

[Kain and Suu arc] [3] [Stuck with you] [9611]

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Suu had a dream. No, it was a clearly achievable goal for her. It was to become an admiral.

She was born in a Bau outsider family. Her family was still prominent and her parents, especially her father, was keen on becoming an insider. There were several ways for her family to become insiders. There were easy ways and there were hard ways.

Her parents were just and honorable people. Especially her father cared a great deal about righteousness and justice. And for him to take an easy way to become an insider involved sacrificing Suu, his only child. In other words, getting Suu married to a prominent insider and becoming insiders by using his son-in-law's influence. As easy as it might have sounded, her father was strongly against the idea.

His righteous and just personality was fully against the idea of using his daughter to achieve his goal. Eventually, he came up with an idea.

One day, he told her during dinner. He told her that he wanted her to become an admiral. He told her to become an admiral the hard way, working her way up from the very bottom without using his influence and resources.

Suu got along with her father very well. She respected him and fully understood his desire of wanting to become an insider and eventually become a councilor. She was even willing to sacrifice herself if it was for his goal. To see his father not choosing the way easy was greatly appreciated by her. His just and honorable qualities; she wanted to inherit and follow him as an example.

And she did just that when she found how ridiculous United Sol navy's protocols was during her first patrol session. She saw those in need of help and gave them assistance despite of her superior officer's order not to meddle in. A fellow cadet, Margaret, agreed with her and joined her.

What happened afterwards was a history.

Fortunately, neither she nor Margaret was court-martialed, but for Suu, it was as good as being failed. What her instructor told her echoed in her ears for a long time.

“You must be flexible. Someone like you will only end up killing yourself for nothing,” Her instructor scolded her. “I am not going to ask what you were thinking or whatnot. What I am going to tell you is that you must be able to resist your urges.”

But she felt she did the right thing. It was the only right choice. It was everything she lived for, justice and righteousness. Alas, she admitted that she was wrong just so that she would not be kicked out. And she was given a second chance under someone she could not understand.

Kain, his name was. He was someone she could not understand. In her all life, she treated everyone fairly. She firmly believed that she wronged no one. But, for some odd reasons, Kain avoided her like a bee that was about to sting. She noticed his reluctance to be around her for the first time at a cafeteria after the race in USF Junkers. She did not think too much into it at that time.

However, as she spent more time with the man, she realized he was clearly avoiding her. In fact, it looked as if he was running away from her.

Why he would act so, she could not understand.

She had never wronged anyone. She treated everyone fairly. She realized not everyone would like her but to have someone who disliked her so much that he'd run away from her, it was beyond her naïve understanding.

She spent days trying to think whether she wronged anyone in her life. There was none. At least, she could not recall anyone. It frustrated her greatly.

“Woohoo!!!”

She was startled by a loud voice. She was in a cafeteria on Jupiter shipyard. She was alone and her table was right by a window. She was staring into space when she was disturbed by the loud voice. She slowly turned her head to the direction. There was a man on a table surrounded by people.

Actually, it was Kain on a table surrounded by his crews. He was holding a champagne bottle and was about to ready to pop the cork. He and his crews were celebrating his recent promotion to a captain.

Suu, too, was promoted to a captain but it certainly felt different and she had no reason to celebrate. Kain was given a cruiser with the promotion. She wasn't given anything other than a rank that seemed meaningless to her.

A captain with a frigate meant a little indeed. It meant that captains with frigates would still be under someone else's command because a frigate was too weak to do anything alone.

“There it goes!” Kain popped the cork and champagne sprayed all over those around him. They cheered.

Sighing deeply, she stood up and walked away from her table while trying to avoid looking at the happy scene. She wanted to get drunk but with the loud commotion going on in the cafeteria, she wasn't feeling comfortable enough for

drinks. Growling in silence, she was walking toward the exit where Margaret entered with a bottle of champagne in each of her hands.

“Hello, Mr. Kain!” She exclaimed joyfully as she entered the cafeteria. “Congrats!”

Suu’s eyes filled with doubt. Why was she happy? What was there for her to be happy about? Margaret was also promoted to a captain but, like Suu, she was stuck with a frigate. She rushed out of the cafeteria, storming past Margaret who failed to notice her.

While Suu was grumbling about her situation, Kain was having good time. He had a party with his crews and, at the moment, he was idling on his bridge alone when the system notified that he had a call.

“Yes, this is Cadet Kain.” He wasn’t officially a captain yet.

A holographic screen appeared and a familiar face showed up. It was Graeto.

“Hello, cadet. I take that you’ve had good time?”

Beaming a smile, Kain answered, “Oh, hello, sir. I am not sure about having hard good time but I survived.”

“Yes, I read over your progress report. You had some rough moments but you got through and you survived. That’s all that matters,” Graeto said indifferently.

“It’s good to see you, sir, though I wonder why you are contacting me. You are not dragging me into yet another trouble, are you?”

Gareto let out of a weak laugh. “Fear not, cadet. We are recalling all captain-to-be to Jupiter where a ceremony will be held. Admin Emuel is set to make an appearance. A special guest will attend as well.”

Kain wasn't genuinely interested in such an event, but it wasn't as if he had a choice.

"I see. Thank you, sir. We will be on our way."

"Wait, cadet. I have something to tell you. What is your plan after becoming a captain?"

"Pardon?"

Kain had no idea what he was talking about, and Graeto had to explain what his question meant.

All captains in United Sol Navy belonged to factions, and from their own factions, they received missions and sometimes bonus wages. These factions weren't official divisions or anything but rather a private group of those who shared the same motives or political views. As a new captain, Kain would be asked to join a faction and Graeto was attempting to recruit Kain.

"When you say 'factions', do you mean political factions?"

It took few seconds for Graeto to answer him. "Factions are political in nature to begin with, but if you are thinking those political factions on the Ark, no, navy factions are nothing like those sorts."

"Be straight with me, sir. I may be young but I don't think I am a fool. What do you gain from this?"

Graeto looked into Kain's eyes for a moment. He looked slightly offended by Kain's reaction, but his discontent soon evaporated from his face. "Of course, I expected no better from you. Very well, I will be straightforward." Clearing his throat, he continued. "I am Commander Graeto. I am the faction leader of Black Sailors. I am aiming to take the next step and become a rear admiral, and for that, I need more members in my faction."

"I see. Thanks for being straight with me, Commander. But I refuse your offer."

This time, Graeto was clearly disturbed. “Son, has other faction approached you already?”

Kain shook his head. “No, sir. I didn’t know factions existed even.”

“You will want to join a faction. If so, you can join mine. I assure you fine benefits.”

“Do I have to join a faction, sir?”

“You are not joining any faction? Why is your reason behind such a decision?”

“I have little ambitions, sir,” Kain shrugged as he said. “My primary goal is to have a long career with the navy. By joining a faction and therefore aligning myself to a side, I risk shortening my career.”

“You can’t mean that,” Graeto argued. “You mean to say that you plan to stay as a captain for rest of your career?”

Kain shrugged again. “Is there something wrong with that, sir?”

Graeto became speechless. Seeing him like so, Kain added, “Nothing wrong with that, sir. You only fall once you reach the top. And when you fall, you fall in flames generally. I don’t want all that crap. I just want this career to last. I may get promoted but I don’t want to rush that.”

So that he wouldn’t have financial issues.

Graeto terminated the channel shortly afterwards and Kain said to himself.

“I hope he won’t hold a grudge against me.”

When his crews came back from their break, USF Parashe headed to Jupiter.

Kain wondered whether Samuel knew about factions and asked him.

“Yes, I was told that the navy has factions,” Samuel answered him promptly.

“Were you approached by one?”

“Yeppers, I refused though.”

“Which faction was it? Just out of curiosity.”

“Black Sailors.”

“I’ve heard of them. I think their leader is Graeto who’s a commander.”

“Would you have joined him if you were me?”

Samuel crossed his arms in his seat. “Not sure, sir. I may have. It feels good to be headhunted, no? Speaking of which, are you going to join a faction?”

“I don’t plan to. Will that be a problem?”

“Not much of a problem but I heard that you need to join one if you want promotions.”

A smile emerged from Kain’s face. “I don’t want any promotions, so it won’t be a problem for me right?”

“In that case, for you, no problem, but those who serve you might have different ideas, you know.”

He had a point and Kain asked the obvious question. “Do you want to climb the ladder?”

“Yes, I do eventually.”

“How come?”

“Well, isn’t it human nature to climb as high as possible? I want to see how far I go before having to retire or something.”

Samuel had a valid point of course. Kain didn’t argue back because he was correct. At the same time, he felt that his vision was also correct.

You only fall once you reach the top.

As soon as they arrived at Jupiter shipyard, they were notified to prepare to attend a ceremony that was to be held in few days. All officers were told to get haircuts if needed and shave.

Meanwhile, an officer contacted Kain about his new cruiser.

“Hello, cadet Kain. I am here to inform you about your new cruiser,” A female officer spoke to him on a holographic screen on bridge of USF Parashe. All other crews, including, Samuel, were absent; they were preparing for the ceremony. “As soon as the ceremony is done, you will move to your new cruiser. It has already been assigned to you and it is currently docked at docking bay #4707.”

“Is it a virgin ship?”

“Yes, it’s not like we have spare cruisers lying around. It’s from the latest batch of cruisers that were produced this year, meaning you shall name her.”

Kain groaned and scratched his chin.

Noticing Kain’s obvious groan and his gesture, she asked, “Is something concerning you?”

“What is going to happen to this frigate?”

The female officer smiled as if she knew what Kain was thinking.

“I suppose you want to keep her. It’s not uncommon among cadets who want to keep their first ship. But you must understand that those ships are expensive. Even a frigate costs approximately 50 million credits to produce. We can’t just keep producing more for the fun of it.”

She was basically saying that he couldn’t keep the ship.

“Is it possible to purchase this ship?”

The female officer looked surprised. She never heard of any cadets attempting to purchase any ship.

“I have no idea actually. I am just a shipyard staff. That question of yours is for someone higher up than me. You will need to talk to someone else. My job is to

tell you where your new cruiser is docked and you are to leave your frigate where it is. You are not authorized to take it with you. That's all there is."

Kain nodded. It was obvious from the beginning that she was just a staff and there was no point in discussing any further since she had none of decision powers.

"Alright, thanks."

He wondered who he needed to speak to. He didn't have any connections in the navy, either. He had two people in his contact list and they were Graeto and Samuel neither of who he felt would be useful in this situation. In the end, there was no one he could contact and he decided to put the issue beside him for the time being.

It was a luxury party hall where cadets were gathered. There were few hundreds of them, and according to gossips, only 50 or so cadets received cruisers. There were exquisite tables with high quality food where cadets were having tastes with. Officers and engineers had their own ceremonies. This ceremony was for cadets.

Kain was alone since he didn't have anyone to go with.

"Holy shit, that is a fish," Kain blurted when he looked over a table. "I haven't eaten a fish for tens of years."

Fish was an expensive and rare delicacy. Commercial farms existed but number wasn't great and supply was never able to keep up with demand, resulting an obvious price hike. Commercial fishing was strictly forbidden on Earth. Even commercial fish farm wasn't allowed on Earth by laws of United Sol. However, the Bau did run few commercial fish farms on Earth regardless.

There were commercial fish farms in space but its number was scarce. It was due to high start and upkeep costs of a space fish farm. Fishes didn't fare well in zero gravity which forced the farm to rotate to create some form of artificial gravity. Such a set up cost a lot more to construct and maintain.

Kain was eager to take a bite but a drill instructor entered the hall and shouted at the cadets and officers.

“The administrator is entering! Show your respect!”

A tall figure with a dark gray with red lining entered the hall. There were two gorgeous women in fine dresses behind him. The women looked identical. He also had a cane with him although his legs seemed fine.

Jupiter administrator Emuel was a man known to be highly crafty and cunning. President Gvew considered him as his rival which was the reason he replaced former administrator Rommel who simply vanished. By placing making Emuel a high profile figure, Gvew had a much easier time keeping his eyes on him.

Emuel cleared his throat loudly. The twin stood behind him and the drill instructor stood by him.

“Greetings, young cadets!” He spoke while he looked around. “From this moment on, you are now captains!”

All cadets saluted at him at once.

“Now I know some of you failed to receive your cruiser. I understand your pains, but you must remain strong! As for those who have received a cruiser, step forward.”

Fifty or so men and women lined up in front of the crowd. Kain stood on far left.

Emuel had a good look at each of them before he would speak.

“Now, good job on graduating the course with good grades. That is why you've received your cruiser.”

Emuel's eyes slowly moved to Kain or at least his direction. "Captain Kain, step forward."

Kain wasn't sure why he was handpicked. Regardless, he took a step forward.

"Make no mistake," Emuel explained as if he knew what he or everyone else was thinking. "Capt. Kain here wasn't one with the best grades but this man here went through the most. He handled a minor revolt."

Emuel paused and progressively looked around before speaking again.

"It's never easy to work with those who don't want to work with you. But as a captain, you must make it happen. As a captain, you must set an example. As a captain, you must make it work. Capt. Kain here made it work. It wasn't the most ideal way but he nevertheless made it work and that is commendable."

"Captain Kain, you are to receive a medal of honor from our special guest today!" The drill instructor exclaimed.

A woman in a formal suit entered the hall. The face looked awfully familiar. It took a moment but Kain realized who it was and unintentionally spoke out loud in the quiet hall.

"Holy bleepy bleep! That's Miss. Jupiter. She's no android?!"

And an awkward moment of silence passed while everyone's attention was fixed at Kain. Smiling nervously, Kain made a silent apology by bowing weakly.

"Yes, she is not an android," Emuel answered Kain. "And, yes, you may laugh."

Some snickering was heard from behind.

The woman who Kain called Miss. Jupiter walked directly toward Kain. She had a red wooden box in her hands. Opening it in front of him, there was the medal.

"No, I am NOT an android," Pouting cutely, she spoke to Kain. "My contract is with Jupiter administration, so I am forbidden to make any other media appearances other than Jupiter news. Happy now?"

"My.... apologies, ma'am!"

“My name is Esthar. Nice to meet you, Capt. Kain.”

Emuel’s systematic cough signaled the end of their conversation and Esthar presented Kain with the medal. He walked back once he received the medal. Esther then stood by the twin behind Emuel.

“Congratulations, captains. I wish you great careers.”

The drill instructor exclaimed, “Salute!” And they saluted at him.

After Emuel and others were gone, they were free to eat and leave. Kain was approached by few and the first one to approach was Margaret.

“That was nice. I hadn’t had a laugh like that for years,” She told him jokingly.

“Really...” Kain had a feeling that she was just making a fun of him. “Charming.”

“A medal of honor given by Miss. Jupiter!” A captain spoke to him in excitement. “You’ve made many men jealous.”

Kain laughed nervously and said, “I am glad I wasn’t punished for making the remark. And I am glad that she wasn’t an android.”

From afar, Suu was looking at Kain who was surrounded by people. It was a déjà vu moment for her. She had done some background search on him. His education history was as ordinary as he could get. Nothing stood out from his background. Yet, he came out as one of the elite graduates from the course. She had far more education than him. She was far more qualified than him. It was hard for her to understand why he was there in a spotlight and she was here in no man’s land.

No, she didn’t want to be in a spotlight but she certainly did not want to be left in shadow like this. Her goal..., her father’s dream, felt so far. She felt she made the worst possible start of her career.

Few days later, Kain was in his new cruiser which he named "USF Parashe II". A cruiser was a ship of vast capabilities. Ship size alone was at least ten times larger than a frigate. It had a single ACM reactor which was able to power everything. All crews would have their own quarters. There was a large cafeteria as well as spacious cargo space for years of frozen food.

Fire power wise, a cruiser generally had 12 turrets and a hanger for five fighter crafts. The bridge was spacious as well. The captain's chair remained the same functionality wise and there were four console stations in front of the captain's chair and two behind.

When Samuel entered the bridge, Kain was already there in his captain's chair.

"Excited much, captain?" He spoke to Kain who was fooling around with controls on a chair arm.

"Wouldn't you be?"

"We can't take off yet you know. We need more crews."

A cruiser had a crew capacity of 150. The optimal crew capacity was the half, 75. Crews from USF Parashe was only 20, so they needed 55 more crews.

"We do meet the minimum crews limit though, right?"

Samuel nodded as he approached a console station in front of the captain's chair and took a seat. "Yes, but we won't go far with just 20 crews. Too much workload for them to do in long term." Samuel noticed an incoming channel. "Captain, you have a channel waiting. Have you noticed that?"

"Oh, crap, put it on screen."

Margaret appeared on screen who waved. "Hello, captain. How are you doing?"

"Margaret?"

She giggled. "Yes, that is my name."

"Yes, of course, I mean I wonder why you contacted me."

"It's not like there is a court order preventing us contacting each other, you know?" She joked.

Kain shrugged. "Fine, ma'am, you win."

"Yes, I do. Anyway, I am contacting you to ask a question. Have you joined a faction yet?"

"No, I have not. Are you trying to get me to join yours?"

"If you'd like. I'd love to work with you."

Even before he asked what faction it was and its nature, he refused.

"I'd rather remain alone for now," He stated.

"Are you sure?"

"Mind if I ask a question?"

"Sure, what is it?"

"What do I miss if I don't join a faction?"

She replied promptly, "Opportunities for promotions. And if your faction leader gets promoted, a good chance for you to get promoted as well."

"Anything else?"

"Oh! And bonuses!"

"I see." He beamed a smile at Margaret. "I see no reason to join one, so thanks but no thanks."

She looked visually shocked to hear Kain refuse. She didn't understand why one would turn down on opportunities. As for Kain, he wasn't going to explain his brief. He refused and there was nothing more to be said.

"Why...?" But she insisted. "Why would you refuse opportunities? I don't understand."

“Miss, I am looking for the right kind of opportunities. I am not one to play lottery and grumble about lack of luck or whatnot. A man creates his own opportunities. I do not want someone else to create opportunities for me.”

He made it up as he went on but there was some truth in what he spoke. It was his brief as well. He also did not want to climb to the top but that did not mean he did not want move up. He didn't have to rush.

He was hoping it was enough to convince her and it was. Margaret seemed to have understood Kain.

“I see. I can't say I agree with you but I see that you are not refusing for no reason. I will not bother you. I do hope to see you around in space.” She saluted casually and terminated the channel.

Later on, he was offered numerous opportunities to join factions by others. Few even offered some lucrative deals but Kain stood firm on his refusal.

And finally an official contacted him for his new and first assignment a day later.

A male officer was on screen. “Greetings, Capt. Kain. I am here to deliver your first assignment,” He was reading off a holographic data sheet. “I see you joined no faction. If you joined a faction, your assignment would have been different. Since there are only two of you, I guess we will group you two to for this assignment.”

Kain suddenly had an extremely bad feeling and stopped him, “Woah, woah, hang on a sec. Did you just say ‘the two of you’?”

The officer nodded. “Yes, there were two captains who refused to join any factions. One is you obviously and the other is...”

Kain stopped him again. “Please, for the love of God, tell me that the name does not start with an alphabet S.”

“Oh, wow, how did you know?”

“Oh, for fuck's sake...,” Kain grumbled in his whisper.

“It’s Captain Suu just in case,” He said. “You two are to head over to Uranus outpost and form a patrol party.”

“Just the two of us?”

“Yes, you two are the first captains without factions, so we can only give you simple assignments.”

After the channel ended, Kain continued to grumble, this time out loud.

“Oh, fuck, fuck, fuck!” He swore and cursed. “I cannot fucking believe I am stuck with her again! What have I done to deserve this?!”

“Why do you dislike her so much?” Samuel asked. He was genuinely curious.

“It’s ... it’s private. I can’t tell you, really.”

“Well, whatever your issues are with her, it looks like you will have to work with her for a while.”

“Oh, don’t remind me... I am going to hit the cafeteria for some espresso. I need to chill off...”

Samuel noticed a data was being uploaded from his console. “Not so fast, captain. I am receiving a list of the additional crews we will be getting. You need to go over the list and approve it. I am redirecting it to...”

Kain stopped him. “Send it to the captain’s quarter. I will look over it slowly later. Give me a break, will you? I feel like crying here, I mean real crying.” His voice was clearly frustrated.

Samuel shrugged in response. “If you say so, captain.”

Unlike Kan who received a lot of invitations, Suu did not receive any. She wasn’t going to join any factions anyway. She was going to climb the ladder of command the hard way just as her father told her.

USF Parashe II and USF Imparis stood next to each other outside of Jupiter shipyard.

Suu was on screen on Kain's bridge.

"Hello, so good to see you again," Kain greeted her casually with a fake smile. His cheeks were twitching.

Suu glared at him for a moment before speaking. "Hello, Captain. I've been told to work with you." And then she closed the channel.

"What the, Samuel, did you close the channel?"

"No, sir, it was her who closed the channel."

He felt offended. At the same time, he was glad not to have to talk to her. "Oh, hell, whatever, let her do whatever she wants. Set the course to Uranus."

"Aye, sir, 2 weeks ETA."

"Fuck," Uttering, he called Ritsuki at the engine room. "Hey, Ritsuki, do your magic. She is a slug."

She lazily responded. "Got it."

Fin