I do.”

After a moment of a brief silence, she suddenly changed the subject.

“Sir, I am so sorry about your daughter.”

She was talking about Suu who was Grand admiral Kain’s right hand man. Both of them perished in the final invasion by Andromeda union.

In response, Cesper beamed a weak smile at the screen. “She died while protecting the federation. I am proud of her. However, I am sad that the dimwits at the Ark never did anything right.”

We all knew that he was her father and that she was his only child. Come to think of it, nobody really cared about his daughter’s sacrifice. It was partially because, at that time, United Sol was in such a deep shit that none of us could think straight. We were just struggling to survive.

“Sir, I owe you. I know that. You can ask of me anything but what you are currently asking.”

It didn’t take an engineer to figure out that these two may have had some deep history.

“Aora, you do not need to fear Emuel. Just report to him honestly that you let me pass. Just tell him that you owed me and you had to do what you had to do, and that we are now even. He won’t punish you if you put it that way.”

She folded her arms on the screen and looked like she was in some sort of agreement. “Why are you insisting this, sir? If you tell me why honestly, I will let you pass.”

He explained that he founded the Spacefarers in hope to get people who are stuck out of their misery and that this was our maiden voyage. He was straightforward in saying that he wanted a big success and that was tackling Luna which was heavily guarded.

The woman, Aroa, looked flabbergasted upon hearing his explanation.

“You are willing to use the favor for that?” She said out loudly.

Whatever favor it was, it must have been significant. At least, that was my take on it.

He sagged his shoulders with a cynical smile. “Aroa, I’ve lost my child, clan, bank account. I’ve basically lost everything. I have to restart my life and this is how I will restart it. Will you help me?”

The woman was speechless for a moment and so were we.

Yeah, I guess the guy did lose everything, literally everything. And we were booing him just because he was a Bau.

She had tears in her eyes when she finally made her response. “Certainly, sir, go right ahead. We won’t stop you,” She told him.

“Thanks, Aroa. I will send you an email later.”

After that, the landing was smooth as butter. Once landed, we sent out a radio that we were there to pick up those who wished to leave. We did make it clear that we could take on only 80 people but more than 10,000 people showed up and it was creating a chaos. They turned violent as they wanted to get into the ships.

We had no idea how to get a hold of the situation until Cesper came up with an idea. We’d keep the frigates levitated and bring down shuttles to scoop people up.

Then the next matter was how to pick. Several of us came up with the basic idea of letting women and children in. But Cesper disagreed.

“Just grab whoever we can,” He explained. “We can only bring eighty from more than ten thousand. Selecting them won’t be that easy without causing further chaos.”

Some of us disagreed with his idea but agreed on a fact that we really had no way of filtering people. In short, we chose to go with his idea.

Four shuttles from our two ships went down to the surface and grabbed as many as possible. It took only five trips to gather 80 refugees.

For the amount of troubles we had to go through to reach here, it took less than half an hour to grab 80 people and that was it. It was quite anticlimax.

The people below were turning violent as no more shuttle came down to pick them up, but there was nothing they could do. While we were silently watching the screen, displaying thousands of people shouting at us for help, Cesper asked us.

“How many of you are from Luna?”

I along with most of crews raised our arms.

“I see,” He replied as he closed his eyes. “My condolences.”

And we took off the planet soon after. About a billion lived on Luna as far as I was aware. The population went down as low as five hundred millions as people smuggled themselves out but refugees from Earth filled the planet up again from

what I heard. With a fleet of a thousand guarding the planet against smugglers, they were pretty much, 100%, stuck.

As soon as we were in deep space, Cesper went down to the ship's docking bay to greet the refugees. I followed him there as well.

40 people were relaxing on a cold, aluminum, floor. They didn't look great but they seemed very happy to have gotten off Luna. Their clothes weren't ragged but they weren't in great conditions, either.

When Cesper greeted them, they thanked him and told him how the planet had turned into literal Hell. He nodded along and spoke very sympathetically toward them. He shook their hands and patted their backs while encouraging them. He was very much being a politician.

It was when he eventually left, I had a chance to talk to them. I introduced myself to them and declared that I, too, was from Luna.

"How did you ever escape from the planet?" A man asked me.

I told him that I was able to leave legally and that it was before Venus declared the war.

"Lucky you. I tried every possible way to get off the planet but was unsuccessful. I haven't had a decent meal in years."

He did look famished and so did every other refugees. I inquired how bad it was. I asked for a specific answer.

“50% tax on every single damn thing,” He told me. “And they shut down all public services. No public health care. No public shuttles. No nothing. Living cost went through the roof and ascended into the space.”

Others vouched for him and told me it was the reality on Luna.

Another man told me other specifics, “They withdrew all navy personnel and dissolved Luna parliament. No police, either. It’s pure anarchy down there. The only reason the planet is keeping somewhat of public order is because of the fleet in orbit.”

Apparently, the fleet had been keeping the minimum order by sending out patrolling shuttles. It wasn’t enough obviously but it was stopping the society from being completely collapsed.

They were all too happy to be out of Luna and seemed excited about restarting their lives on Saturn or elsewhere. They were even prepared to lose their bank accounts. None of them had much left anyway, so it didn’t matter.

When we arrived at Saturn, the eighty refugees were welcomed by the President Gaer Maeka himself along with a fair amount of media coverage. There were also several holographic banners with “Welcome Lunarians!”. It was when I realized that the whole affair was more or less a public stunt. Cesper benefited the most from this event since he was the founder of Spacefarers and did lead the first voyage.

As someone who was literally nobody, I wasn't even interviewed and had to watch the whole affair occurring from afar. There were some resentful voices in how they felt they were used by Cesper. I did feel the same to an extent. At the same time though, I understood that he needed to kickstart his new life.

We all thought that'd be the end of it. Cesper wouldn't see us again since his "operation" was successful and he'd get on his way. That was normally how bureaucrats worked.

However, about 7 days after the event, he came to visit us in person at the hanger we were working. He stopped in middle of the hanger and cleared his throat few times which grabbed attention of those who failed to notice his entry. Those who did were already gathering up around him.

"I know what you are feeling," He spoke indifferently, "Some of you may feel used. And you are not wrong. I've created the Spacefarers for my own benefit."

People around me started to murmur. One exclaimed somewhere from back, "I knew it, you cheeky bastard!"

Cesper, regardless, continued his speech, "Make no mistake though. The goal of the Spacefarers won't change. You are to depart for Pluto and pick up those in need."

The voices became louder and another shouted, "You bastard!"

Cesper, this time, raised his voice to be heard, "Can you blame me though? Can you fucking blame me?!"

His sudden swearing halted our voices and the hanger became dead silent at once.

He exclaimed, "Did you not use your connections or whatever advantages you had to get out of Luna? If so, why can't I use my own? I cannot because I am a bureaucrat? So what? I had god damn nothing!"

The hanger remained silent and he continued.

"If you expect an apology from me, you won't get it. And if you loathe me, you are free to leave the Spacefarers. However, I stand firm on my stance on how this group was formed. Our job is to get those who are stuck out. Did we not get those who are stuck out the first time?"

He went on to tell us that he won't lead any further operations, and we were free to promote someone within the rank to captain the frigates. He explained further that he won't lead any more operations because he was too high profile and that his presence in operations would attract unnecessary attentions.

Finally, he told us that his task was now to secure more funding for the Spacefarers.

Whatever his true intention was, I wouldn't have known. But about six people left the group afterwards but tens of more joined us shortly afterwards as the public stunt at Saturn shuttleport started a planetary campaign for the Spacefarers. It also meant more funding and a third frigate was added.

Soon after, we were given a new order to depart for Pluto and we were to depart in a day. And, since the Spacefarers had to earn their own money for operations,

we loaded up some goods to sell on Pluto. Any trade run to Pluto generally yielded a good profit but getting there was generally an issue due to pirates. But, with three combat frigates, I was fairly confident that we'd be safe.

And interestingly I was promoted to become a captain of a frigate. Sadly though, the position didn't come with any extra benefits. They simply promoted someone within ranks.

"Alright, guys, Pluto, yeah?" I said to the bridge crew in my captain's chair. A captain's chair was slightly elevated to be able to observe the entire bridge with ease. It would have been awesome if it was a bridge of a cruiser. A bridge of a frigate was tiny and there were only two consoles in front of me.

"Aye, aye. All system green," A crew responded.

"Alright, en route to Pluto!"

- Fin