

The second story in this arc. Watch Kain grow and have troubles with Suu.

[Kain and Suu arc] [2] [Cadet Kain] [9611]

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Despite of having passed his class, Kain still had to wait until early 9611 before a frigate was finally assigned to him. He was notified that he'd be given a brand new frigate half a season prior, and the waiting almost killed him.

Good news was that he received a modest reward credit of 5,000 which wasn't much quite frankly but the prize money did allow him to worry less about his day-to-day situation. Furthermore, he had also received an e-mail regarding his wage.

His wage was to be 9,000c per season which wasn't on a high side, but that was a catch. As long as he remained on active duty, food and laundry expense were covered. Considering those factors, the wage wasn't too bad. Many captains chose not to have a home which resulted in further gross profit increase unless, of course, s/he was married.

Like them, Kain chose not to rent a place. His rent was 2,000c per season and not having to pay that was a big load off his shoulders.

And finally he was taken to a navy shipyard where he was formally introduced to his own frigate, a virgin ship that was yet to be named. It was a highly secured bay where he was taken to.

A highly geeky engineer was leading him. "It is our newest model. It is state of art," He spoke proudly. "Although it's only a frigate, it's the best in its kind so far. Unlike previous models, it's got two fusion reactors and heavier armor plating."

A frigate was too small for ACM reactor. Therefore, a much weaker fusion reactor was utilized. Absence of ACM reactor also meant that frigates weren't capable of shields. Thicker armor plating was used to compensate.

"Ta-da!" The geeky engineer opened his arms widely in front of a beefy frigate. It was painted in white-gray with dark blue trim. It did look a hundred times nicer than UEF Junker he once sailed. UEF Junker was truly a junker with rusty bots sticking out here and there and it was literally three big metal boxes jointed together horizontally. But this new frigate was a beauty. Even Kain who had little interest in engineering could see that. It still carried the same simple concept design of the junker but edges were smooth and overall appearance was much more refined.

"Holy..., it does look nice."

And it was at least three times bigger than UEF Junker. Still, it was about one tenth size of a cruiser.

"Crew capacity of 25, dedicated living quarters for 7 including a captain's quarter, 6 turrets and two missile banks; it's miles better than what's out there."

Unlike a cruiser where each crew would have their own quarter, a frigate simply did not have the space for enough rooms. A captain would still have his own dedicated quarter but all other crews were expected to share rooms if not rotate rooms.

"3 days from now, this frigate will be officially given to you. Do you have a name for her? If not, you still have 3 days to think about."

Kain glanced over the frigate. It did look very nice. He couldn't wait to sail it in space. Gulping, he immediately came up with a name.

"Parashe, USF Parashe," Kain said.

The geeky engineer gave a thumb up at Kain. "Parashe? Got it. Be very honored. Not many get to name a virgin ship."

Traditionally, once a ship was named, its name wasn't changed. Only in rare cases, a ship would be renamed. What it meant that USF Parashe the frigate would likely retain its name until either destruction or decommission.

Even after Kain came back home, he couldn't take off the image of the frigate. It looked awesome. He could hardly wait to captain it. 3 days seemed too long. Fortunately, he was summoned to a navy facility the next day which took his mind off the frigate.

"Cadet Kain," A facility officer called him. They were in what appeared to be a briefing room. "Your frigate will hold 20 crew. Its maximum capacity is 25 but 20 is recommended crew number."

Kain nodded, not yet fully understanding what he was summoned here for.

"You have no previous military background, so we assumed that you have no one to handpick, so we came up with a list of your potential crew. You may look over this paper here and tell me if you want to replace someone just in case."

Kain quickly looked over the list. He recognized none of the names.

"I know none of them," He replied.

"Good, so this is the crew you will be working with. You will meet them tomorrow. Any other questions? If not, this is all for today."

"Nope, no questions."

"Good, dismissed."

And the next day, he was summoned to the same facility once again, presumably to meet his crew.

He entered the same briefing room as yesterday and saw 20-something people having casual chit chat inside. As soon as he entered, one of them saluted at him at once.

“Sir! Cadet Kain?”

Kain saluted in return and replied, “Yes, I am Cadet Kain.”

“Sir! Welcome! My name is Samuel, and I am to be your first officer.”

Samuel was about the same height as Kain and with about the same physique. He had dark brown curly short hair with deep blue eyes and sharp nose.

He was getting to know his new crew members when Kain had entered the room.

“We are all trainees,” Samuel added. “And we are all excited to finally work in a space ship.”

“So am I. I’ve seen the ship. She was a beauty,” Kain replied, smiling.

The crew were excited to know that they would work in a virgin ship.

“Her name is USF Parashe,” Kain declared.

“Did you get to name her?!” A seemingly overly excited crew whose name was Ritsuki asked Kain.

“She is Ritsuki Maeka, of the Maeka clan. She is the chief engineer actually,” Samuel added.

“I am just an outsider. I don’t proclaim my last name often,” Ritsuki said with a sneer.

The Maeka clan was one of few clans that chose to immigrate to Saturn from Earth. They were known for producing fine engineers. They were a relatively small clan with a thousand members.

“Yes, I named her myself yesterday,” Kain answered proudly and the crews were in awe. The members in the room seemed all genuinely excited. And then it hit him that he was excited as well.

Had he ever been excited like this in his life?

The answer was no. In his whole 37 years of life, he didn't think he was excited for anything until this moment. Tomorrow, he'd work with 20 crew who were genuinely interested into the jobs they had taken. The whole prospect of working with people who were genuinely interested and motivated in what they were supposed to do was fairly rare, he thought.

Even back at Moon, at the company he initially worked for, not many were motivated. They did their job to earn their wage and that was it.

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And so did he. Many articles he produced, it wasn't out of his pure interest. He had to do for money to feed himself. At the very moment of realizing that, he felt ashamed.

Kain had no family literally. Well, he did have a family. He had a mother but she was someone who's goal in her life was raising children as a single mom. Kain was her 17th child. She would raise a child and, when her child hit 19 years old, she let the child go. Rinse and repeat.

He had never contacted his mother and neither did his mother. The day he left her, that was it. But there were no hard feelings between them.

“No love lost,” Kain said on his bed in his room. He was watching TV after getting back from the meeting with his future crew.

“Hello, Jupitians! Today is year 9611 Season 1 15th day,” The same announcer he had been seeing ever since his arrival in Jupiter outpost started off brightly as usual on TV.

“How are you today? If you ever feel down, you can always vent some steam at Jupiter space marina! A special is going on right now where you can rent shuttles at 20% discount! It’s new year special!”

Kain smiled. He did that few times before. Unfortunately, he wasn’t going to have time this year. He was to captain USF Parashe tomorrow.

What people did at space marina was simple. Rent a shuttle and speed. Since speeding with a car was no longer possible with all sort of restrictions placed on cars’ software. Speed demons used rented shuttles to speed. Kain wasn’t a speed demon per se, but he did enjoy piloting a shuttle around at its maximum speed. It was thrilling.

“Who cares about little shuttles now,” He talked to himself with a grin. “I am going to sail a frigate, losers.”

“Don’t miss out!” The female announcer raised her voice.

The female announcer, who was nicknamed Miss Jupiter, was the most decorated celebrity in and around Jupiter. She was featured in literally every news programs. She appeared very little outside of news programs but her popularity shot through the roof within Jupiter. Other than her appearances in news programs, she was media-shy and avoided spotlights which raised a series of questions on who she really was.

Some even went on to claim that she was just a CG character. Some claimed that she was just a well-crafted android which was the reason she avoided spotlights.

Android technology wasn’t fully developed and, while it was possible to make them very human-like and make them speak like humans, their overall movements, including walking and eye–hand coordination, looked awkward in real life situations. An android would do fine as a news announcer, the general opinions agreed.

No one really knew who or what she really was however.

Finally, the day came.

Kain was taking a deep breath as he prepared to walk into a private docking bay within Jupiter shipyard. He was told where to go exactly and he was standing before a gate to a private docking bay where he would be joining up. He didn't like that the docking bay number was 666 but it was a minor detail.

As he entered the private docking bay, he saw his 20 crewmen who were very excited to see their ship. Some of them were even hugging it.

“Cadet!” Samuel exclaimed with a salute and other crews followed the suit.

Kain saluted casually in return. “How is everyone feeling today?”

“Better than ever!” Samuel reported on everyone's behalf.

Only Kain knew the master passcode to open its hatch. And as soon as he opened the hatch which was just big enough for two adults to pass through at once, everyone rushed inside.

As expected from a brand new ship, the interior was clean. It felt a lot less cramped than USF Junker's interior after all USF Parashe was around three times bigger in mass. The frigate even had a small bridge. USF Junker had a cockpit.



“Ohh, a captain’s chair,” Kain said in awe.

A captain’s chair was an elevated chair in middle of a bridge. How elevated depended on ship’s design and captains’ preference. Kain adjusted the elevation to 2 feet and sat in it. It had controls on its chair arms.

In front of him, there were two console stations with chairs. Samuel quick took a seat in left console. The other console was left unseated.

Opening a channel to all ship decks, Kain spoke after clearing his throat.

“This is Cadet Kain, you have 5 minutes to find your place. We are undocking after then.” And then he closed the channel.

“This is light years ahead of what Junker had,” Samuel remarked.

“Hah,” Kain responded with a short laugh. “You trained in the Junker also?”

“I think all trainees do,” He responded cheerfully. “Junker was the true definition of a basket of rusted bolts and nuts.”

Kain agreed with a laugh.

Soon, Ritsuki contacted the bridge. “This is Ritsuki. Reactors are green and at full capacity. We are ready to go when you are, Cadet.”

“Roger that.” Having responded and closed Ritsuki’s channel, Kain opened a channel to control tower.

“This is USF Parashe. We are ready to undock.”

A male voice sounded in the bridge. “This is Jupiter control tower # 41. You are clear for undocking. Decompressing the docking bay, deactivating artificial gravity, and opening the gate. Your destination is to reach Uranus outpost for infield training. Do you understand?”

“I hear you loud and clear,” Kain responded.

“I see the gate sliding open, Cadet,” Samuel reported.

“Take her out to space, Officer.”

“Aye aye, ser.”

What welcomed them in space was utter silence. It felt completely different from Junker where they had a lot of noises from old machinery. USF Parashe had no such noises. It was dead quiet; it wasn’t something Kain was used to.

“Holy shit, this is quiet,” Kain commented.

“No, kidding, sir. It’s so different from the Junker.”

“Oh, well, we will get used to it. Set a course to Uranus outpost. Give me ETA.”

Samuel was busy with his console for a minute and responded, “A week and half, sir. This frigate hasn’t been designed for speed.”

Kain opened a channel to engine room. “Ritsuki, this thing is slow. Can you beef up the speed?”

“Of course, I can!” Her voice was full of excitement. “Leave it to me, this bitch will fly to the high Heavens!”

“I hope she doesn’t blow up the reactors,” Samuel said.

“Well, even if she does, we won’t be too far to send SOS,” Kain responded.

Ritsuki did her magic and the ship’s raw speed dramatically increased. A week and half journey was reduced to a week.

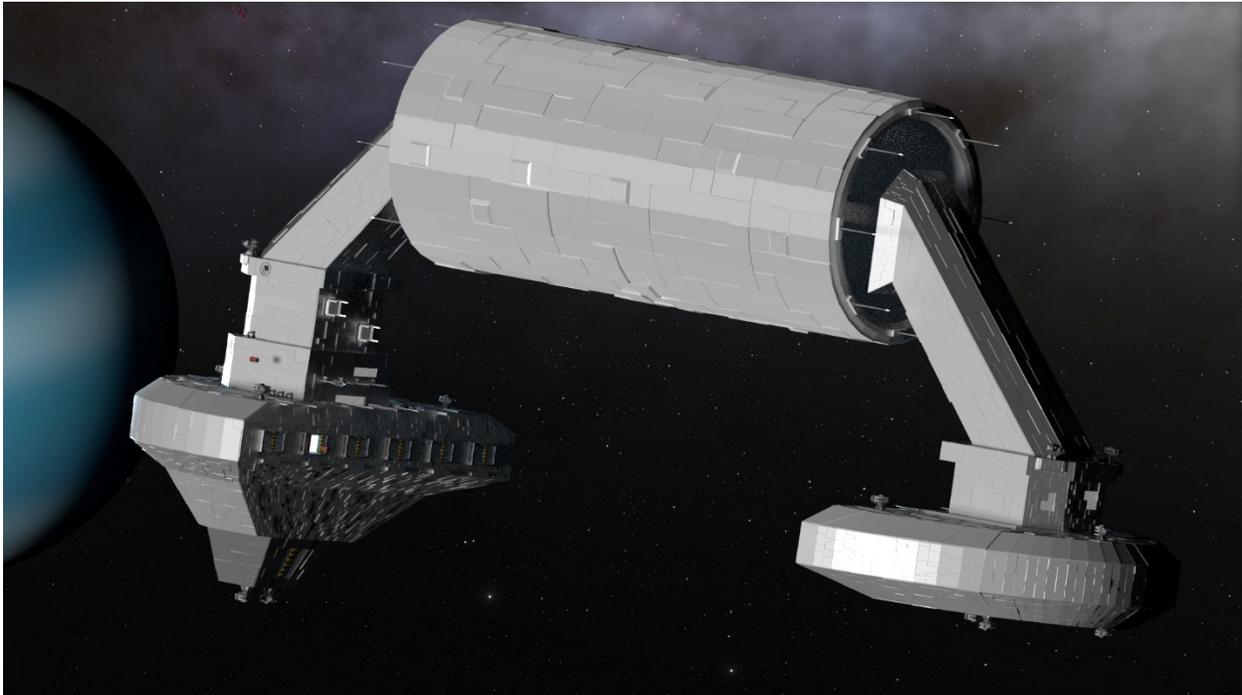
During the week of journey, Kain and his crew became used to their ship. Kain had his own private quarter but for all other crews, they had to either rotate or share quarters. They had 6 rooms to use between 19 crews and each room was barely big enough for a single bed. In the end, they chose to rotate rooms and they didn’t complain because they knew others had worse. Other frigate, older models, had only four rooms total.

“Ritsuki recalibrated everything from reactors to even laser turrets,” Samuel reported when Kain entered the bridge next day. “She told me that they intentionally leave everything at stock values on virgin ships.”

“Makes sense, I guess. Anything else to report?”

“Nothing, sir. This region is as secure as Earth’s orbit.”

The ship had no cafeteria due to lack of space. Therefore, everyone was responsible for taking care of their own meals. Everyone chose to use energy pills and dummy food simply because that was the only visible method.



6 days later.

“Uranus outpost is in visual range, Cadet,” Samuel reported.

An outpost stood before the bright blue planet called Uranus. The outpost sat in middle of a long trade route and provided security within its vicinity. The outpost had a key role in security of Outer Sol and it boosted impressive fleets for its size.

Pirate activities sky-rocketed past the outpost’s security radius and a lot of trainees were trained here.

“This is Cadet Kain of USF Parashe. I am here to report in for infield training. Requesting permission to dock,” Kain spoke.

It took a bit but a response was made. “Your docking request has been denied,” A female officer answered. “Redirecting you to an infield instructor. Please wait.”

After another moment of waiting, a man answered on screen.

“Hello, Cadet, don’t worry about being denied docking permission. You will be allowed to dock but not right now. Our primary goal at this moment is to get you and your crew used to living in space,” The instructor stated.

“Understood,” Kain responded with a nod.

“Meanwhile, do report those who seem itchy and cranky. We need to filter out those who can’t handle being in space.”

“Roger that.”

“You are to join a small fleet. The fleet has few cruisers and numerous frigates. It is a patrol fleet. I am sending the coordinates now.”

“I’ve received the coordinates,” Samuel reported.

“You will know what to do once you join the fleet. Good luck.” And the channel closed and a holographic screen vanished.

“It’s not far from here, probably half an hour max,” Samuel said.

“Alright, let’s go.”

The patrol fleet was waiting on the other side of Uranus. Due to being shadowed, the area was utterly dark.

“Oh, man, it is pitch black here,” Kain commented. “Can’t see anything.”

“The sensor is picking up a small group of ships. It must be them and their signatures indicate that they are the navy with USF tags in front of ship signatures.”

Kain opened a channel. “This is USF Parashe. Hailing the patrol fleet.”

There was no immediate answer and Samuel was becoming skeptical.

“Could be pirates in disguise?” He guessed.

Kain shook his head. “Can’t be. I am hailing them again. This is USF Parashe, hailing the patrol fleet, respond.”

After another moment of uncomfortable silence, at last a voice answered.

“Hello, hello, sorry about the silence. We were just playing around,” The voice said. And then a holographic screen popped up on Kain’s bridge and a figure appeared.

“I am Commodore Savas and current fleet captain of this patrol fleet.”

Kain saluted at once.

“At ease, Cadet. This spot has been traditionally used to welcome new cadets. Join the formation.”

The fleet had three cruisers and fifteen frigates including Kain’s frigate. They had been patrolling Uranus-Neptune-Pluto route for past two seasons and still had two more seasons before their duty was over, meaning Kain and his crews were to be in a fairly long run.

It was especially taxing for the crews on frigates due to lack of cafeteria and recreation options.

Their patrol had been smooth for past few weeks.

Kain was in his captain’s chair and was playing with the chair’s buttons to learn which did what. They also had a light classical music playing in background to repel the utter silence.

Samuel was also in his station but he was watching a TV channel.

“WOAH!” Kain was thrown out of his chair. The chair swiftly moved bended forward, throwing him out.

“Sir?!” Startled by the sudden shout, Samuel looked back. “What happened?”

“I must have pressed something wrong. The chair literally catapulted me.”

“Be careful, sir.”

Kain just sat on spot where he fell and stared at hologram dome that dominated top half of the bridge. It was displaying outside, the space.

“Were you level one or level two?” Kain talked to Samuel who was back watching his entertainment.

“I started off as a level one, sir,” He answered with his eyes fixed at a holographic screen. “But they told me that I was better off as a level two, so here I am as your first officer.”

“Is anyone else level two? Do you happen to know?”

“I believe Ritsuki is level two. All others should be level one.”

Kain slowly stood up and walked out of bridge and went to the engine room where he found Ritsuki in ragged and oiled work suit sleeping on floor.

The engine room was about the same size as the bridge but due to having two fusion reactors present, the actual space they could use was much smaller.

“Hello? Are you sleeping?”

Ritsuki lazily opened one of her eyes to see who it was. Once she knew it was Kain, she immediately got up and wiped off her drool.

“Sir!” She saluted.

“At ease. Where is everyone?”

She resisted yawning and answered, “I think ... they are somewhere ..., just not here?”

A charming answer, Kain thought.

“Well, I just wanted to check on everyone. Good to see that you are alive and sleeping.”

“No problem, sir!”

The frigate had three floors. The first floor had the bridge and engine room. The second floor was quarters including Kain's. The third floor was a small storage compartment for spare parts, food, and deactivated missiles.

When he went down to the second floor, he saw about five crews gathered together. They seemed to be discussing something.

"Hello, everyone, what are you guys up to?" Kain approached them and causally asked.

They all startled at once and saluted.

"At ease. What were you discussing?"

They looked at each other. They were clearing scheming something and one of them spoke out.

"Sir, we were discussing a possibility of hull modification."

According to him, they were discussing a possibility of taking down two quarters and reusing the space for a small cafeteria or some sort of recreation place.

"Is that even allowed?" Kain had to ask because he wasn't sure. He knew the rules but didn't recall reading anything about hull modifications being allowed or let alone being mentioned.

"A lot of ships are customized, sir. I don't think it's against rules."

"Are you sure about this? We are talking about taking down two rooms. I mean I wouldn't mind it but you will be losing out two rooms."

They looked at each other and nodded at Kain.

"How about others?"

"They've all agreed, sir."

Kain didn't give them a definite answer right away. Instead, he assured that he'd give them an answer soon because quite frankly he wasn't sure.

After returning to the bridge, he inquired Samuel about the crews' request.

“I think it’s allowed, sir. It’s not encouraged but allowed,” Samuel replied.

“We are talking about weeks of labor here.” Kain was still skeptical.

“Yes, weeks of works, something to focus.”

“Oh, I see.”

Yes, something to focus, something to keep them occupied, something to look forward to, it was a way to living in space.

Everyone had to do something to keep them occupied. Samuel preferred watching what he had saved for tens of years. Ritsuki got by tinkering with stuff. Some would play video games. Some would just sleep all day long. Everything had their own unique ways to make time tick by.

Kain had been too excited to think about how he should have spent time. He was just happy to be on his bridge so far.

The patrol fleet had a relative quiet journey until they reached Pluto where it was pretty much lawless. Pluto had been discarded by United Sol just as planet Dawn was discarded by Andromeda union. The navy still fiercely protected known trade routes but it was inevitable that some freighters were fished out by pirates from time to time.

That led some merchants to choose less known route and pirates tracking them down. The end result was a chaotic situation for both navy and merchants.

“Savas to all ships, we are entering Pluto region. Expect plenty of actions,” Commodore Savas spoke to the fleet. “Cadets, your primary task is to survive. Let the veterans take the front line. You support-fire.”

Out of fifteen frigates, ten frigates belonged to new cadets. The other five frigates belonged to Commodore Savas and his officers were manning them. As a commodore, he was entitled to have a small fleet. This fleet was his.

“This region is not quiet. That is for sure,” Samuel agreed, adding, “I see plenty of stuff on sensors. Some are too far to make out though.”

Kain opened a channel to all decks. “This is Cadet Kain. We’ve entered Pluto region and be on alert.” And then he closed the channel.

The region was not peaceful, yes, but it wasn’t all that chaotic. One of major reasons that sensors appeared chaotic was merchant ships were scattered around which ironically made pirates be able to blend into the sensory chaos.

Pirates used fighter-class ships exclusively because maintaining cruisers and frigates were too expensive for them. A fighter was a small but nimble one-man craft with few fore weapons. They acted in a group of 10 or more to effectively fight against larger ships. A pirate fighter craft was heavily modified versions of USF fighters. The modifications were mostly on its weapons to beef them up. Still a pirate fighter had little chance of actually going through even armors of a frigate. But in numbers, it was possible to aim and destroy bridge window of frigates, thus damaging them and even disable. They stood no chance against cruisers however.

“This is Commodore Savas, we are heading to a SOS signal. Cadets, your job is simply to follow me and support-fire. Don’t be a hero.”

When the fleet reached the scene, about fifty pirate fighters were swarming around a freighter. Debris of shipwrecks indicated that his escorts were destroyed.

Fighters survived by a rather complex math. They would orbit their target at a high speed at a close range, thus rapidly increasing their transversal speed to a point that they overcame turret’s tracking speed. And their small size assisted their odds for survival.

As soon as Savas’ fleet came into range, the pirate fighters immediately dispersed. To the pirates, their range was a key to survival and, even with their high transversal speed, cruisers were well capable of hitting them given enough distance.

Cruisers had a capacity of holding up to 5 fighter crafts but they were rarely used for few reasons.

One was that loss of manpower was more significant than what they might gain in battles. Second was that the fighter crafts themselves weren't cheap. A damaged cruiser could be repaired. A damaged fighter was likely to blow up in space. Finally, fighter crafts needed experienced pilots, and due to them being seldom used by USF Navy, they just did not have any experienced pilots to make good use out of them.

All in all, it made little sense for USF Navy to utilize fighters.

The fleet did not chase the pirates simply because they could not out chase them down since they scattered. Savas contacted the freighter. They reported heavy damages. They needed on-site repairs.

“Uh oh,” Samuel uttered. “I think those pirates we chased away are going after another freighter nearby.”

Indeed, they were tackling another freighter just 5 minutes away. However, the protocol dictated that they needed to secure safety of the freighter they were protecting first.

“This is Savas. Do not leave the formation. We follow the protocols.”

Kain could see how useless the patrols were. The pirates were jumping from targets to targets and the patrol fleet would always be one step behind.

Alas, there was little he could do at this point. They could easily take down a lone frigate. Besides, he wasn't about to throw his career away which had barely just begun.

The fleet patrolled for weeks in Pluto region. Their patrol wasn't very effective due to “protocols”. Merchant freighters were continuously picked up by pirates and patrols continuously chased them without much result.

Savas' fleet hadn't even fired once during the time.

But this day, things turned slightly different. Savas' fleet was doing the usual routine. They chased off a group of pirates and was repairing a freighter.

And it happened.

"Are you seeing what I am seeing?" Kain asked Samuel while reading a holographic sensor in front of him in his captain's chair.

"If you are saying you are seeing two USF frigates chasing a group of frigates, then yes, I am seeing what you are seeing," Samuel replied right away.

"USF Imparis and USF Hawky? Who are captaining those frigates?" Kain asked and Samuel had no idea of course. He contacted Commodore Savas.

"Commodore, I am sure you are seeing a certain situation," Kain spoke to which Savas replied promptly. "Yes, I am aware of that. I, too, am trying to find out what is happening."

The two frigates refused comm. and kept on chasing the pirates. At one point, another pirate group came to assist their fellows and it was turning bad for the frigates.

"Commodore? They seem like they need a hand." Kain told Savas but he returned no response.

"It isn't looking good. They are taking down the frigates soon," Samuel reported.

"Commodore!" Kain continued to contact Savas and he finally responded, "The patrol protocol dictates that I must contact their fleet leader first which I've been unable to do so."

"So what?" Kain raised his voice. "Are you saying you are going to watch fellow navy frigates go boom because of that, sir? Surely, you are better than that."

Fortunately, he was better than that. He quickly led his fleet toward the two frigates and opened fire at once. For Kain and his crew, it was their first battle

although there wasn't much they did. Turrets were automated and all they had to do was just watch the battle unfold before them.

Once the pirates were either repelled or destroyed, Savas opened a public channel which could be heard by anyone.

"USF Imprais and USF Hawky, identify yourselves first. It is the least we deserve after saving your lives," Savas spoke.

A female voice responded, "I am Cadet Suu of USF Imparis."

Another female voice responded, "I am Cadet Margaret of USF Hawky."

"Alright, Misses, care to explain what happened? Or do I need to court-martial you?"

According to Suu, they were fed up with the patrol protocol and attempted to take matters by their own hands. They left their fleet intentionally and chased a group of pirates. Savas had every right to simply court-martial them. However-

"Listen, kids," Savas raised his voice as he spoke. "I know the system isn't exactly working, but the protocols exist to protect us rather than protect the merchants. The merchants don't give a damn about our own safety. It falls onto us to save our own asses. The pirates exploit every holes in system and it's nearly impossible to combat them, which is why the strict protocols exist. There is no need for us to die needlessly. I am sure your fleet leader told you at the beginning. Don't be a hero because, if you die in space, you will be nothing but a frozen corpse."

After a moment of silence, Suu and Margaret apologized for their reckless actions.

"If you want to change the system, climb the ladder of the chain," Savas said through the channel as if he wanted everyone to hear his words. In fact, he had been speaking through a public channel. "Become an admiral or even higher. Try to change the system when you have the powers. What you did would change nothing but cause needless death."

Commodore Savas managed to contact their fleet and sent them their way. He warned Suu and Margaret that he was not court-martialing them only because they were cadets.

“Everyone deserves a second chance,” Savas claimed. “Especially when they are just starting.”

Their patrol remained smooth for rest of period. Kain wasn't entirely happy about the protocols but knew there was nothing he could do and after 2 seasons of patrolling was over, the fleet headed back to Uranus.

And once they arrived within visual range of Uranus outpost, Commodore Savas made an announcement.

“This is Savas, all of you are now dismissed. You may dock at Uranus outpost and enjoy a break or whatnot. Your instructor will tell you more,” He announced.

“Thanks for the lesson, Commodore,” Kain replied but there was no reply.

USF Parashe approached the outpost opened a channel.

“This is USF Parashe, requesting docking permission,” Kain declared.

A response was made a moment later. “Request granted. Docking bay #11, proceed at once.” And then Kain received a private channel from an instructor. It was voice-only.

“Hello, Cadet. I am glad to see you back in one piece. Congrats on your first successful patrol. You now have a week of break. You will continue to do this for a while, so undock and contact me after your break. Oh, and check your bank balance.”

Kain had received 18,000c as his wage. Of course, he did. He was off 2 seasons and his wage was 9,000c /season. The thing was that he didn't really taste the

passage of time and the 18,000c felt like a big bonus instead of hard-earned money.

While he was struggling as a freelancer, he barely made 5,000c in a season. Now suddenly, he found himself in a small pool of sizable credits.

“What’s your wage, Samuel?” Kain asked out of curiosity.

“9,000c per season, sir.”

It was the same as his. He opened a channel to the engine room and asked Ritsuki the same question.

She replied, “It’s 9,000c, sir. Why do you ask that? Need me to loan some money to you? I heard prostitutes on Uranus outpost are expensive. I understand.”

“Woah, woah, no, no, I was just curious. That’s all.”

“No need to be shy, sir. I understand, perfectly. Men need to blow off some steam once in a while. Hell, I am thinking I might as well blow off some steam myself as well.”

“Ne...Nevermind.” Kain simply closed the channel. “Geez.”

Samuel had a snicker. “Ritsuki is a fun girl, sir.”

“Too much of fun, I’d say. Well, let’s dock and breathe some fresh air.”

Uranus outpost had a population of 50,000, and some of the population was just passing merchants. The outpost inhabitants made their livings via services; station services which included docking fees, repairs, shops, and personalized services such as prostitution. The outpost also had a small downtown district for passing merchants also.

The whole outpost was dedicated to serving merchants. For USF Navy, Uranus outpost was a safe haven in middle of nowhere in outer Sol.

As soon as USF Parashe docked, Kain received a report from a crew. It was cargo report and what they needed to restock. It was mostly food. However, the report included some construction materials for the renovation they had been working

on. It had been halted due to lack of materials. Kain approved the list and left the ship.

Having more than enough credits enabled him to be able to slack with peace of mind. It was the first time in his life that he wasn't concerned with money. He visited a five-star hotel and decided to stay here for a week only to realize later that he didn't have anything to do and went back to his ship. At least he had familiar faces there.

He went down to the second floor to see how the renovation was going. Three crewmen were working on the renovation. They were rebuilding walls after taking down two quarters.

“How is it going?” Kain casually asked.

“Not bad since we have the materials we need, sir,” One of them responded.
“What are you doing here, Cadet? I thought you left.”

Kain shrugged and responded. “I did only to realize that I had nothing to do out there.”

“Done with blowing off steam already?” Another crew responded. “Ritsuki said you went out for that.”

“Oh, for fuck's sake. I was simply asking her what her wage was!”

“I am paid 9,000c per season. Boy, I was shocked to see 18,000c in my account,”
The first crew said.

“I think we all are paid 9,000c,” The second crew said.

Kain felt he needed to straighten things up with his chief engineer and went to the engine room and found Rituski in her underwear and she was climbing one of the fusion reactors.

“What the hell are you doing?!” Kain exclaimed.

“Oh?” Ritsuki looked behind while still climbing the reactor. “Cadet? What are you doing here? I thought you went out to blow off some steam.”

“I never had any intention of doing that! Answer me. What the hell are you doing in underwear?”

“We are all off duty and it’s hot in here,” She responded just as she reached top of the reactor. “I just want to take a better at this reactor. That’s all.”

The reactor had hazard warnings all over and that didn’t seem to deter her.

“Hmm, I see...” She was crawling around and Kain could almost see her private part through her skinny low waist underwear.

Sighing and shaking his head, Kain simply left the engine room and he found Samuel nodding off on the bridge. He had no intention to wake him up and instead went to his quarter despite of the fact that he had 6 days left on his 5-star hotel room which he paid 1500c for.

Two days later, he decided to visit the hotel for a drink but unfortunately ran into Suu in main lobby who was also staying at the hotel.

As soon as he saw her, he froze on spot and turned around at once. When he was about walk away, Suu walked to him and stopped him by grabbing his shoulder.

“Stop, Cadet Kain,” Suu demanded.

Laughing nervously and without turning around to face her, Kain said, “Eh..., ma’am, I just remembered I have an appointment and I am kind of late. So, if you will excuse me...”

“Cut the rubbish, Cadet, and face me,” She told him boldly.

But Kain did not give in and resisted. “Ma’am, I assure you that we can talk later. For now, I must take my leave...”

Sighing, Suu responded, “Very well. I will contact your ship later and I fully expect video communication. Do you understand?”

“Does it have to be video communication? I mean it’s not like we are...”

“Cut the rubbish, I said, Cadet!” Suu shouted at him at which point people in the lobby looked at them.

Kain realized he had no way out and agreed. He went right back to his ship and cancelled his room at the hotel right away remotely.

Few hours later, Suu contacted USF Parashe and Samuel informed Kain who was in his quarter.

“Cadet, Cadet Suu is on comm. She’d like to speak with you.”

“Crap.” Uttering in a whisper, Kain replied. “Put it to my quarter.”

“Aye, sir.”

A holographic screen appeared on a wall and Suu appeared on it soon after. Looking at her surrounding, she was on her bridge of her ship.

Clearing his throat, Kain readily greeted her. “Hello, madam. It is so nice to see you back.”

Suu looked visibly surprised for a brief moment by Kain’s not-so natural greeting. She sighed and shook her head before speaking to him.

“Cadet Kain..., can I call you Mr. Kain instead since this is a private channel?”

“Yes, of course, whatever you wish, ma’am.”

“Alright, Mr. Kain. I don’t think I know you and I don’t think you know me. Is that correct?”

Kain nodded at her. “Correct, ma’am.”

“Then please explain why you avoid me?”

“I haven’t avoided you, ma’am.”

Sighing again, Suu told him, “I saw you froze on spot as soon as you saw me and you turned around at once to leave the lobby.”

Kain firmly denied. "Ma'am, like I said, I remembered an appointment and had to leave with haste. Seeing you there was a pure coincidence."

Suu would kind of glare at him for a moment and Kain remained still nervously. He was having cold sweats on his back.

Eventually, Suu told him suddenly, "Do you have a problem with the Bau?"

Up until this moment, Kain had completely forgotten that Suu was from the Bau, and naturally he responded, "The Bau?"

"I guess not," Suu said while scratching her chin. She was trying to figure out why Kain was acting so weirdly toward her. She was frustrated because she felt she hadn't wronged anyone in her life. For Kain, he just wanted to get this over with ASAP.

"I don't get you, Mr. Kain... I really don't..." She mumbled. She had tearful eyes. "I've never wronged anyone in my life. I don't think so. I don't think I've done something so horrible to you that you must avoid me like this."

The situation turned bad to worse as Suu couldn't resist sobbing.

"Wooaaah, why are you crying?"

Kain felt like crying as well. He just wanted her to get off his back and leave him in peace. He was never going to tell her that he stole her purse a decade ago.

Suu simply shut the channel off and that was the end of their awkward conversation. The outcome didn't make Kain feel any better, either. Still, he was glad that it was over, for the time being at least.

After a week of the break was over, USF Parashe undocked and contacted the instructor.

"Hello, Cadet. Good to hear from you again and on time also. That is good."

"Is it going to be another patrol mission, sir?" Kain asked.

“Yes, although I am sure you are getting sick of this already. Still, it doesn’t change the fact that you are merely a cadet with only 2 seasons of experience under your belt. You must understand.”

Kain nodded. “I do, sir.”

“Good. It will be yet another patrol mission but I’ve decided to spice things up a little.”

Although Kain was unaware, Commodore Savas made individual reports on each cadets. Savas described Kain was righteous and ductile but rebellious.

The instructor continued, “You will lead a small patrol fleet consisted of entirely frigates simply because your rank isn’t high enough to command those in cruisers. You will lead only five frigates but you will be patrolling in relatively safe zones only. I am sending you the mission info. You are to patrol for only a season and return, hopefully alive and well.”

“I see. That sounds easy enough,” Kain responded. He was receiving the mission information.

“You do know the protocols, don’t you?” The instructor wanted an assurance which Kain duly complied.

“Yes, I do although I will be honest to say that I am not entirely sold on the protocols.”

“Listen, Cadet. I need you to follow the protocols. However, when you are leading a fleet or something in middle of nowhere, exceptions can apply after all you will be the law. But! Be wise and make right calls. I want all of the frigates come back intact. If you are missing even one frigate, that will be it for your career.”

Level 2 and its risks, this was one of it.

“I understand perfectly, sir.”

“Very good. I will be sending the four frigates to your location soon. Good luck, Cadet Kain.”

Few minutes after the comm., Samuel reported that four frigates were approaching.

“Four frigates are approaching our location, sir, USF Turtle ,USF Steels,USF Imparis, USF Hawky.”

“Crap!” Kain uttered.

“Sir? Is something wrong?”

“Did you just say Imparis?”

“Yes, I did. Didn’t you talk to the cadet some days ago?”

Indeed, he did and it was something he never wanted to be reminded ever again.

Sighing deeply, Kain muttered. “Did he give me rejects or what?”

Actually, he was spot on. All those four frigates were rejects. They didn’t behave well from their last mission. They were literally being given a second chance. However, Kain wasn’t a reject but the instructor chose to test him his leadership by letting him handle a group of rejects. The instructor also took a note of his rebellious nature that Savas pointed out which could come handy handing the rejects.

Once the frigates formed a formation, Kain opened a channel to the frigates. A big screen appeared in front of him and it was divided into four smaller screens where it was displaying faces of each cadet.

“Hey, guys, this is Cadet Kain. I am to lead this group for a season. I am sure the instructor told you.”

“Hello ~, Cadet Kain, we meet again ~,” Cadet Margaret responded in overly friendly manner.

“Yes..., good to see you..., again,” Kain was hardly smiling of joy but he had to put on a smile regardless on screen. He swiftly glanced at a screen where Suu was. She was looking at him emotionlessly.

“Hello, I am Cadet Gordon, sir! I am honored to work with you, sir!” He sounded overly enthusiastic.

“Hello, I am Suu.” She introduced herself in a simple and quick manner.

“Greetings, Cadet Kain, I am Cadet Garderic. Let us crash those pirate bastards!”

Samuel lazily looked back at Kain with amusement. He also felt that Kain was given to lead a group of troublemakers. Kain tried to smile well but it didn't come out too good, not that any of the cadets noticed or even cared.

After the channel was closed, Kain sat deeply into his captain's chair and asked Samuel, “I got rejects, didn't I?”

“Looks that way, sir.”

“It looks like my job is to keep them from dying instead of patrolling.” Having said so, Kain covered his face with both of his hands, sighing in progress. And then he recalled how USF Imparis and USF Hawky almost killed themselves.

“Come on, you've got to be kidding me... I am just a cadet with 2 season worth of experience for fuck's sake...,” Kain muttered.

Alas, he had to do it. Do this or go back to his poor days.

“Alright, I have to do this. I am not going back to the way it was! Just hang on for 91 days!” He encouraged and pushed himself. Having charged up on his own, he opened a channel to the frigates again.

“Alright, this is Cadet Kain speaking. Our objective is to patrol the known trade routes only. We are not to sway from the routes. Do you understand?”

All of them responded positively.

And off they went. The mission span was a season, 91 days. Kain expected accidents and his expectation became a reality when they encountered a group of pirate bubble. They were apparently asking for a toll to pass through.

Even before Kain could say thing, Garderic screamed, “You motherfuckers! Die!” And charged forward. Gordon soon followed.

“What the?!” Kain quickly opened a channel. “You two! Stop!”

“No way am I just going to watch pirates have his ways!” Garderic shouted as he continued his charge with Gordon.

“God damn it!” Kain muttered. He had to protect them. “USF Imparis, USF Hawky, we have to assist them. Let’s go!”

There were approximately 40 pirates, and because there were only five frigates, they fought back. The fight went on for a while and Kain’s bridge had been shaking for a fair amount of time.

“I can’t believe we are still alive,” Kain remarked as he watched the battle unfold before his eyes.

“We have armors, sir. Their weapons can hardly put a dent on us. We are holding fine. I am not sure about USF Steels though. That Garderic guy is crazy,” Samuel said. “USF Turtle isn’t as bad as USF Steels but both are crazy, I’d say.”

USF Imparis and USF Hawky were behaving well and was very responsive to Kain’s commands meanwhile.

“So, let me get this right. Girls are following me while guys are rejecting me? That’s how it looks like to me!” Kain uttered jokingly.

It was true on surface, but Suu and Margaret were lectured by Commodore Savas which helped them get back on their feet.

Samuel responded with a pleasant laugh, "I wouldn't complain about such a situation, sir. But at least two of them are obeying your commands. Could be a lot worse, you know?"

He had a point.

The battle ended in Kain's favor as the pirates retreated, but USF Steels and USF Turtle was heavily damaged. USF Steels had it worse and their side armor was melted heavily. It needed an immediate repairs and replacement of side armor.

However, Garderic went on to claim that his ship was fine. "My ship's fine, sir! This is nothing!"

"Listen, Mr. Garderic!" Kain raised his voice. "I hereby dismiss you. Your first officer shall take over."

Rank wise, Kain had no such authority to revoke Garderic's command. However, as a fleet leader, he had the authority to dismiss him for the time being. Of course, Garderic couldn't care less about that and turned aggressive.

"You have no authority over me!" He claimed loudly. "I listen to no one!"

The situation was becoming tense, and Kain turned to Gordon. "USF Turtle, what do you say now? Are you turning against me also?"

Gordon seemed troubled but soon came to his senses.

"Of course, not, sir," He said calmly. "I am not revolting against your leadership."

"Now, Garderic, stand down. Your first officer will take over."

Garderic was clearly agitated and was reluctant to obey. When his first officer approached him slowly and tried to take him away from his captain's chair, he took him off and knocked his own first officer out with a punch.

"Never!" He blurted as he cut off the channel.

"USF Imparis and USF Hawky, disable that ship!" Kain quickly ordered and it was over in a minute.

USF Imparis got behind USF Steels and started to focus-fire on its engine while USF Hawky distracted Garderic with loose fires at him. With its engine blown, USF Steels became a seating duck and it was over.

However, Garderic wouldn't still stand down and they had to breach into his ship. Suu led her crew into USF Steels while fully armed.

"Hands up, Cadet Garderic, you are under arrest," Suu said while her five crews aimed their guns at him.

Dropping his head, Garderic surrendered. After Garderic's first officer woke up and took over the command, the patrol resumed for the time being after emergency repairs were done on its engine.

"Cadet Suu confirmed that Garderic has been locked up on her ship, Cadet," Samuel reported.

"Alright, get me a detailed damage report on USF Steels. We might need to send it back." Kain responded.

"Aye, ser."

The damage report came in shortly later. It was determined that the molten armor could be repaired to some degree but it would be a time consuming effort.

Kain smiled as he read the report. "Time consuming, eh? Anything to avoid pirates and kill time, let's repair the ship here."

The five frigates formed a circle formation and started to repair USF Steels molten side armor. For Cadets, it meant they had spare time. Kain called the other cadets to his ship for a meeting.

Gordon, Suu, and Margaret were with Kain on the bridge of USF Parashe. Kain repeated what Commodore Savas told Suu and Margaret earlier and Gordon looked sorry.

"My apologies. I guess ... I wasn't thinking straight," He said with an apology.

“At least you didn’t revolt,” Kain told him with a grin. “It could have been a lot worse.”

“What is going to happen to Garderic now?” Gordon inquired cautiously.

“He will be court-martialed probably. I see no other way,” Kain replied.

Margaret agreed with a nod, adding, “Yep, there is no other way. He could have just stood down but he went too far.”

Suu remained quiet and Kain knew why. He wasn’t about to touch a hornet’s nest however.

“Alright, let’s get back to work.” Kain concluded the meeting.

To Kain’s delight, they “wasted” six days to restore some of the molten armor and went on to continue patrolling. Gordon responded well to Kain’s command afterwards, and their journey was overall smooth, minus occasional complaints from Garderic.

Once a season passed, Kain’s patrol fleet made a haste to return at once. The fleet was denied of docking however when Kain asked.

“The instructor wishes to speak to you before docking,” A control tower crew claimed. “Getting him on the channel now...”

After a moment, the instructor was on the line. “Hello, Cadet. It’s good to see you back in one piece. The reason you were denied docking was I need you to hand over your ship’s logs.”

Kain had a hunch as to why. “I see. Of course, sending them over now.”

“I hope you understand.”

“Yes, I do. It must have to do with USF Steels incident. Were you watching?”

“No, I wasn’t, but there was a report from a freighter that a patrol fleet was fighting against themselves.”

“It is done, the data is all yours,” Kain said.

“One moment please, let me take a quick look...”

The instructor returned after an hour.

“I see what happened,” He said with a smile. “I cannot blame you for what you did. In fact, I want to applaud. You exercised your authority remarkably well.”

“Let’s be honest, instructor,” Kain said with slight aggression in his voice. “You dumped rejects on me, didn’t you.”

The instructor laughed pleasantly. “Yes, I did. Did you enjoy the journey?”

“I almost shitted my pants. Let’s just put it that way.”

The instructor cleared his throat to stop from further laughing. “It was either that or kick them out. I felt it was also a good opportunity to test your leadership capabilities. From the logs, I see that Cadet Suu and Cadet Margaret did well. What is your opinion on Cadet Gordon?”

“I feel he could revolt again if he is placed under another fleet. I don’t think he’s fit to be captain a ship.”

“Is that your honest assessment?”

Kain realized something. “Hey, am I deciding his fate?”

The instructor nodded on screen.

Sighing Kain responded, “I stand by what I said. He could revolt under a different leader. He is a ticking time bomb.”

“Thank you, Cadet. That will be all. You may now dock. Docking bay # 12.”

Kain was given a break of a week again but he stayed on his ship and so did most of his crews. The ship had become a home for them.

“Ta-da!” The crews introduced their makeshift cafeteria to Kain. It had three tables with two stools each. And it had a serving counter with a small fridge behind it.

“Not bad!” Kain gave a thumb up. “But... what is she doing there...”

Ritsuki was sleeping on a table.

“Sorry, Cadet. She had few shots of tequila and fell asleep there,” A crew explained.

They were off duty, so Kain wasn’t about to lecture her.

The break went smooth and USF Parashe undocked to receive their next order.

The instructor was on screen.

“Congratulations, Cadet Kain. You are leading another patrol fleet again.”

However, Kain’s face twitched. He had a bad feeling. “Please, sir, tell me that I am not leading USF Turtle, USF Imparis, and USF Hawky again.”

The instructor beamed a smile and told him, “Cadet Gordon has been dismissed, but yes, you are to reunite with USF Imprais and USF Hawky.”

“Oh, for the love of God....,” Kain muttered in his whisper and told him, “Just the three of us? Isn’t it too small?”

“Cadet Kain, you’ve been performing excellent. You’ve known authority as well as leadership last time. You will be graduating from your cadet status.”

Meaning he was to be a captain.

“After this short mission, you will be given a cruiser. You will, by your choice, retain your current crew from USF Parashe and additional forty crews. Congratulations.”

Samuel applauded.

“Thank you, sir!”

“Once you turn captain, training will be over. No more dealing with instructors.”

According to the instructor, the mission was just to kill some time. Kain was told to just roam and patrol around Uranus with USF Imparis and USF Hawky.

Cadet rank was for trainees who passed the initial class. No trainee was meant to have the cadet rank for too long. Cadet Suu and Cadet Margaret were also being graduated from their cadet rank. However, being inferior than Kain in grades, neither was them was given a cruiser.

“I am going to keep everyone from USF Parashe,” Kain told his crews through a comm. “Samuel will still be my first officer and Rituski will still be my chief engineer.”

He did not know whether he could still keep USF Parashe but that wasn't really a concern. He was used to moving on.

- Fin