

A more personal dig into Lisette's mind, this one.

[Warring era arc] [5] [I will not falter] [9674]

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Fifteen cruisers were moving onto a freighter escorted by eight cruisers. They fired upon each other once they were in range.

The freighter, which was a SSS Slate, had more than enough escorts by usual standards. It would have fought back any pirates if encountered.

However, the fall of United Sol meant there was more than pirates to worry about, especially for any Saturn bound vessels.

“The freighter surrendered eventually,” An office was reading out a report to Gaer who was in a conference room along with his wife, Natsuko. Cesper was also present along with Lightwave CEO, Brian.

“The attackers had their ship ID erased,” The officer added.

The freighter was carrying essential food stuffs to inner Sol. It wasn't from Saturn but Saturn was one of its guarantors while it traversed Sol. Considering that it was attacked as soon as it left Saturn space reflected badly for the planet.

“I think we all know who the attackers were,” Gaer told the others as he waved away the officer who left the room at once.

“Aye, Jupiter,” Cesper replied.

“Hijacking freighters marked as essential is just low,” Brian added while he growled.

“Most of it was going to go to Moon. I suppose he didn’t want to pay for the stuff,” Gaer said.

“There have been some minor skirmishes between us and Jupiter as well. The loss hasn’t been significant but it’s mounting,” Cesper stated.

The conference room was met with a moment of dead silence followed by sighs.

The breakup of United Sol meant that there was no laws to fall back. Everyone was on their own. In other words, those with powers could get away with whatever they wanted, and Emuel of Jupiter was doing exactly that.

Crossing fingers and supporting his chin on top of them, Gaer told the others, “Realistically speaking we cannot do anything about Jupiter themselves. However, the skirmishes, we need to do something about those. I believe we’ve been mostly losing them, yes?”

Cesper and Brain both nodded in response with Brian added some details.

“The losses have not been significant. It’s in single digit currently.”

It was insignificant. However, both Gaer and Cesper had a different angle of view on the matter.

“I’d like to think that Emuel is doing it to further dent our moral,” Cesper explained, “He can afford the losses if incurred. We are hardly able to, if the loss goes into higher end of two digits.”

To which Gaer agreed fully and added, “He is showing off.”

“Regardless,” Cesper insisted, “I believe we need to take the skirmishes more seriously.”

“Meaning?” Gaer inquired.

“Perhaps we should deploy a real fleet, like Captain Lisette’s fleet.”

Gaer began to tap his fingers in consideration. He rated her highly and so did Cesper. However, he felt it was a little too soon to push her into real action. At the same time, he felt that Cesper had a point. Saturn couldn’t just keep losing the skirmishes.

Meanwhile, at a similar time, Lisette was in a bar on Uranus colony. She enjoyed solitude rather than companionship and this was her regular routine when she was off duty.

The bar was dimly lit and had a soothing jazz music in background on loop. With wood grain walls and tables, it was a premium bar. It was a sign of change as Uranus colony never used to have such places with socially higher standards.

“It’s all thanks to the grand Admiral,” the bar owner once remarked.

Lisette was a woman who had hardly any femininity. She was pretty muscular and her height of 6.2 foot (190cm) didn’t help the matter. People saw her as a female only because of her rather large rack and her shoulder length blond straight hair along with her feminine-shape face. She was basically a macho with some feminine features in between. It certainly helped regular men from avoiding her in bars and pubs which she was actually glad of. Hence, her regular visit to bars and pubs. Otherwise, she would have preferred drinking alone in her quarter.

As she sat in a corner having her drink, she downcast her eyes and fell into deep thoughts.

She and Suu never got along. They had virtually opposite views on politics and how things should have worked. Suu was on right and Lisette was on left on the political scale.

While they worked on a professional level, outside of their jobs, they never spoke to each other. So, when Suu was making her speech after grand Admiral Kain perished, Lisette’s reaction was going to be predictable.

“This is Suu. We are turning back and we are going to fight the invasion fleet.”

Lisette scoffed at the moment she heard her because she knew what Suu was going to ask. She was going on a suicide mission. Knowing her, that was the only outcome.

"The enemy must have let their guard down. This is the only chance to strike them."

She scoffed once more. "Yean, right," She told the others on her bridge.

"Absolutely no chance," She added. Her crew were in general agreement on the assessment. However, she could feel that some of them still wanted to go.

Then she heard someone arguing with the rear admiral.

"Admiral, that may be so but we are just 600. They are like 12,000. Even if their guard is down, there is no way we can take them!"

"That's right," Lisette said.

"True!" Suu exclaimed and then lowered her voice, *"But we are not going in to take them out. We are going in to take out their commander. I know which ship it is."*

The truth was that, even if there was a decent chance, Lisette was never going to go along with Rear admiral Suu's plan and, when they were asked to leave if they weren't joining, Lisette's USF Bismarck duly departed her fleet.

"I don't mind dying for a great cause. But I am not going to die for an operation that has absolutely no chance," was what she told her crew as her cruiser withdrew.

When her ship arrived at Jupiter outpost, a canned message arrived, stating that Jupiter were welcoming them and that they would be reassigned eventually.

She told her crew that they'd be on a short vacation in a joking manner. They were denied of docking permission. Therefore, all they could do was just slack.

Then few days later, news hit that rear admiral Suu was successful in her operation. She perished along with her entire fleet of few hundreds. However, she also killed the enemy commander Juron along with his ship. Her action ended the invasion, literally.

The news hit Lisette hard. She was on her bridge when the news swept across Jupiter sector. She was godsmacked for a good minute before she could close her mouth.

"I, uh....," She tried to say something to the bridge crew whose attention was on her. "I, um, excuse me!"

All she could do was escape to her captain's quarter and isolate herself for the time being.

She felt deeply ashamed and embarrassed. She felt as if her consciousness was shattered pieces of a broken glass. Hundreds of fragments of thoughts popped up in her head that overloaded her brain.

Should I have gone with her?

She died a hero.

So, she was right?

But I -

I was wrong?

H, how could she have -

But I ...

She had no chance, how?!

She died a hero while you ran away.

She screamed loudly and hysterically. If her quarter wasn't sound proof, someone would have dashed in to check on her.

Then she wailed.

You see, she named her ship "Bismarck". It was named after an obvious person, Otto von Bismarck. He was her personal hero and someone she'd look up to.

The simple fact that she ran when she could have died a national hero was something she could not accept, at least not right away. In other words, she became what she would call a coward.

"I should have joined her...," She cried out as she pulled out her hairs, literally. "I SHOULD HAVE JOINED HER!" She screamed as she fell to her knees.

“I AM SORRY! I AM SORRY, ADMIRAL KAIN. I AM ADMIRAL SUU!” She just kept on screaming hysterically as she slowly collapsed to the floor. Her face was drenched with tears already, and she just passed out eventually.

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She was standing in a crowd who were merrily conversing to each other. Then there was another crowd far from the crowd she was with. They looked sincere and determined. They’d look at each other and would nod at each other. Then they’d charge away from the crowd into sheer darkness.

The crowd she was with couldn’t care less about the other crowd and merrily continued on, talking and laughing. She attempted to leave the crowd and join those who vanished into the darkness but she was being pulled back into the crowd as she attempted to get away. She desperately tried to reach out the others but to no avail.

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Lisette gasped for air as she opened her eyes at once. She was covered in sweats and was panting hard. She looked around fanatically to figure out what happened.

“Where... am I?”

“Oh, you are awake, Captain.”

She was apparently carried to the sick bay once she was found unconsciously crying.

“The crew found it strange that you wouldn’t come out after five hours, so we went in to check. You are alright aside from a moderate level of mental stress,” a medic told her.

She sighed deeply. She couldn’t recall much of what had happened. However, one thing was clear on her mind that she should have joined Suu to the glory.

“Captain, you are free to leave whenever you feel like.”

In response, Lisette asked a sudden question, “Do you think we should have joined Admiral Suu?”

The medic was struck back by the sudden question. But he regained his composure swiftly and replied, “Yes, we should have. That was the least we could have done to repay Admiral Kain. I would have died for that man.”

With a darkening face, she downcast her eyes. “I see,” She replied stoically.

“Though I also see where you stood. Her plan didn’t look like a chance to me. It looked more like a suicide. Look, Captain. I doubt many will point their fingers at you for making the decision. You shouldn’t stress yourself because of that.”

After having a shower in the sick bay and getting into a clean uniform, Lisette made her way into the bridge where Alisa, her first mate, was in the captain’s

chair. It was an understandable situation, given that the protocol dictated that the first mate would take charge in case its captain fell.

Alisa quickly noticed her presence and got off the chair at once. She, then, turned around and saluted at her.

“Captain,” She stoically stated.

Nodding at her, Lisette spoke, “At ease.”

Lisette and Alisa barely knew each other. After all, Lisette had just been given her cruiser when the fourth invasion occurred. Bonds between crews did not exist yet on USF Bismarck.

Just as Lisette was making her way to the captain’s chair, Alisa told her, “Captain, may I speak with you in private?” To which Lisette nodded. “Alright, let’s talk in my quarter.”

Once in the captain’s quarter, Alisa was quick to get on her subject as Lisette sat down at her desk.

“Captain, I am afraid that Jupiter may not be welcoming us.”

“What makes you say that?”

“A canned welcome message and then no further messages or actions at all ever since. Docking permission denied and no resupply allowed. Isn’t that enough?”

Lisette, too, was concerned about lack of actions from Jupiter administration.

However -

“True, but given a fact that Admiral Kain was his enemy, I doubt Emuel is willing to take us in with open arms. I am thinking that he wants to test us somehow.”

“If that is the case, do we have to stay here?”

Lisette narrowed her eyes. “Meaning?” She inquired.

“Saturn, Captain. That’s another choice we have.”

She sighed. “Why Saturn?”

“Because Administrator Gaer has always been our late Admiral’s ally, the only ally. If you wish to redeem, working for him would be the right choice.”

“What makes you think that I want to redeem?”

“Captain,” Alisa pressed forward boldly. “When we were carrying you to the sick bay, you kept on apologizing to our Admiral while shedding tears.”

Lisette blushed immediately upon hearing her statement. Clearing her throat quickly, she responded, “I can’t lie then. Yes, I do feel guilty. In fact, I feel like a fucking coward right now. Happy?”

“Captain, I am not making fun of you, sir. I am making an honest request on behalf of our crew. Our Admirals were a great man and a great woman. Granted, we’ve missed a chance to exact revenge for their death but that doesn’t certainly mean we should join his enemy.”

Kain did make a statement, telling those who survive to join Jupiter which was why Lisette made no hesitation about her decision on coming here. It was true

though. Emuel was indeed Kain's enemy and a traitor to the federation given how he had attempted to undermine the Ark as well as Kain.

"True," Lisette admitted, "I don't feel good about coming here. I chose to come here because that was what the Admiral told us."

Having said so, she wondered why which Alisa answered.

"I think the Admiral chose Jupiter so that we'd be safer. Safer in numbers overall. But I feel we need to make our own decisions now."

She made sense, Lisette felt. Couldn't really argue with her, she felt. While she felt hesitation, she chose not to dwell on the matter this time. Once her mind was made up, the rest was easy.

She and Alisa returned to the bridge, and Lisette made a short announcement of her intention of joining Saturn instead and asked to use escape pod to leave if they disagreed with her decision.

None did.

Lisette put down her glass of whisky. There were an empty bottle on the table. She felt she had enough. Just as she paid her due and was about to leave, her communication badge vibrated, indicating that someone was contacting her. She figured it was Alisa as she was the only one who knew her off-duty contact code.

“Yes?” Tapping the badge, she responded.

“Captain, this is Alisa. We have a direct order from President Gaer.”

She was quite drunk but that wouldn't matter since she'd sober up by time her fleet would reach any destination.

“I will be right there.”

She vaguely recalled how Kain was jokingly complaining how he was never having a decent break. She was beginning to understand him better. She hasn't had a full day of a break ever since she took charge of Uranus colony. Always something happened that'd disturb her off-duty period. It was lucky that she got to finish her drinking.

Once arrived in HQ, Alisa briefed her quickly that Gaer wanted Lisette to lead a small fleet to combat numerous small Jovian skirmish fleets. There was a caveat in his order. It was that he wanted as little losses as possible while leading the smallest fleet she could.

“That is an odd order,” Lisette remarked and Alisa filled her in about the recent situation around Saturn.

“Saving face, eh,” She scoffed in response and added, “Anyhow, that sort of battle is what we had done for years non-stop.”

Indeed, when Suu was in charge of securing Outer Sol, she was hell-bent on incurring as little loss as possible while wiping out pirates. Although it wasn't by

her choice, Lisette knew all about Suu's tactics since she was her first mate for few decades.

Originally, Suu used a defensive sphere formation to reduce losses. Over the years, she eventually developed her own formation which was what she called "Sandwich formation". Ships would be stacked together to divert incoming damage and reduce possible ship losses.

This formation was informal and wasn't programmed into WASP which was the de facto operating system for ships. Therefore, in order to effectively execute the formation, whoever was in charge had to know what he or she was doing.

As of year 9764, only few remembered this formation, and Lisette was one of the few. Alisa was aware of it but didn't know how to execute it.

Lisette chose to go with 15 ships, hers included. Then she divided the small fleet into three groups of 5. Each group would stay in a straight row formation and groups were stacked in columns. This would shield two groups from taking damage.

This formation had a crucial weakness though. It worked only in small engagements where direction of incoming damage was only one source. Otherwise, the shielding was pointless.

Furthermore, in order for other groups to fire through shields of the first group, energy frequencies had to match which was easily done via a simple synchronization link between ships.

A quick training and drilling were executed while the fleet was on its way to Jupiter-Saturn border.

“Never expected to execute the formation,” Lisette remarked in her captain’s chair on the bridge to which Alisa, who was standing next to her, beamed a bitter grin.

She replied, “And sadly you are one of few who know this formation thorough.”

Lisette didn’t respond. Taking a deep breath, she downcast her eyes, recalling the days which Suu led countless battles with pirates to secure Outer Sol.

Alisa added, “United Sol fell apart really quickly after those two perished. I guess they were really holding the federation together.”

Lisette was against Suu’s methods because Suu paid little care for the lives of pirates. Yes, they were pirates but, at the same time, they were human beings as well. She wanted to capture pirates alive and make them go through trials whereas Suu just wanted to get rid of them on the spot without leaving any reports. Even now, she felt she was in the right. However, she came to realize that perhaps Suu had her reasons. The federation was not in any shape for any other extra steps. Any form of bureaucracy would just slow things down to a crawl and pirates would eventually get away somehow by loopholes or bribes.

Of course, it was too late to think about the past at this point. Neither Kain nor Suu was alive, and the federation had fallen. And, of all places, she was working for Saturn.

If someone told her 10 years ago that she'd end up working for Saturn, she would have laughed her arse off.

"Let's get this over with," She causally muttered.

"Aye, aye, sir," Alisa responded with glee.

For those who worked under Kain and Suu, battles were frequent, and therefore, they had no fear and hesitation when entering battles. Alas, situation was completely different for others. Especially for Saturn patrol fleets, they barely saw any real fleet battles outside of simulations. Therefore, perhaps predictably, they didn't do exceptionally well in real battles. The truth was that Jovan fleets weren't any better; they hardly saw any real battles, either. However, Jovan fleets were drilled and trained better overall which gave them an edge.

That edge was no longer effective against Lisette's fleet, not even close.

"A fleet on radar," A crew reported, "No signatures, 21 ships."

"Must be them," Alisa said to which Lisette nodded with a groan.

"Shields up, formation on, fire at will, focus on center," She added quickly, "The meat shield task goes to group A. B and C stick tightly together on A's arse. Don't panic when shields go low. I am watching."

The battle started to go well for the suspected Jovan skirmish fleet. However, as it went on, they suffered losses while Lisette's fleet suffered none which began to make a difference.

When the suspected Jovan fleet lost about four ships, they sent a parley signal to all frequencies. Normally, this would halt the battle and a negotiation for a break-off could commence.

However -

"Fuck if I care. Lads! Get'em all!" Lisette bellowed. "Pour everything we have on'em!"

The suspected Jovan fleet was stunned that Lisette's fleet began to attack even more fiercely. They attempted to react but it was already too late. The tide of the battle was over.

"Group C, come out of the formation and block their retreat path. Group A, get behind group B now," She commanded calmly. "I want a focus fire on that ship in the middle of their formation. It looks like their leader to me."

As the suspected Jovan fleet was being slaughtered, they opened a public channel and shouted.

"What do you think you are doing?! We've sent a parley signal! Cease fire!"

To which Lisette replied promptly.

"I don't listen to pirates."

"We are not pirates!"

“You’ve erased your ship signatures. That makes you pirates. Of course, you can always reveal who you are.”

The channel fell silent.

“Should we stop?” Alisa inquired Lisette to which she shook her head.

“Fuck them.”

Alisa giggled and remarked, “You are acting like Admiral Suu right now.”

Lisette chuckled and admitted, “I guess I am. I really disliked that woman but I am beginning to think that she was right. You can’t be nice to these scumbags and expect a straightforward result. So-” She inhaled and spoke loudly, “Fuck’em all. Show no mercy!”

Alisa saluted and responded with a big smile, “Aye, aye, sir!”

The battle ended in one-sided slaughter with zero loss to Lisette’s fleet. The suspected Jovan fleet was completely annihilated. Some of their crew, however, made through escape pods which Lisette chose to spare.

After spending 24 hours in the vicinity to recharge shields, the fleet went on to whack havoc on further two more suspected Jovan fleets before other hostile skirmish fleets started to withdraw from Saturn bother zone.

Because the overall ship loss exceeded 50, it was no longer a laughing matter for Jupiter. However, as ships had no signatures, they had no way of pushing to matter against Saturn without first admitting that it was them.

Once the outcome of Lisette's battles and its subsequent result were delivered to Saturn Ironhall, its parliament members were very pleased. Many of them had doubted her previously when Gaer fast-tracked her, but this result vindicated his judgement.

Gaer called his close allies for a meeting to discuss the matter.

"Well, Emuel paid for that food and water in another way," Cesper remarked as Gaer and Brian smiled pleasantly.

"Paid more than that, I reckon. They lost 52 cruisers. That's well over half a billion credit," Brian replied with glee.

"Captain Lisette has done a very good job. It's too bad that I cannot promote her, yet," Gaer said.

"It is too early, sir. If you promote her too early, you risk her being isolated by those who are jealous," Cesper said.

"To think that someone like her almost joined Jupiter...", Brian remarked to which Gaer chuckled weakly and said, "I can bet that Emuel wouldn't make a good use of her service anyway. He isn't someone who'd trust a stranger who came out of blue."

"Agreed," Cesper said. "And there is a fact that she worked under Admiral Kain. He would never trust her to begin with."

Gaer clapped hands to gain attention. "Alright, everyone, I am going to attend the Ironhall session. I am going to give the captain a call later. Dismissed."

Several hours later, Lisette was conversing to Gaer on a secured channel.

"Good job, Captain. I am proud of your accomplishment. Very good indeed." He showered praises on her.

She replied indifferently, "I did my job, sir. I am glad you are satisfied with my performance. The fleet is going to withdraw in 24 hours unless you need the fleet for other purposes."

"No, you've done your part. I can't keep you here forever. You are needed at Uranus colony."

"Very well, Mr. President. I will depart as planned. Is this all?"

"That is all. Keep the good work, Captain."

Once the channel was closed, dead silence dominated the quarter immediately. Lisette would sit back deep and slowly closed her eyes. Enjoying the silence for a moment, she whispered to herself.

"I will falter no longer. My path is clear."

- Fin