

Chaos' Heir 161

Chapter 161 - Explanations

Liiza and Khan couldn't interact much at the party. Azni still managed to drag her among her group, but she had to leave to spend some intimate moment alone with Doku at some point.

The only Niqols who weren't completely drunk had hidden in the forest to enjoy intimate moments with their partners, so Khan and Liiza could have a peaceful conversation after they remained alone. Khan mostly teased her after Azni's revelation, while Liiza complained and threatened him to increase hours of sleep that he had to pay. However, they soon realized that they had to separate.

All the barriers had crumbled after the two had voiced their feelings. They had been about to forsake their secrecy as their conversation continued, and only separating could solve the issue. They would have loved to spend more time together, especially since the emotional rush from before was still affecting their minds. They didn't feel too bad about parting either since they had already shared beautiful moments.

Khan felt full of energy after he returned inside the underground habitation and wore intact clothes. The clock on his phone had yet to hit six am, but flying back to the camp could take up to six hours, so he departed immediately.

Snow knew the fastest path back to the human camp, even if the envoys had taken many detours back then. Khan could force the eagle to fly in a straight line and save time, but he decided to let it have some fun. His packed schedule had forced the Aduns to forsake its enjoyment, so he didn't mind letting it have fun now.

Khan used the strong winds that blew on his face due to the dives, spins, and sudden accelerations to sweep his sadness away. It was strange to define how the party had helped him, but his condition had improved nonetheless. Tears would try to appear in his eyes whenever he thought about the mutated Niqols, but that urge wasn't unbearable anymore. His actions had been ugly, but he didn't blame himself.

The mission, his poor mental state, his time with Liiza, and the party had forced him to skip an entire day of training, but his flying ability had improved a lot after riding Snow basically every day. His control over mana had also grown after his diligent efforts during the lessons. Khan could meditate or remain immersed inside his mental training even when his Aduns was upside down.

The city grew closer while Khan remained immersed in his training. Everything felt smooth. It seemed that the human and the Niqols' training methods complemented each other to create the ultimate foundation meant to control and deploy mana.

On one side, Khan had the techniques and moves perfected over the centuries by human experts. On the other, he had methods that forced him to improve his basic understanding and control over mana.

Those two paths would lead to similar levels, but they affected fields so different that fusing them didn't create any problem. In theory, it was possible to manipulate mana to gain the effects of a punch while throwing the actual attack and obtain something stronger. The two actions didn't affect each other, which was the very reason why they sounded so easy to use at the same time.

Khan couldn't wait for his manipulation ability to reach decent levels, but his excitement focused on something that appeared far closer. He felt almost about to succeed in the eleventh mental exercise, which would lead him directly to the last lesson of his elemental training. The Wave spell didn't seem far anymore.

Khan's proficiency level with the Lightning-demon style had reached the competent level, he would soon gain access to his first spell, and he already had a second martial art ready to add to his fighting style. His meditations were also going smoothly. His growth appeared far more than promising.

Snow's screech eventually awakened Khan from his training. The familiar uneven plain with the simple-looking camp unfolded in his view, and a strange feeling spread through his mind. That place was the reminder of his belonging to the human species. It forced him to recall part of the problems that could affect his relationship.

Khan wanted to stay with Liiza, but his nightmares would inevitably bring him deeper into the universe. His life seemed a battle between his love and his desperation now, and he couldn't see a viable solution, not in his current position at least.

Delusional ideas on how to run away with Liiza appeared in his mind, but his intense feelings didn't make him stupid. Khan never stopped remaining aware of how unreal those plans were. He wasn't even seventeen. He could decide very little about his life.

His greatest hope was to remain on Nitis long enough to achieve an important position among both species before departing to look for the Nak and the solar system depicted by his nightmares. Ideally, Liiza would be his wife by then, so she would get the chance to come with him.

'I'm already thinking about marriage,' Khan laughed in his mind as he jumped off Snow's back and started walking toward the camp's entrance. 'Love really makes you crazy.'

Khan stopped making unreasonable plans and crossed the entrance of the human camp. Everything felt too cramped and cold compared to [The Pure Trees]'s peaceful environment. He could almost hear the difference between the different approaches to mana in the faint sounds that came out of the structures featuring no isolation.

A familiar figure stepped out of a building to greet Khan, and he didn't hesitate to perform the iconic military salute of the Global Army. Paul inspected him from head to toe. The aura that covered Khan was different from his memories, but he blamed the alien robe for that strange feeling.

"Where are the others?" Paul asked.

"They were busy helping the Niqols after the crisis," Khan lied to cover for his drunk companions. "Besides, I'm the fastest in the air."

"Wait here for a bit," Paul nodded while scratching the side of his head, "Or visit the canteen, whatever. I need to contact Lieutenant Kintea and the Captain to prepare the briefing."

Khan nodded and went directly toward the canteen. The food was better in the camp. The kitchens there made plates aimed to the human tastes, especially when it came to their temperature. What the Niqols saw as warm was cold for the humans, so it felt nice to have a satisfying meal.

A notification eventually reached Khan's phone. That ringing sound was another thing that he had almost forgotten after being in the academy for more than three weeks, and he smiled at that thought since it made him remember Martha. His conflicting feelings about her didn't exist anymore after confirming his love for Liiza. Khan felt affection and concern for Martha, but she couldn't be anything more than a friend now that his current girlfriend had become such an important part of his life.

The briefing room didn't change during those weeks. Khan could reach it in no time, but something felt off when he saw that it contained only Paul, Lieutenant Kintea, and Captain Erbair.

A personal briefing wouldn't require those three important figures. One of them was enough to update Khan. Moreover, the Captain's presence would often involve all the other recruits, but Khan was the only one except for the trio.

Khan performed a military salute, and his two superiors did the same curious inspection that Paul had completed just a few minutes ago. Khan had changed during those weeks, but they couldn't understand how. They could see a faint maturity in his stance and movements, but everything else remained hidden from their powerful eyes.

"Is something the matter, ma'am?" Khan asked after the inspection stretched for longer than half a minute.

"It's nothing," Captain Erbair announced while pointing at one of the seats.

Khan didn't hesitate to take his place, and a series of images appeared on the wall behind the three soldiers as Paul activated a few menus. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Kintea and Captain Erbair stared at Khan before the former decided to voice one of his doubts. "How much can you say about the academy?"

Khan recalled about his restrictions at that point, and he opened his mouth to say something. However, an azure symbol suddenly lit up on the left side of his neck and started to spread an ominous aura.

Khan revealed a weak smile while pointing at the symbol. The two soldiers could only sigh at that sight, but they didn't appear too disappointed. They didn't hope to discover much through him anyway.

"I believe you didn't come here on your own," Captain Erbair said as her bionic eye focused on the azure symbol to analyze the changes in its glow.

"The Niqols wanted me to question you about yesterday," Khan revealed while keeping the azure symbol in check.

It seemed that the explicit authorization that the professors had given to Doku allowed Khan to speak about that part even if it came from the academy. It felt surprising to see how flexible that restriction worked, but the Captain's stern gaze didn't give him time to let his thoughts wander.

"Is it true that you didn't help them on p-," Khan began to ask, but pain suddenly spread from the azure symbol.

Mentioning the hidden meaning that Doku's words carried seemed too much. The actual question wasn't a problem. The issue was that Khan had tried to talk about the Global Army's lack of cooperation after having gained those ideas from the Niqols.

Luckily for Khan, Captain Erbair didn't have time to waste. She didn't make him go over the combinations of words that would allow him to ask the same question without hinting at anything negative. She nodded at Lieutenant Kintea, and the briefing began.

"The Niqols won't reveal much," Professor Kintea announced as the Captain moved to the side of the room and cleared Khan's sight of the images on the wall. "However, we have kept track of the event for some days already. Communicating between Nitis and the telescope outside this solar system takes a while, but we have received a few reports. The mana became unstable on almost half of the planet. Their losses must have been consistent."

"I'm sorry," Khan interrupted the Lieutenant as a frown appeared on his face. "Did you say some days? Were you aware that the daylight would have arrived?"

"Technically, it wasn't proper daylight," Lieutenant Kintea replied while nearing the images on the wall. "It was a solar wind that created peculiar and temporary patches of bright sky throughout Nitis. The telescope saw it coming four days ago, but we only learnt about it and completed the necessary math two days ago."

The images on the wall depicted scenes that Khan couldn't wholly understand. They showed Nitis' solar system together with equations and numbers connected to a wave of energy that shot out of the distant star.

Lieutenant Kintea didn't go too deep into details with his explanation because he was aware of Khan's ignorance in astronomy. Still, he highlighted every piece of information that he found important.

"The arrival of the daylight is still set at a bit more than two months from now," Lieutenant Kintea continued. "It should probably last for two months before bringing darkness that will last for a bit more than two millennia."

"We even expect the radiation to be more influential during that period. We believe that the solar wind didn't generate too many monsters since it arrived close to the first crisis. The Tainted animals easy to affect had already transformed the first time, but the proper daylight will be merciless. Only the Aduns and a few unique species will remain untouched."

Khan memorized those words, but his mind could only focus on one detail. He had started to believe that his bad luck was to blame for his mission in the village, but there was something else now. The Global Army was aware of the incoming crisis and had chosen to remain silent.

"Why didn't you warn us?" Khan asked in a cold voice.

"We couldn't let go of this chance," Lieutenant Kintea announced while revealing a cruel smile. "It's a pity that you can't say anything. We have sort of confirmed that the solar wind has affected some Niqols, but Ambassador Yeza isn't saying anything about that. Having an actual report would give us better data."

Lieutenant Kintea sounded completely detached to the core of the issue. He didn't seem to care that the lack of warnings had caused countless casualties among the younger generations of the Niqols. He talked without knowing the pain that those aliens and the eight recruits had suffered.

"Warning you all was too risky," Lieutenant Kintea continued. "We needed the Niqols to lose as much as possible to create better terms for our cooperation. We even sent many of us to different locations through the teleport beforehand to limit the amount of help that we could give."

The explanations piled on in Khan's mind, but he could only review the last detail over and over. Cribs, small beds, and gruesome scenes appeared in his vision. The Global Army had basically been the cause behind that pain and his actions.

Chapter 162 - Story

Khan couldn't find peace.

The mental barrier had helped him go through the mission, and the many proofs of the Niqols' intense love in the village had brought some stability.

Liiza had made Khan realize his similarities with the mutated Niqols, which shattered that stability, but her intentions were pure. She wanted him to experience everything fully to gain access to a deeper layer of his feelings and allow her to take a share of that burden. Her desire was selfless, and it had made Khan go past simple acceptance. Liiza had managed to create some forgiveness and peace inside him.

Still, everything crumbled again during the briefing. The Global Army wasn't only aware of the incoming daylight. It had even decided to remain silent about the whole matter, uncaring of what the aliens and the recruits would experience.

Khan could probably accept that behavior if he tried to rationalize it. He would understand the benefits that the Global Army could receive after that decision if he threw away his emotions and studied everything through cynical eyes. However, Lieutenant Kintea's expression made him silently swear never to become like him.

The issue wasn't with the cruelty in the Global Army's intentions. Khan could even ignore where that decision had led him. He knew he was a pawn, a mere gear in a larger system. Yet, he couldn't accept the satisfaction and joy that Lieutenant Kintea showed during the briefing.

It was fine to gain something from the suffering of those around you. That mindset wasn't good or righteous, but the world was too ugly to think in those terms. Khan had learnt how to be cynical in the Slums, and that understanding had never once left his perspective.

On the other hand, Khan had never accepted that blatant cruelty. He had done bad things, but he had never enjoyed himself during those moments.

The issue was even worse at that time due to the targets of that cruelty. Khan had grown close to the Niqols, so it hurt to see his superiors treat them with such detachment. He was a pawn, but the aliens had even lower value. Their worth came from the potential benefits that they could give to the Global Army, and Lieutenant Kintea had never once viewed them as living beings or intelligent species.

Captain Erbair and Paul didn't appear as cruel as the Lieutenant, but Khan could see how they shared the core belief that led to that feeling. The Niqols weren't humans, so they didn't have much

value. That view didn't even come from a sense of superiority or xenophobia. The simple awareness that the Niqols were aliens created a wall that made the two soldiers unable to accept them as their equals on a general viewpoint.

Khan had to activate the mental barrier to maintain his poker face. He was already radiating cold feelings, so the action didn't alert the three soldiers. They actually found his mental resilience quite commendable, but that made sense when they recalled everything that Khan had experienced.

The three soldiers couldn't even begin to imagine what Khan was experiencing. The recent deepening of his emotions and his current frail condition risked making him show his true feelings. The three would be able to see the anger born from the injustice that Khan felt. They would learn about his newfound mistrust toward the Global Army, and they would also notice his affection toward the species that had never struggled to accept him.

'I could probably gain something out of this,' Khan guessed as his cynical mind took over his thoughts.

The order to clear the village had come from the professors, so Khan couldn't describe how important his actions had been for the Niqols. Yet, the three soldiers had already almost confirmed that the mutations had affected the aliens. It was doable to make them understand that Khan had performed a crucial role during the crisis without triggering the azure rune on his neck.

Still, his mind categorically opposed that approach. Khan couldn't even start to think about that tactic. The mental barrier couldn't defeat his feelings there.

"What do I have to report back?" Khan coldly asked as the atmosphere inside the briefing room became suffocating.

"We have already provided a story," Lieutenant Kintea revealed while nodding toward Paul. "You only need to confirm it and express our desire to be more involved with this event. The solar wind has ruined our initial plan, but we believe that reaching similar results is possible.

"Make sure to mention what we know about the daylight too. Ambassador Yeza is playing dumb, so we must take the first step in spreading awareness about our knowledge. It's time that we stop pretending to be ignorant about the incoming crisis."

Paul understood the silent order and started tapping on the screen of his phone. Khan's device rang a few times as his squad leader forwarded to him the story that the Global Army had used to justify the absence of troops. The message spoke about a made-up crisis on a planet called Ecoruta and even added general explanations.

The best lies had truths blended inside them. Ecoruta was a planet constantly at war that the Global Army had occupied in the last century. That place was famous in a political array that involved many alien species, so the Niqols would find the story reasonable even if they knew about it.

The message also contained information meant only for Khan. The soldiers didn't know the exact range of his knowledge, but they wanted to make sure that he learnt enough about the matter to make his story more convincing. Some of those descriptions were classified, but every recruit on Nitis had the clearance to gain access to them. The reports weren't too secretive since Ecoruta was quite famous.

"Understood," Khan stated after memorizing the contents of the message and raising his gaze toward the three soldiers. "Do you have additional orders?"

"Not really," Lieutenant Kintea explained while crossing his arms. "Our relationship with the Niqols has improved quickly during the last period, but that's an anomaly. These matters usually take years or decades of silent cooperation to move forward. Your priorities are still within the academy. Learn as much as you can, but don't grow weak."

"The daylight is coming," Paul added. "The entirety of Nitis will turn upside down, and the situation won't stabilize for months. Almost all the Tainted animals will become monsters, and the eight of you will experience the crisis from inside the Niqols' social environment."

"You won't have the chance to remain outside of the struggles," Captain Erbair summarized. "Get as strong as you can in these months and perform well once the daylight arrives. Getting through the crisis isn't as important as the amount of help that the Niqols will accept once everything is over."

Khan stood up and performed a military salute. The three soldiers nodded at that resolute gesture and dismissed him. Paul even escorted him outside of the building and until the camp's edges.

The squad leader appeared honestly concerned about Khan's well-being, but he didn't question him about his life inside the academy due to his restrictions. Paul remained mostly silent while walking next to his talented underling, but he eventually started adding details connected to the briefing.

"Our prospects see most of the fauna dying due to hunts and battles among different packs," Paul explained. "The years after the crisis will require long cleansing operations, but the worst will come later, once the shortage of food hits the Niqols. We plan to share part of our resources and technology at that point. Who knows? We might even establish a proper independent city that works as a source of food."

"I understand," Khan emotionlessly replied. "Our focus must be on appearing reliable and honest throughout the whole crisis. Our freedom on Nitis after everything settles will depend on how well we perform."

Paul nodded, and a satisfied smile even appeared on his face. Khan could appear eccentric at times, but he remained the best asset in his class. The promotion to lieutenant didn't seem unreasonable with Khan gaining merits for his team.

Paul would be even happier if he knew everything that Khan had achieved during his time inside the academy. The Global Army wasn't aware of how deeply he had blended with the Niqols. The trust that the soldiers put in him came from his previous achievements.

"Be sure to continue working hard out there," Paul announced once the two reached the gate and a white figure became visible high in the dark sky. "I believe there will be full disclosure after the crisis. Everyone will become aware of your sacrifices, and I'll make sure that they won't go unrewarded."

"Thank you, Paul," Khan said while showing a fake smile toward the soldier. "I know that our relationship has been rocky at times, but I'm glad to have you as squad leader. You are fair."

Paul didn't say anything. He limited himself to wear a proud smile and pat Khan's shoulder while Snow landed a few meters from them.

"Time to go," Khan announced before approaching the Aduns.

"Bring honor to the Global Army," Paul reminded as Khan jumped on Snow's back, "And keep it inside your pants!"

Khan voiced a fake chuckle before patting Snow's feathered neck. The Aduns set off almost immediately, and Paul continued to smile as he stared at the white figure disappearing in the sky.

The wind blew on Khan's face, but he didn't feel it. The beauty of Nitis' dark sceneries expanded in his vision, but he couldn't appreciate it. The mental barrier lowered its walls and let him experience his emotions again, but he only sensed a profound coldness mixed with disgust.

Khan felt the need to vomit the food eaten in the canteen. He cursed himself for appreciating the warm meal. The spot where Paul had patted his shoulder also became an unbearable sight. Khan tried to wipe it clean of the stench that only he could smell, but nothing seemed to work. That awful odor remained on him even after he tore that chunk of his robe apart.

Ideas on how to make the Global Army pay for what it had done and had forced him to go through appeared in his mind, but he did his best not to fall prey to his anger. Khan needed his organization, and the settlements on Nitis had nothing valuable either. He could ruin the relationships between the two species, but that would only send him back to the Slums or in a military prison.

'How can everything be so cruel?' Khan cursed in his mind. 'They could have just alerted everyone and use that favor to improve their relationship!'

Khan was only venting his feelings. He knew that politics rarely rewarded good deeds, especially when it came to different species. Hesitation would always exist on both sides. He had actually studied that during the classes connected to the subject.

The idea of having to spend almost six hours alone with his thoughts scared him. His orders were clear. Khan had to return to the academy and lie to the friends that had accepted him so openly.

Liiza wouldn't even be able to do anything after learning about the Global Army's decision to keep the solar wind a secret. Khan's help had probably given the Niqols enough time to prepare for the daylight, but the situation was different now.

The elders probably already suspected that the humans were withholding information. Ambassador Yeza's behavior also showed the profound mistrust that still existed between the two species. Khan felt lost among problems that he couldn't solve and situations that he couldn't affect. His role also forced him to work for an organization that he had started to despise and go against the species he admired.

Khan decided to hide inside his training to dull the delusional and unrealistic thoughts generated by his messy feelings. He needed to calm down before reaching the academy, but life seemed to have no intention to give him peace.

Khan opened his eyes when he was halfway through the travel. His gaze went on the dark sky as his traumatic experiences flowed through his vision. He had another advantage to add to those events. He had just completed the eleventh mental exercise.

Chapter 163 - Meeting

Traumas led to accomplishments, and a parallel connection existed between the blood on his hands and his happiness. Khan had found himself linking those terrible events and actions to advantages and positive feelings in the past. He had hoped that his increasing power would have made him escape that trend, but his success with the mental exercises proved that he wasn't quite there yet.

Khan spent the rest of the flight in a daze. The world ran through his vision, but he barely saw it. He struggled to believe that a single person could experience such beauty and pain at the same time.

His love for Liiza and affection for his Niqols friends existed with his desperation and newfound disgust toward the Global Army. His talent in the ways of mana, fast growth, and achievement moved forward as he amassed traumas in his mind.

There didn't seem to be anything in-between. Extremes dictated Khan's life, and he didn't know how to view that. That perfect balance felt to go beyond luck. It almost appeared as the work of a higher force, but Khan didn't let his mind wander in those fields.

The forest among the seven mountains appeared in his vision before he could reach a conclusion that explained his life. Still, everything became clear by the time Snow landed on an empty spot on the side of those rocky dark-grey structures. His experiences had no deeper meaning in that chaotic world. Khan could blame luck, fate, or mana itself, but that didn't change the truth about his situation. He was nothing more than a powerless gear in a system that he didn't understand.

'Everything points toward power,' Khan thought as he crossed familiar areas of the forest.

Finding and eventually fighting the Nak required power. The higher ranks of the Global Army had a broader range of requisites, but being strong helped reach them. A strong ambassador would also obtain more benefits and privileges, which might involve the chance to marry important figures, even when it came to an alien species.

Khan's goals and desires required him to become strong. It didn't matter if they involved the Nak or his girlfriend. He wouldn't manage to pursue those paths if he remained weak.

That answer didn't change Khan's situation since he already gave his everything in his training. It only helped stabilize his mind and generate a new desire. He now wanted to become strong to avoid ending up in awful situations again. He desired the power to fix the traumatic events that his bad luck continued to put on his path.

It felt strangely good to desire power for those reasons. Khan could work harder than others because no recruit had experienced the same desperation. However, there was much more inside him now. Those drives fused and created a stronger determination, a resolve that appeared able to bear the deeper emotions that he had learnt to experience.

The areas past the membrane were empty. The squares and the various buildings didn't feature students or professors. The elders had called a worldwide day of mourning that put all Niqols activities to a stop, so most aliens decided to spend that time with their loved ones.

Khan didn't meet anyone on his path toward the underground habitation. The recruits meditating on the beds were the first trace of life inside the academy, and they all turned toward the staircase when they heard him descending the last step.

"Khan!" George exclaimed and revealed an honest smile, but the other recruits diverted their gazes in shame.

Kelly and the others had drunk too much the previous night. It had felt extremely easy to end up in that condition after their experience in the village. They even desired to join a party again, but they knew that no amount of booze could make them forget those images.

"What has even happened to you?" Khan asked when he noticed the state of George's neck.

Khan's mood was far from ideal, but the sight of the many hickeys on George's neck made him explode into a laugh. He chuckled for so long that the situation almost felt awkward, but the recruits didn't dare to judge him. He had experienced far worse than them, but he didn't fail to attend his duties.

Khan eventually managed to fall silent. He had ended up using his laugh to vent part of the heaviness that had filled his mind, and an elated smirk remained on his face after he calmed down. George's state remained hilarious, but he didn't lose control again.

"I've seen leeches doing less damage than Havaa," Khan cracked a joke, and his companion couldn't help but laugh or cover their mouths to suppress their smirks.

The event with the leeches had led to the death of two Niqols, and the previous night honored the many casualties suffered during the solar wind. Yet, everyone managed to smile, even if some of the laughs ended up in suppressed sobs and loud sniffs.

"I have to update you on the situation," Khan eventually said once everyone calmed down and the mood returned serious.

"Before that," Kelly announced while mustering her determination and fixing her eyes on Khan, "I wish to say that I'm sorry. I messed up after seeing a few bad scenes. I have no idea how you must feel after going through the Second Impact, Istrone, and yesterday. Spending nights in the wilds sounds too little now."

"Does this mean that I won't hear your complaints anymore?" Khan asked after his eyebrows arched in surprise.

"I will still say something if your actions risk hurting the Global Army," Kelly explained, "But well. I've been a senseless idiot. I would understand if you reported me to our superiors."

A flash of coldness ran through Khan's expression, but he promptly lowered his head to heave a deep sigh. His gaze slowly returned on Kelly, and he felt able to see the girl in her true form. She was nothing more than a recruit at her first traumatic event. Her mental growth was even commendable. Khan had felt slightly disgusted after seeing her dedication toward the Global Army, but he couldn't blame her too much about that. Her belief came from ignorance that he was about to fill.

"I couldn't say anything because of the restrictions," Khan reminded her while pointing at the spot on his neck where the azure symbol had previously appeared. "Besides, I doubt they would have cared with everything that is about to happen."

The recruits showed curious expressions, and Khan began to share what he had learnt from the meeting. He didn't hide anything from the recruits, and some revealed faces that he knew far too well when his story explained how the Global Army had kept the solar wind hidden on purpose.

Many among the recruits felt a strong sense of belonging toward the Global Army and their species, but cracks opened in their beliefs after Khan finished describing the contents of the briefing. It became evident how every story had two versions and multiple perspectives, and they had lost the privilege of being on the ignorant side.

In theory, the tactic had been a success. The Niqols had lost a lot, and they would probably accept worse pacts as long as they could avoid going through a similar event. However, the recruits had to take in that from the side that had paid the price of that decision.

Kelly and the others didn't only witness the gory scenes in the village. They had also seen how hard the event had been for the Niqols. The difference between their species didn't matter too much in front of honest tears, suicides, and desperate cries of sorrow voiced by aliens who had been nothing but cheerful until then.

Khan could see how the recruits were far from fine. Their world had grown darker in a few minutes due to simple words. They needed help and emotional support, but he couldn't provide that. Khan limited himself to change his torn robe and leave while his companions remained in a daze and let that knowledge seep inside their minds.

'What is it?' Doku's voice resounded in Khan's mind while he walked toward one of the mountains.

Khan could sense that Doku had deactivated the tracker of his cube, but that didn't prevent him from hearing the summary of the briefing. Khan revealed what the Global Army had allowed him to share, and Doku didn't dig deeper. They both felt their respective need to say something that didn't involve politics, but that desire felt pointless when talking through their cubes.

'I'll notify my superiors immediately,' Doku eventually transmitted. 'Get some rest now. Oh, Azni says hi.'

'See you tomorrow, both of you,' Khan said while trying to convey a smile through the mental message before shutting down the communication.

Snow was already waiting for him on the side of a mountain. The Aduns felt quite pissed due to the multiple travels and long waits, but Khan made sure to let it enjoy itself during the flight to the marsh. The eagle even passed through areas that Khan didn't recognize due to many detours and reckless airborne stunts.

Khan reached the cave past ten pm and found Liiza waiting for him in her usual position under the blankets. He had felt some hesitation in the past when it came to talking to her about problematic matters. Still, nothing like that happened that night.

Liiza didn't react well to the awful actions of the Global Army, but she did her best not to explode in a fit of anger. She didn't want her feelings to add weight on Khan's already heavy mind, but he made sure to shatter her self-restraint. The couple went through that matter together without hiding their feelings. Liiza sobbed at times, and Khan ended up kicking the rocky walls once to vent.

Their intense state even caused a rough intimate outburst that left Khan full of marks that were hard to hide. Liiza ended up in a similar situation, but the blush that continued to affect her cheeks even after she fell asleep in his arms confirmed that she had enjoyed the unexpected event. Khan couldn't help feeling slightly proud as he imagined Azni nodding at him before his mind slipped into the nightmare.

Khan had planned to wake up earlier than usual to take care of his exposed marks through a longer meditation, but an azure glow awakened him before his alarm. Liiza also woke up, and both of them raised their sleepy heads to find the source of that light.

Khan's head went back on the pillow after seeing that the source of the light was Liiza's robe. The girl groaned as she crawled toward her clothes while dragging the blanket with her. Khan's bare body ended up in the open, but he only chuckled as he inspected the captivating scene.

Liiza dragged her robe closer to Khan before restoring that simple bed and laying her back on his chest. Her hand went looking for her cube only after Khan wrapped his arms around her and gave her all the warmth that he was capable of.

Khan tried to fall asleep again, but Liiza's movements during the mental conversation didn't let him remain calm. She didn't even try to hide the teasing nature of her gestures, and Khan made sure to respond accordingly after he checked his phone. It was four am, half an hour before his alarm.

'Who even calls at this hour?' Khan wondered before moving his attention on Liiza when she rubbed her butt on his waist.

Niqols weren't morning people. Khan could only think about one figure who could be awake and call Liiza at that early hour. The matter probably involved Yeza, which even explained Liiza's bolder behavior.

The teasing came to an abrupt stop at some point. Liiza's body tensed before turning until she faced Khan. The cube was still in her grasp, but she placed her free hand on his chest as she concluded that mental conversation.

"What is it?" Khan asked after Liiza let the cube roll behind her.

Liiza showed annoyance but also worry. Khan brought her closer in his arms to reassure her, but it soon turned out that her fears weren't as serious as he had initially imagined.

"My mother wants a meeting with the human envoys," Liiza explained. "It will happen at the end of this week."

"That's not too bad," Khan laughed. "We can still spend a lot of time together."

"That's not the issue," Liiza continued while avoiding Khan's gaze. "She mentioned you. I know how that stuff ends with her."

Ambassador Yeza was one of Liiza's weak points, but Khan could only laugh in front of her insecurity. He had seen hell multiple times already. A meeting with a tempting woman didn't even classify as a problem in his mind.

"Will you be there?" Khan asked while kissing Liiza's bare shoulder.

"I must be," Liiza scoffed as she slightly turned and clung to the back of Khan's head to let him dive toward her chest. "She will probably find the chance to remain alone with you and use me to keep the other humans busy."

"It's fine," Khan chuckled as his kisses continued. "I had to meet my girlfriend's mother sooner or later."

"You know that's not the issue with her," Liiza complained.

Khan heaved a helpless sigh and glanced at her chest one last time before moving toward her face. Liiza was still trying to avoid his gaze, but he took her cheeks in his hands and forced her to look at him.

"[Liiza]," Khan said in a scolding tone.

"[She is really good]," Liiza complained again. "[You wouldn't be the first taken men to fall prey to her]."

"[I'll just tell her about us if the situation becomes too dangerous]," Khan laughed, but Liiza pulled his hair to remind him that she wasn't joking.

"[Isn't my reaction during the past event enough?]" Khan asked. "[Though don't wear special dresses unless you intend to bring them here]."

"[I will wear a new one]," Liiza whispered as her hand slid down Khan's torso, "[And I will bring it here if you behave]."

"[What happens if I don't?]" Khan played along and revealed a smirk as Liiza's cold hand reached his manhood.

His smirk froze as Liiza's hand grew colder. The girl revealed a smile that carried a chilling aura before announcing her intentions. "[I'll turn you into a block of ice, starting from here]."

Chapter 164 - Lysixi

Doku took care of informing the group of recruits about Ambassador Yeza's decision to hold a meeting. The Niqols couldn't explain much since those matters involved areas of Nitis that the aliens had never shown to the humans. Still, he didn't fail to give a few general warnings, especially when he found himself alone with Khan.

"You must be the luckiest boy on Nitis," Doku commented before drinking from his cup. "Play it well, and you'll have something to brag about for the rest of your life."

Doku winked at Khan multiple times, but the latter couldn't fake his reactions completely with Azni staring coldly at him.

It was the night of the fifth day of the week, and the Niqols had thrown the usual party meant to celebrate the end of the lessons. The recruits had already heard the few instructions that they would have to apply during the actual meeting, but they had dispersed among the other groups of aliens by then.

Only Khan, Doku, and Azni had remained on the trunk-bench they often used as their drinking spot. It was already quite late, so the couple would leave soon to spend some time alone. Yet, the two had insisted on having that conversation now that the recruits had left since it would cover more personal topics.

"I told you already," Khan smirked at Doku's gesture. "You need to blink only once. Don't repeat it, don't make it obvious, and definitely don't alternate your eyes only because it feels cool."

"What if the other doesn't notice it?" Doku asked.

"The gesture loses its purpose if you make it noticeable," Khan repeated in an exasperated tone. "It's like a secret code. You wink, and your previous words or actions gain a meaning that only your companion and you understand."

"What about the other meanings that you've mentioned the other time?" Doku questioned while scratching his cheek and showing a face that was far from promising. "Also, won't it become more secretive if I wink multiple times?"

"That was my bad," Khan sighed while shaking his head as he recalled his past mistake. "I didn't think that telling you about all the possible applications would confuse you so much. Focus on the secret code thing, and no. It doesn't become more secretive. It only turns into a joke because everyone can see that."

Trying to teach how to wink to Doku had turned out to be harder than predicted. Khan didn't expect that a simple gesture would confuse the Niqols so much. The issue was with the multiple meanings that the same movement could gain depending on the context. The alien could follow when it involved secret codes, but he lost himself once he reached lies, jokes, and flirting.

Khan had spent the last day trying to make Doku forget about the meanings he had listed in the past, but the project wasn't going well. Still, his current exasperation wasn't completely real. Faint gratefulness accompanied that feeling since the two had managed to disperse the awkwardness that the politics between their species had created.

"Do you plan on winking at Ambassador Yeza often?" Azni asked with clear annoyance in her voice. "Is that why you want to learn?"

"[Azni]," Doku said in a dramatic tone while taking the girl's shoulders between his hands. "[You know what I feel for you better than me]."

Azni's annoyed face started to relax in front of those honest words. Her mouth even began to curve into a smile, but her irritation came back stronger than ever when Doku spoke again. "[But you have seen Ambassador Yeza. Better men than me have failed to resist her, and I can understand the reason behind that quite clearly]."

"[You must have really grown tired of sex and booze]," Azni announced in a chilling tone.

"[Why would I ever grow tired of them]?" Doku asked in confusion.

"[Because you won't have either for the next two weeks]," Azni explained as an emotionless smile appeared on her face, and Doku's eyes widened when he understood the nature of his punishment.

Doku wanted to beg for forgiveness, but Khan's laughs interrupted his attempt. The alien boy also started to chuckle with him, hoping that everything would turn into a joke. Still, Azni's expression continued to radiate a chilling feeling that slowly made him accept his punishment.

Doku glanced at Azni again before rolling his eyes and throwing away the cup in his hands. The boy appeared truly depressed about the action, but Azni finally dropped her cold attitude and hugged him. Doku caressed her back as evident affection seeped out of his glowing eyes, but his girlfriend's next comment made him desperate again. "[You'll add tonight to the two weeks]."

Khan laughed to no end, and his voice rose when Doku begged him for help with his eyes. Still, Khan only shook his head. He knew the Niqols well enough to avoid mixing himself with the

private matters of another couple. Also, Azni knew about his secret relationship, and he feared what she could say to Liiza.

"Come on," Khan eventually stated. "I've fought monsters and seen much worse. How hard can it be to resist her?"

The couple shot sorry glances at Khan. Their heads shook as they tried to make him understand how little he knew about the matter.

"Even I would fall for her," Azni commented at some point, and both boys fixed their surprised eyes on her.

"[What]?" Azni giggled as she closed her eyes and snuggled on Doku's chest. "[You have seen her. She is stunning]."

Doku and Khan stared at the girl resting on the former's chest before exchanging a meaningful glance. They didn't speak nor show any expression, but they both understood what was happening in their minds.

"[I can hear your dirty thoughts]," Azni commented without raising her head, and the two boys ended up revealing a silent knowing smile before all three of them exploded into a happy laugh.

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Khan's ability with the mental barrier had increased so much that he cleared the twelfth mental exercise in the days that separated him from the meeting with Ambassador Yeza.

The new intensity that his feelings could reach didn't affect the mental exercise at all. They actually made it smoother since Khan could suppress far stronger emotions now. Maintaining access to the entirety of his abilities while the mental barrier was up turned out to be extremely easy during the calm moments spent training.

The deepening of his ability in the three fields taught by the Niqols had also helped him clear the last mental exercise in the training for the chaos element in no time. Only the Wave spell remained at that point, but Khan didn't have time to start studying it since the day of the meeting arrived.

Professor Supyan ended up being the one to pick up the recruits from their underground habitation early in the morning. The presence of a professor highlighted how different the event was from the other missions and tasks, so a tense aura quickly fell on the group as the Niqols led them toward the short structure where they had drunk their first potion.

It turned out that Khan and the others needed another potion before leaving the academy. The Niqols were extremely careful about revealing areas they had kept hidden from the humans for seventy years, and the incoming crisis only intensified that approach.

Getting a new restriction made of mana obviously didn't please the recruits, but they didn't have any choice in the matter. Of course, they could refuse to attend the meeting, but none of them dared to miss that chance.

Professor Supyan didn't let the recruits summon their Aduns. The eagles could memorize locations with a simple glance of their three eyes. They also had an incredible sense of direction that could help them find their way back home in unknown lands. The Niqols couldn't risk having loose ends, so they opted for a different ride.

"This is a Lysixi," Professor Supyan explained to the astonished recruits. "Our species has dug under Nitis' surface for a long time. These structures are one of the main reasons why humans struggle to figure out our actual power, but we rely on Lysixi to cross them."

Professor Supyan had led the recruits through a secret passage hidden inside one of the seven mountains that encircled the academy. The rocky path led under the surface and into a large tunnel that featured a tall ceiling. Azure symbols shone throughout its walls filled with cracks, but their glow didn't manage to illuminate the depths of the structure.

The tunnel was seven meters tall and seven meters large. It had a smooth square shape disrupted only by the many cracks that had opened due to the passage of time. The azure symbols improved the texture of those dark rocky surfaces, but that apparent unstable structure still alerted the recruits' survival instincts.

However, their lingering worries about the tunnel's stability vanished when a huge Tainted animal came out from one of the rare branches connected to the structure.

The Lysixi had an odd shape. It resembled a lizard for most of its features. The creature had dark-green scales, cold yellow eyes, and a forked dark-pink tongue that often came out of its triangular mouth. Yet, it had two strange characteristics that made the recruits open their mouths in surprise.

The first surprising feature was its size. The Lysixi wasn't tall. It barely reached the recruits' waists. However, its back was so vast that it could almost fill the large surfaces of the tunnel.

Moreover, its body was basically flat. The Lysixi was five meters long, but its belly didn't even come close to touching the floor. The eight legs growing out of its sides allowed it to stand, but its overall stability appeared relatively poor.

"Don't be afraid," Professor Supyan announced while jumping on the upper part of the lizard's back. "They don't like meat too much, so their nature is rather peaceful."

The recruits noticed how the Lysixi didn't budge at all when the Niqols landed on its back. That scene didn't seem to fit that seemingly frail structure, but it became evident that the creature was stronger than it looked.

Khan jumped on the lizard after confirming that the creature had barely noticed the additional weight caused by the professor. Still, he relied on his expertise with the Lightning-demon style to perform a soft landing that didn't release any sound.

His improved sensitivity to mana gave him a general idea of the creature's strength after he sat behind Professor Supyan and placed his palms on the dark-green scales. Khan almost felt the Lysixi's back to be firmer than the rocky floor. He soon found himself wondering if his kicks would affect it at all.

The other recruits had a more careful approach to the climb. They followed George as he avoided the creature's legs and bent forward before slowly crawling behind Khan. It didn't take much before all the humans sat on the Lysixi, but the Tainted animal remained still throughout the entire process.

"Don't fall," Professor Supyan warned before patting the back of the lizard's neck.

The recruits didn't have the time to question the Niqols about the warning since a force landed on their bodies and made them bend backward. The Lysixi had started to run, but its acceleration had been so sudden Gabriela and Rodney almost fell off. Luckily for them, the dark-green scales were rough enough to cling on them.

Khan quickly managed to stabilize his position. He had an advantage in the task since his martial art already forced his skin and mind to endure such speed. The Lysixi wasn't going as fast as his top acceleration, but its fast movements weren't something that unprepared recruits could learn to handle immediately.

The straight structure of the tunnel allowed the Lysixi to keep moving at the same speed for two entire hours. The lizard never slowed down nor showed signs of tiredness. It resembled a vehicle with endless fuel that quickly led the group toward their destination.

"Don't be so tense," Professor Supyan advised once the Lysixi stopped in front of a cavity that featured a narrow staircase. "Ambassador Yeza only wants to see you. You will help us face the daylight, so she requested to get a glimpse of your character."

Shocked faces appeared on the recruits again. The Professor had openly spoken about the daylight. That was the first time a Niqols didn't try to hide that news. It seemed that the higher-ups of both species had sealed a deal in the days after the briefing.

The professor led the recruits through the staircase that opened in a snowy area surrounded by mountains. The temperatures were low, and a tremor ran through some recruits once winds blew in their faces. Still, their gazes soon converged toward a vague structure in the distance.

The building carried the same shades of the mountains, so it was hard to see it clearly among Nitis' darkness and the falling snow. The group had to walk for a while before they could gaze at the tall palace that the remote area hid.

The palace filled the narrow area that separated two mountains. Its dark-grey surfaces mixed with the rocky structures and allowed it to reach heights that even mana would struggle to keep stable.

Many azure symbols filled the ground around the palace, the mountains, and the actual surfaces of the structure. A few small windows appeared every few meters and marked the spots where each floor stood. A black glass-like material covered those openings and hid the areas behind them.

The palace didn't have any entrance door, and its summit seemed to end in a bridge that connected the two mountains. A few towers came out of the top's sides and featured flat roofs with the same black windows as the rest of the structure.

The structure would almost resemble a simple wall or a dam if it weren't for those windows, but everything changed when the group got close enough. The palace revealed how its surfaces had many layers by making a few of them slide open to show a rectangular metal entrance hidden behind them.

The two tall sides of the entrance slid open, and a series of Niqols dressed in luxurious robes became visible. The woman standing at their center completed the majestic scene with her striking beauty.

Ambassador Yeza wore the brightest smile that the recruits had ever seen, and her revealing dress immediately attracted everyone's attention. She was wearing a simple long gown that used only two narrow lines of fabric to cover her torso. Her ample chest was basically in the open, and the same went for her sensual waist and back.

Khan saw a piercing cold gaze filling the corners of his vision, but he did his best to appear captivated by Yeza's beauty. Liiza was also beautiful with her tight dress that adhered perfectly to her skin and revealed her flawless silhouette. Only her back was in the open, but that didn't diminish how tempting she appeared.

Liiza wasn't expressing more coldness than usual. She was wearing the normal aloof face showed during those political and social events, but Khan could feel her true feelings anyway.

Khan couldn't enjoy Liiza's appearance since it could make her mother suspicious, so he wore a captivated smile that satisfied Yeza's need for attention. Silent and cold warnings converged toward his mind and almost made him beg to go where Liiza couldn't glare at him, but he could only endure for now. His sole consolation was that his girlfriend wouldn't change before going to the cave that night.

Chapter 165 - Red Spot

The Niqols' customs that concerned specific political events weren't too complicated. Doku had given detailed instructions, and Khan had even heard them before from Liiza.

The recruits performed a general deep bow before stepping forward to bow in front of each Niqol. The latter replied with similar gestures, and some announced their political roles before Ambassador Yeza brought everyone inside the palace.

"Many important figures from each tribe travel here to attend specific matters," Yeza explained while walking in front of the group at a slow pace to make sure that everyone took a good look at her exposed back. "We can control most of the functions in the region powered by mana from here. This involves every symbol that you have seen, communicators, and other things unique only to this place."

Khan found Yeza's slow pace quite annoying. He was the only one among his group unaffected by her beauty, so he didn't enjoy that walk through the almost empty corridor connected to the entrance.

Guests couldn't wander alone. That was part of the customs, which wasn't hard to follow. Yet, those traditions also stated that they could suggest activities or ask questions only after the main host was over with the general introduction of the habitation.

Those customs didn't apply to the Niqols who had welcomed the recruits and Professor Supyan. The aliens slowly returned to their tasks as multiple rooms started to appear along their path. It didn't take much before only the humans, Liiza, Yeza, and a few young Niqols remained in the corridor.

The environment eventually revealed something that Khan could inspect while the slow walk continued. Artworks made of silk-like materials started to cover the walls, and soft carpets appeared on the floor. They carried unusual red shades, and the drawings on them were mostly abstract.

Those artworks were a rare sight among the structures that the Niqols showed to the humans, but Khan couldn't avoid connecting the redness of their shades to Zalpa's hair. It seemed that they belonged to an ancient part of the aliens' history that came before the cooperation with the humans. The palace probably kept them due to their undeniable artistic value.

The corridor ended in a large hall that featured large staircases on both sides. The area had more of those artworks together with wooden tables and chairs with handmade decorations. The furniture carried the same style that Khan had seen before, and the red shades also appeared often.

"Let's go upstairs," Ambassador Yeza announced with her sweet voice. "Something to drink should arrive soon."

The Lysixi didn't take much to reach the palace, and the slow walk had only lasted for half an hour. According to the Niqols' standards, it was early morning, so the recruits hoped that Yeza's drink didn't involve booze.

According to Liiza and Doku's words, the last custom connected to those events was something that the Niqols had started to abandon after the humans landed on Nitis. It basically forbade guests from refusing what the hosts offered, be it drinks, food, or even themselves.

A refusal would offend the hosts, and only a present with equal value to what they had offered could soothe that feeling. That tradition had often created problems among the various tribes, and it became even harder to apply once the humans joined the political scene.

The Niqols had stopped applying that custom for a few decades by then, but it was hard to get rid of instincts inherited by parents or older members of the tribes. Many aliens from the older generations still felt offended if guests decided to refuse their offerings, and Yeza could easily do the same.

The recruits didn't have anything to offer back, so they could only accept everything Ambassador Yeza threw at them and hope. George and the others were mainly worried about getting drunk or forced to eat something that their human tastes found disgusting, but Khan's fears involved far different topics.

'She can't offer herself to me, can she?' Khan wondered as the soft fabric of the carpets that covered the staircase prevented his steps from releasing noises. 'I'm only a slightly famous no one. Her interest in me shouldn't be too deep.'

Everyone had warned Khan about Yeza. The ambassador had never once hesitated to use her beauty as a weapon, and the constant attention that she naturally attracted had made her quite lascivious. Liiza had even revealed that her mother actually held back often because her position among the Niqols was too important.

Yeza couldn't sell herself cheap, and Khan had built his hopes on that approach. Doku wanted him to play his cards right, but he planned to do the very opposite. Khan would show how he was nothing more than a recruit so that Yeza wouldn't value him enough to offer herself to him.

The upper floors of the palace featured rooms with different purposes. Yeza led the recruits through a few vast libraries, training areas, indoor gardens, guest rooms, multiple lounges, and far more. The insides of the palace were immense. It seemed that an entire army could live inside it.

The tour even led the recruits toward some structures that they had only imagined after witnessing the various functions that mana could obtain inside the Niqols' buildings. Ambassador Yeza allowed them to take glimpses of the vast halls meant to regulate specific purposes the azure symbols spread throughout the region featured. She even added short explanations without forgetting to add sweetness to her voice.

The structures meant to handle those functions always had the shape of large black cubes that could be as tall as a grown-up man. Each hall or area that regulated a specific purpose of the azure symbols in the region featured many of them, and the Niqols seemed able to activate them through their communicators. Yeza didn't explain how they could affect the distant areas, but Khan guessed that the underground tunnels had something to do with it.

"Drinks!" Yeza exclaimed when Niqols who weren't wearing white robes reached the group. "Finally."

Those Niqols seemed to work as servants or butlers. They carried many wooden cups filled with a liquid that made Khan curse internally. They had the same booze that the aliens patrolling the village had shared with the humans during the crisis.

"Is it too strong for you?" Yeza asked when she saw that the recruits hesitated to grab one of the cups.

Yeza's voice broke toward the end of her question. Her acting was so good that the recruits felt terrible about putting her in that situation. Even Khan couldn't help but experience a slight ache in his chest when he saw the woman's worried face.

'She would become queen of the Slums in a single day!' Khan cursed in his mind before joining the recruits who didn't hesitate to leap toward the trays with the wooden cups.

Yeza made sure to exchange the traditional Niqols' toast with each recruit, and Khan vaguely felt that she had decided to make the exchange of gazes with him last slightly longer. Having such strong drinks in the morning made the humans' stomachs twist, but none of them dared to show displeased expressions.

The pure smile that Yeza showed at the sight of that scene made the recruits instantly feel better. Brandon and George even took another sip in the hope that they could receive some special attention, but Yeza turned to continue the tour at that point.

Khan almost forgot about the seemingly longer toast, but a few strange behaviors became evident as the tour continued. Yeza used her incredible acting experience to make the recruits drink even more. Still, Khan made sure to be in full control of his mental capabilities before confirming that something was off.

The Niqols who had remained in the group throughout the tour often glanced and shot smiles at the other recruits. Only Liiza walked on her own, a few meters from the others, but she was a special case.

Instead, Khan wasn't getting any attention. No Niqols dared to look at him, and he even tested his idea by moving among the group to fall in their line of sight. The aliens always pointed their eyes away from him in a few seconds, and they even tried to make the gesture appear natural.

The other Niqols weren't as good as Yeza. Khan could see through their pretense after repeating his tests a few times. He suddenly felt like the special target of some secret political mission. Still, the aliens didn't give him enough time to think about his situation since the transparent roof of the palace soon unfolded in their vision.

"That's it for this building," Yeza announced. "The tour is over. We'll divide ourselves into different groups and discuss various topics now. I hope you all enjoy yourselves."

The Niqols who had remained with the group started taking the recruits' hands or arms to lead them to various locations. Khan only had the time to see Liiza approaching Veronica and bringing her away before realizing that he had remained alone with Yeza.

"You haven't looked at me once during the tour," Yeza stated before covering her mouth and voicing a tempting chuckle. "Interesting."

Yeza turned and walked toward one of the corridors connected to that area, and Khan gulped before following her. He felt worried after that comment. He didn't expect her senses to be so sharp.

The Niqols led Khan in a dark room before tinkering with the menus on the walls. The azure symbols on the surfaces immediately became brighter, and everything felt warmer after a few seconds passed.

The room didn't have much. It featured the same carpets and silk artworks on the walls. A long table and a few chairs occupied its center, and a tray with different bottles and cups stood on the furniture in the corner.

Khan could glance at the mountains through one of the transparent walls of the room. That was one of the black windows seen from the outside. Its darkness appeared unable to reach that side of the glass-like material.

"You also drank less than your companions," Yeza continued while undoing her braids and messing with her hair to remove the shapes caused by her previous hairstyle.

Yeza seemed to have dropped her act, but Khan understood that she had just decided to change tactic. The Niqols approached the bottles and glanced at him from behind her shoulder before giggling and picking two clean cups.

"Come here," Yeza ordered in a sensual voice while filling the cups with the booze in the bottles nearby. "Leave your drink there."

Khan gulped again. Trying to refuse was pointless, and it would even worsen his situation. He could only play along and make sure that he didn't ruin the source of his happiness that day.

Khan placed his cup on the table and approached the other side of the room. Yeza turned when he reached her. Her timing felt unreal, even when it came to the handing of a new drink.

Yeza raised her cup, and Khan performed the iconic Niqols' toast. The new booze was strong, but something made it easy to drink it. It was slightly dense, warm, and it carried the faint taste of strawberry. Those features hid how easily the liquid could affect someone's mind.

"You have helped us a lot since your arrival on Nitis," Yeza smiled before moving closer to the window. "Do you have something to prove in the Global Army, or do you simply like the Niqols?"

"I believe both is the right answer," Khan firmly replied while walking toward her.

The two stood side by side as they watched the dark snow falling on the mountains. The scene was quite beautiful, but the darkness of Nitis' constant night didn't allow Khan to see much."

"You have even helped with the village," Yeza continued. "Your life must have been hard."

Khan didn't answer, but Yeza's words made him take another sip from his cup. He had actually promised himself not to drink anymore, but he realized what had happened only when the warm liquid ran down his throat.

'She is dangerous,' Khan reminded himself.

"The daylight is coming," Yeza eventually sighed. "Your superiors have tried to offer their help, but I've always managed to sense the presence of hidden intentions. You can't remain naive when you are me."

Khan confirmed that the daylight had finally stopped being a secret, and he even felt glad that Yeza was spending time in her monologue. The more she focused on herself, the less she tempted him.

"Will you help my species once our world turns upside down?" Yeza asked while glancing at Khan, and he felt the need to meet her eyes.

"Of course," Khan stated in a firm tone.

Yeza showed what appeared to be an honest smile. Her hand reached his cheek, and Khan felt unable to retract his head. His body didn't want to oppose her touch.

Khan felt surprised when Yeza's fingers touched his cheek. She was warm, even warmer than a human. She caressed his face and spread that cozy feeling throughout his body.

"So young," Yeza whispered as she placed her palm on his cheek and softly pushed him toward the table, "And yet so driven. I know about your pain. Let me see it."

Yeza's hand slid over Khan's neck and reached his chest. Her fingers started to spread the opening in his robe to reveal his scar, but his hand suddenly grabbed her wrist to stop her.

Khan had to activate the mental barrier to resist Yeza. His body felt out of control, but he couldn't let her ruin his happiness. The cold and cynical mindset created by his technique made him accept that he might have to reveal his relationship with Liiza, but he kept that as his last option.

"I'm sorry, Ambassador Yeza," Khan said in the politest voice he could muster. "I have someone."

"Oh!" Yeza exclaimed before an interested smile appeared on her face. "It has been so long since someone tried to resist me. I only wanted to tease you, but you have earned my full interest now."

Yeza's hand moved quickly. It reached the edges of Khan's robe and uncovered his chest. He was still holding her wrist, but the entirety of his physical strength was unable to stop her.

Yeza revealed another surprised expression when she saw the state of Khan's chest and side. The azure scar immediately unfolded in her vision, but the various marks that filled the rest of his torso

made her smile broaden. She noticed hickeys and faint scratches, and she could immediately recognize their source.

"You have a wild one," Yeza chuckled.

"She was worried about today," Khan explained.

Liiza couldn't announce her relationship to the world, and leaving signs on Khan's neck was never ideal. The meeting also worried her deeply, so she had ended up being quite rough the previous night. Not even half a day had passed since that intercourse, so Khan still carried her marks.

"Did the other students tell you something?" Yeza asked in a curious tone. "Maybe this is the job of a Niqols."

Yeza placed her warm hand on Khan's chest while speaking. She noticed how he didn't react at all at that touch, so she made her temperature drop to Niqols' levels. Khan couldn't stop his eyes from flickering when he sensed the contact he had grown used to feel.

"It is a Niqols!" Yeza giggled before placing even her other cold hand on his chest and uncovering the rest of his torso. "You are remarkable."

The cold sensations spreading from his chest made his mental walls crumble. Khan saw himself falling prey to Yeza's influence again. His grip on her wrist opened as he abandoned himself to those irresistible sensations.

"That's a good boy," Yeza whispered with her sensual voice while caressing his azure scar.

Her hands slowly returned to Khan's face. Yeza bit her lower lip before starting to bend toward him. Her captivating figure was about to descend on him, but he could only think of how Liiza made the same gesture when she felt excited.

Yeza had been honest before. She didn't plan to do anything other than teasing Khan. However, his ability to refuse her and his determination in protecting his relationship had aroused her interest.

Khan saw Yeza's lips drawing near. His body wanted to dive on her, but his mind still worked properly. He could understand what was happening, and all his thoughts ended up converging toward Liiza.

A simple kiss would be enough to end the reason behind his happiness. Lying about it wouldn't help either since Liiza would hate Khan even more for that. Yeza was a sensitive topic for Liiza, and she would never forgive him for cheating, even when he couldn't control his actions. Her memories of her ruined family would never allow her to justify Khan even if her rational mind understood that he was innocent.

Khan felt able to activate the mental barrier again, but that technique would last for less than a second with all that tempting coldness spreading from his face. He needed slightly more to escape from that situation, but he had no idea how to stretch that time.

Leather that Khan wasn't used to touching ended up in his left hand while he struggled to raise his arms. He had started to carry the null-grade bunt knife everywhere he went in the last period since flying back to the academy when he was in the marsh took too long.

Khan didn't need to think. He didn't even need to consider the nature of his actions. He wanted to protect his happiness at all costs. His pain didn't matter.

Yeza closed her eyes when she was about to kiss Khan, but he disappeared before their lips could touch. She frowned while turning toward the other side of the room. Her senses had never lost track of him, but she remained surprised and confused anyway.

Khan had his back on the wall. Sweat fell everywhere from his skin as he breathed roughly. Still, his most striking feature was the long knife stabbed on his left thigh. The blood that came out of his injury quickly tainted his white robe and created an expanding red spot.

Chapter 166 - Mother

A single instant with the mental barrier wouldn't have given enough time to perform one of the Lightning-demon style's sprints, but pain could stretch that window.

Khan only needed a few seconds of clarity and freedom from Yeza's influence to run away from her kiss, but the same went for a proper technique with his knife. In theory, the instant provided by the mental barrier wasn't enough to draw his weapon and stab his leg.

Yeza inspected Khan from under her frown. Her sensitivity to mana wasn't something that weak soldiers could understand. She was strong, strong enough to sense the slightest change in that energy even when it happened outside of her body.

Her eyes went on the expanding red patch before moving on the side of Khan's waist. The functional and neat leather sheath had turned into torn pieces of fabric that hung from the robe's belt.

Khan had never drawn the knife. Yeza had sensed a vague sharp feeling when he had touched the weapon's handle. The boy had stabbed his leg after piercing his sheath, and he had done that without showing any hesitation.

His current expression didn't carry any regret either. Yeza could see how Khan only cared about not cheating on his partner. His determination was unwavering. He treated the matter as if his life depended on it.

"Am I so disgusting in your eyes?" Yeza said in a tone that hinted at the arrival of tears.

Khan felt his heart plummeting. Everything inside him desired to reassure Yeza and prevent her sadness. However, he promptly twisted the knife stabbed in his leg to wash his body clean with another wave of pain.

Clarity filled his mind. Yeza's first instinct in front of that dramatic scene had been to see how far Khan's determination stretched, and his reaction left her quite stunned.

"Do you plan on cutting off your leg to resist me?" Yeza asked as her expression gained a tinge of curiosity.

"I hope it doesn't come to that," Khan replied in a cold voice.

"It was just a kiss," Yeza scoffed while turning to refill her cup. "You can even lie about today. No one would know about it."

"I would know," Khan responded as his cold expression broke and his eyes fell to the ground.

Khan tried to imagine what it would be to remain with Liiza without their complete honesty. His mind immediately rejected the idea of tainting that pure feeling. Khan felt like he would deserve such a sad world if he couldn't preserve what was bringing so much happiness to his life.

Yeza didn't miss the slight changes in his expression. She was the best at what she did. Khan's mind was like an open book in her eyes, so she could directly read the emotions that he experienced.

Of course, Yeza could only guess what caused them. Yet, she had learnt to link the dots of a character together and understand personalities in ways that others couldn't, and Khan appeared deeply broken.

"That doesn't seem like love," Yeza announced after taking a sip from her cup.

Khan's eyes flickered, and a frown appeared on his face as he raised his gaze toward the Niqols. His grasp on his knife tightened as he prepared for eventual attempts to affect his mind, but Yeza had no intention to continue in her teasing.

"Maybe you are feeling something so intense only because it mends your mind," Yeza continued.

"That's not love. That's a toxic addiction."

Khan didn't doubt his feelings for even an instant. He would have considered Yeza's words if his relationship with Liiza had happened differently, but their attraction had started right away.

His mana might have seen Liiza as a cure for his mind, but that wouldn't explain how she felt the same deep emotions unless she was also deeply broken. Liiza's mindset wasn't exactly ideal, but she wasn't like Khan. Moreover, even if she were, Khan would see that as the reason why they completed each other so easily.

"It might be toxic for humans," Khan revealed honestly, "But isn't that what Niqols strive to have?"

Yeza remained speechless for the first time during that conversation. Even Khan's determination in hurting himself to avoid betraying his girlfriend didn't manage to silence her. It had taken him that remark to make her understand that she had analyzed the situation from the wrong perspective.

Yeza had learnt how humans thought, and she applied that mindset during political events.

According to her experience, even those who ended up dating Niqols still preserved the values of their different species. Still, the situation was different with Khan, and she quickly realized how her initial judgment had been off.

Khan's eyes widened when Yeza started to laugh. He had seen her giggling multiple times already, and her gestures weren't any different now. The Niqols was covering her mouth to hide her smile, but she wasn't trying to be cute or tempt Khan. Her voice carried a faint sadness.

"You remind me of my ex-husband," Yeza laughed. "Well, who he was when we first decided to marry."

Liiza had told Khan about her father, Deni. The topic was quite important for her since her parents' separation had been what had eventually led to her outcast status. Still, Khan felt that something was off when he saw Yeza talking about him.

"Were you married?" Khan lied as honest curiosity filled his voice.

"Years ago," Yeza sighed as her gaze fell on her cup. "I know I'm not an easy woman, even for Niqols' standards. Yet, I really believed that his love would have kept us together."

"What happened?" Khan questioned.

"The same that happens in every relationship," Yeza voiced a bitter chuckle. "Small things become big things. Promises turn into curses throughout the years. One day you are able to accept who you have married. The other you ask her to change."

Yeza heaved a helpless sigh before chuckling when recalling that Khan was in the same room with her. "And you become so bitter that you end up revealing this stuff to a kid. Maybe I'm getting too old for this."

Khan felt slightly confused. Liiza's version of the story covered other topics and mainly focused on Deni's pain. It never considered Yeza's perspective, and Khan didn't find it hard to blame her for the crack in her family. Even humans had cheaters in the end.

However, it was clear that there was more to the matter, which wasn't entirely surprising. Liiza had been nothing more than a kid when her parents separated, and she had even been closer to her father back then. She could have easily misunderstood and failed to see something crucial.

Khan didn't know what to do with what he had just learnt, but Yeza didn't keep their conversation on that topic any longer. She used both hands to raise her hair and show the entirety of her face before questioning him. "Do you think I'm getting old?"

Yeza's revealing gown showed even more of her bare torso in that position. The Niqols also slightly turned to make sure that Khan could get a good look at how her sensual curves mixed with her slim and flawless waist. She was a piece of art without wrinkles or spots.

"You are stunning," Khan honestly evaluated.

"I know, right?" Yeza scoffed before letting her hair fall and revealing a teasing smile. "And yet you still refused me."

Khan tightened his grip on the knife's handle but still decided to give a polite answer. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Yeza stated as her smile started to radiate a faint affection. "Never be sorry for what feelings make you do. That's the Niqols way, and you must learn it if you want to make your girl happy."

"I never said that she was a Niqols," Khan quickly corrected, but Yeza shot a glance at him that clearly stated how little she believed in his words.

"Don't make promises that you can't keep," Yeza lectured while approaching the other side of the room, "Don't let your feelings for her change, and don't try to suppress her. Succeed, and you'll have a relationship that humans can only dream."

"Yes, ma'am!" Khan promised in a serious tone.

"And don't you dare to use that ma'am with me ever again," Yeza scolded. "It only makes me feel old."

Khan couldn't help but chuckle at that reaction. He nodded honestly as he took her lecture to heart. Yeza had no idea that he would apply those teaching to her daughter, but she didn't need to know that.

Yeza noticed the sharp change in Khan's expression. She had tried to make him cheat on his girlfriend just a few minutes ago, but he could still appear grateful about her teachings. She felt almost moved by the intensity of his commitment toward his relationship.

"You might become the kind of man that I always wanted for my daughter," Yeza exclaimed. "I thought that the Ilman kid would be perfect since he basically worships her, but you saw how easily jealousy twists love."

Khan suddenly recalled how Yeza probably was aware of everything that had happened in the academy. She even knew that Liiza had brought Khan to get his Aduns since she had called Captain Erbair on that same day.

"Liiza seems to lower her guard with you," Yeza continued. "Maybe she has also sensed some resemblances with her father. Do me a favor and keep an eye on her, okay? She doesn't trust Niqols anymore, so a human might help her get back into the world."

Khan limited himself to nod slowly. Everything he had ever learnt about lies fused to allow him to maintain the perfect poker face in front of the queen of pretenses.

Yeza revealed a satisfied smile at that gesture, but her eyes fell on his leg when she stopped in front of the room's exit. The patch of blood had almost reached Khan's ankle.

"Do you plan on taking that off at some point?" Yeza asked.

"Depends," Khan firmly responded.

"I won't tease you anymore. I promise," Yeza chuckled while covering her mouth. "I would feel bad about breaking your determination after seeing how deeply you care about your partner."

Khan inspected Yeza's face for a few seconds before slowly retracting his knife. More blood poured out of his injury, and the red patch soon threatened to reach his shoes. Khan didn't exactly know how deep the wound would have been after manipulating his mana to become sharp, but it seemed that he needed to meditate and patch himself up.

"Stay still," Yeza said as she stretched her hand toward Khan.

Khan instinctively bent backward, and a membrane of sharp mana even covered his knife. He was ready to stab himself again to resist Yeza's powers, but he didn't feel anything off for now.

"I'm just trying to heal you," Yeza giggled.

Khan inspected Yeza for a few seconds again, but he eventually dropped his guard. The mana around his knife dispersed, and a new mark appeared on its edges. The weapon would probably break soon if his manipulation ability didn't improve, but that was precisely what he intended to do.

Yeza placed her hand on top of Khan's head. She was cold, but that sensation brought some coziness when she sent mana inside his body. She didn't use the [Harmony Technique]. Her control over mana granted her access to a superior ability that used her energy to copy Khan's features and find every damage before fixing everything.

Khan felt the pain coming out of his legs disappearing as the injury closed, but the positive effects of that technique didn't stop there. His tiredness also vanished while a sense of liveliness filled his mind. Only the marks and hickeys on his torso remained untouched.

"I left them on purpose," Yeza explained in a teasing voice. "I believe you want to keep her marks, right?"

Khan nodded a few times before staring at Yeza showing an approving smile and reaching the room's exit. He felt slightly strange in that situation. The Niqols had stopped acting as a temptress, but her new behavior was something that Khan didn't know too well. Yeza vaguely felt like a mother.

"Aren't you coming?" Yeza asked while stepping out of the room, and Khan quickly snapped back to reality.

Chapter 167 - Sorry

"[Get him new clothes]," Yeza ordered as soon as she found one of the servants. "[We are going to the basement]."

Yeza was leading Khan across the palace. He had covered his chest, and the Niqols had healed his injuries, but his robe still had that ominous red patch. It wasn't ideal for an envoy to come out of a political meeting with bloodied clothes.

Khan hid how well he had learnt to understand the Niqols' language in the last period. He had been on Nitis for a little less than two months, so his knowledge was far from perfect. Still, his deep immersion in the aliens' social environment had allowed him to get better quickly, especially when it came to simple phrases.

Khan wanted to preserve some advantages, even if they were slight. A minor slip-up on the Niqols' side might allow him to gain important information or connect events that he thought to be unrelated. Of course, that was a general mindset. He didn't reveal his above-average knowledge of the alien language to Yeza only because of her connection to Liiza.

Khan didn't know how to interact with Yeza. He felt to have taken a glimpse at her true face during their previous conversation, but that didn't exactly bring his relationship with her to a friendly state.

Yeza remained the ambassador in charge of managing the humans even if she had shown her motherly side before. Khan felt that she liked him, but she still was the woman who had cheated on her husband for the greater good of her species. He believed that she wouldn't hesitate to forsake her feelings to make use of his position inside the Global Army.

On the other hand, Yeza was his girlfriend's mother. Khan wanted to know her better, especially after learning that Liiza might have misunderstood part of the events involving her family.

The strangeness and awkwardness of the situation made Khan remain utterly silent as Yeza led him across the staircases and toward the first floor of the palace. He didn't even ask her where they were going.

Yeza ended up opening a secret passage behind one of the silk-like artworks hung on the walls of the first floor. She could unlock hidden menus when she placed her palm on the dark and smooth material that made the palace, and one of them granted the two access to a descending path.

A servant reached Yeza and Khan before they could step into the path. The Niqols kept a folded and clean robe on his raised palms as he waited for more orders.

"Change," Yeza ordered as she tinkered with other menus to adjust the illumination and temperature in the passage. "Don't let the dirty clothes touch the carpet."

Yeza basically stated that Khan had to change there, but he didn't mind. She wasn't paying attention to him, and the servant was wearing a blank expression that almost made him look like a puppet. Also, Khan had lost his sense of decorum after his life in the Slums. Ending up in his pants in the middle of an almost empty room wasn't an issue.

Khan felt surprised to discover that the new robe was warm. The Niqols had actually heated it before bringing it to the first floor, and Khan couldn't help but express his gratitude in the alien language.

The servant didn't react to those words. He limited himself to grab the dirty robe and turn to leave. The emotionless interaction made Khan wonder whether he had done something wrong, but Yeza didn't miss that interaction, and she didn't fail to address his doubts.

"Some Niqols still don't accept our new ways," Yeza explained while showing a complicated smile to Khan. "Those attached to the old ways often work in similar buildings. This art tells our history."

Yeza caressed the artwork hanging at her side, but Khan felt the need to comment. "Isn't it dangerous to have xenophobic Niqols living with the ambassador in charge of the relationship with the humans?"

"Oh, no, they are professionals," Yeza responded. "They wouldn't let their beliefs ruin their work. Zura is simply jealous because I don't open my legs for him."

Khan fell silent and decided not to ask more questions for the time being. It felt too awkward to learn about Yeza's sexual life as her daughter's boyfriend.

Yeza led Khan through the descending path. Her previous tinkering with the menus had filled the area with a dim azure glow that revealed its details. The secret passage didn't feature any carpet or artwork, and the hall that unfolded after reaching its end resembled a larger version of the training camp's prisons.

Cells with bars made of black metal with multiple red spots filled both sides of the hall. Chains built with the same materials occupied their insides, but Khan didn't fail to see how everything appeared quite dusty. It seemed that no one had been inside the prisons for a long time. A dark moss had even started to grow in the corners of the room and some humid spots.

Yeza didn't stop there, and Khan made sure to follow along. She crossed the whole hall and opened another descending passage after reaching the opposite wall. The new path appeared almost identical to the first. The only difference was that the room at its end carried different cells.

The same glass-like material that made the palace's windows divided the hall in half and separated the other side into multiple smaller cells. Moreover, azure symbols shone on those dark surfaces to control the environment inside each cubicle.

The symbols' shades gave Khan the idea that the Niqols had created that layer of the prison after meeting the humans. The clear contrast with the red spots on the metal bars on the superior floor gave birth to two very different pictures in his mind. He almost felt able to see the old and modern versions of the alien species in those differences.

"It won't be a good sight, especially for you," Yeza announced.

"It's fine," Khan responded.

Yeza glanced at Khan while showing a slightly sad expression. She didn't know too much about him. The Global Army had to send general descriptions about all the humans arriving on Nitis, and Khan's report had a few more lines due to the issue with the Aduns and his many feats. Yet, she still ignored how much he had to suffer to gain that resolve and detachment at such a young age.

Khan appeared more mature than most Niqols, even if the aliens had to join hunts fairly early on. That felt a bit too much, but Yeza could only ignore her feelings since she had political duties to attend to.

"Mistrust between our species still exists," Yeza explained as she approached one of the cells.

"That's natural due to our respective goals, so I can't completely trust your superiors. I don't trust you either, but maybe I can appeal to your compassion and sorrow. I only need you to focus on your feelings for the girl from my species before giving your answer."

Yeza covered two fingers with mana before touching the azure symbol on the dark glass and changing some of its lines. The material quickly became transparent, and Khan's expression turned cold as soon as he recognized the creature contained inside the cubicle.

Monstrous growls that Khan had heard in the village reached his ears as Yeza continued to move the lines of the symbol. She was lifting the restrictions of the cell. Her last movement even allowed the creature to see what stood outside of the cell.

The growls intensified at that point. The mutated Niqols inside the cell was short, barely one meter and twenty centimeters tall. It stood on two monstrous legs. One of them was hairy and ended in a hoof, while the other was smooth and had a slimy liquid above it.

Its torso had lost every humanoid feature. Bumps covered in scales, chunks of hair coming out of open patches of skin that leaked blood, and what seemed to be a three-fingered hand grew from that part.

Khan felt lucky that feathers covered the creature's head. A horn seemed to grow from the center of its forehead, but it wasn't long enough to show its entire shape. Other strange features covered the monster's arms, but Khan moved his cold gaze on Yeza at that point.

"Did you show me the ugliest mutated Niqols on purpose?" Khan asked in a cold tone.

Mutations usually led to death when they were so unstable, but the creature in the cell had managed to remain alive even if it had developed body parts that could often create conflicts in a single body. The chances of something like that happening were almost non-existent, so Khan guessed that Yeza's choice had been part of a plan.

Yeza was perfect in her pretense. She didn't show any reaction until her mouth twisted in an emotionless smile and she decided to admit everything. "I had to cause an intense emotional reaction. You have probably found Niqols in the same condition during your mission."

It felt strange to see Yeza show such an aloof face. She always relied on evident emotions to affect the behavior of those around her. Her current expression appeared entirely out of character.

"Why?" Khan asked.

"Because of your scar," Yeza explained. "You probably know a bit about problems caused by mana. I've asked your superiors if they could turn these Niqols back to their original form, but they wanted something in exchange for that information."

"Are you asking me to betray the army?" Khan asked as his eyes returned to the cell.

"I'm asking you to show mercy," Yeza corrected.

Khan had to muster the entirety of his mental strength not to answer that question right away. Yeza had picked correctly. Khan knew enough about mana infections to have a real answer to her question. He also had a weak spot for the Niqols, even if she ignored how deep his reasons for that were.

Making the other recruits decide to reveal something would have been easier for Yeza due to her many talents, but she wasn't sure about their knowledge. The same applied to Khan, but she could at least guess that he knew a bit more about the field.

"What do I get if I help you?" Khan asked coldly.

"Do you like Nitis?" Yeza questioned.

"Very much," Khan revealed.

"I can give you political relevance as long as you remain here," Yeza promised. "I can turn you into the bridge between our species after the crisis. It will take a few years, but you would gain enough merits to climb the ranks of your army or establish yourself here. The choice would be yours."

Those were words that Khan had dreamt to hear ever since acknowledging everything that could have hindered his relationship. Yet, he didn't let his hopes get to his head. Yeza could take back those promises whenever she wanted, so he wanted something else for the time being.

"I also want to know more about the Niqols' ways," Khan demanded, "Especially when it comes to everything that you can do with mana."

"The academy will eventually teach you that if you become good enough in manipulating mana," Yeza stated.

"I'm talking about the old ways," Khan explained.

"Why would you even want to learn methods that we have abandoned?" Yeza asked while turning to show her confusion to Khan.

Khan couldn't reveal anything about his meeting with Zalpa. Truth be told, her methods had left him quite surprised, especially when she had uncovered the hidden parts of his nightmare. The old ways seemed to have a profound understanding of mana, and Khan wanted the chance to study them.

Moreover, Zalpa knew about the problems that daylight could cause. The knowledge hidden in the old ways seemed to go past what the Niqols held now, and Khan wasn't scared to pay the price for that power.

"I want to fuse our methods while keeping the human ways as the core," Khan voiced a partial lie.

The Niqols were fusing the methods of the two species, but they still founded what they developed on the three fields connected to mana. It made sense for Khan to desire to do the opposite.

"Sure," Yeza quickly agreed. "I'll send you a list through a secret channel. Pick a field, and I'll give you what we have."

The knowledge of the old ways was useless in the hands of a single recruit. Khan wouldn't even be able to reveal it to his organization without arousing suspicion, so Yeza felt safe sharing it. She would also keep the truly important aspects of those fields for her, and Khan wouldn't be able to do anything about it.

The silence that followed their arrival to an agreement felt heavy, but Yeza respected it. Betraying your species wasn't something easy, but Khans' explanation arrived sooner than she expected anyway.

"Even our best technology can't turn them back," Khan revealed. "They have remained in this mutated state for too long. I'm sorry."

Chapter 168 - Paranoia

The meeting was only an excuse to give Ambassador Yeza the chance to question Khan about the mutated Niqols. The other young aliens mostly exchanged superficial talks or probed each other's view of the relationship between the two species.

Creating a psychological profile of the recruits that the Global Army had decided to send to [The Pure Trees] could only help the Niqols since those humans would probably continue to occupy important political positions. The young aliens took note of how they reacted to various stimuli, be it teases, drinks, sudden questions, or statements that put some pressure on them.

Only Liiza struggled to make it hard for Veronica and understand how the girl's mind worked. Liiza was too anxious about Khan remaining alone with her mother, and having one of his suitors in front of her didn't help.

Luckily for Liiza, Veronica's personality was warm, polite, and welcoming toward every odd reaction that she could have. Liiza even ended up in a daze at times when she immersed herself in her fears and paranoia. Her mother could make men fall to their knees with a single smile, but she had to wait for the event to end to understand if her boyfriend had managed to resist her.

"Is everything okay, Miss Liza?" Veronica politely asked when she saw that Liiza had remained immersed in her thoughts for more than two minutes.

The girls were in an ample room adorned with a thick dark-red carpet, artworks hanging from the walls, and a large window that showed the dazzling snowy environment outside the palace. Comfortable armchairs and couches occupied the center of the area and encircled a small table that had a few bottles and cups at its center.

Veronica and Liiza sat on armchairs on opposite sides of the small table, and the latter had limited herself to fill two cups before taking anxious sips. She would ask preset questions whenever Veronica reminded her of her situation, but she never truly listened to her answers.

The situation worsened until Liiza remained silent for more than two minutes after Veronica's last answer. The latter had managed to wait calmly, but the faint fear that she might have done something wrong eventually appeared in her mind due to the Niqols complete and constant lack of attention.

"What do you think about the Niqols' customs?" Liiza quoted one of the preset questions that she had memorized earlier when Veronica brought her back to reality. "I believe it must be hard to adapt to our different ideas of decorum."

"I think about it as a priceless experience!" Veronica exclaimed while wearing a brilliant smile. "I think we should learn from each other while we have this lucky chance together. It doesn't happen every day meet a species which has evolved."

Veronica halted her answer when she noticed that Liiza had stopped listening to her again. The latter kept her mouth on the cup's edges as she gazed at the room's exit. Her glowing eyes even moved left and right as her paranoia fueled her worry.

Veronica had long since learnt about Liiza's situation. A single conversation with Azni had been enough to make her aware of all the gossips inside the academy. Of course, Veronica had also heard about the rumored secret boyfriend that had made Liiza arrive at the party after the solar wind with pale cheeks.

In theory, the Global Army's orders saw the envoys expressing the utmost respect toward the Niqols, especially those with some political involvement or connection. However, Veronica had learnt how the aliens thought and behaved in the last month, which gave her enough courage to be more open. Her current approach wasn't going anywhere anyway.

"Are you worried about your man?" Veronica suddenly asked.

"Did you find the schedule in the academy welcome-," Liiza voiced as she snapped back to reality, but another question came out of her mouth when she understood what Veronica had said. "What man?"

"Everyone in the academy says that you have found someone," Veronica giggled before diverting her gaze and lowering her voice. "Is it the part of the sexual gratification true?"

"What?!" Liiza instinctively exclaimed before covering her mouth to remind herself about her composure.

"Sorry!" Veronica quickly added. "I know. It's too personal. I was just curious since I also have someone I like, but it's hard to compete when everyone is so pushy with him."

A wave of jealousy filled Liiza's mind and washed away the tipsiness that her anxious drinking had created. She knew who Veronica liked, and she was also aware of the pushy attention that he was receiving.

"My companions are so hard to approach about that topic," Veronica continued, "And the Niqols tell me to jump on him before the others. How does one even jump on someone?"

"You shouldn't listen to everything they say," Liiza stated from behind her cup to hide the jealousy that filled her face. "It's pointless to change who you are just to get a man."

"That's what I think too!" Veronica exclaimed. "Still, this man is so hard to approach. He is always there when you truly need him, but he is impossible to find otherwise. I can't really say anything to him after everything he had to overcome, so I'm lost. You looked like the only Niqols who could have a different view."

Countless plans on how to make Veronica give up on Khan mixed with her jealousy and filled her thoughts. Yet, Liiza wasn't nearly as good as her boyfriend when it came to pretenses and lies. She feared that her words or behavior could reveal something if she became too involved in the conversation.

"Why do you like him?" Liiza asked after deciding to let Veronica focus on her own feelings.

"I don't really know," Veronica revealed while wearing a genuine smile and fixing her eyes on her cup. "He probably lies a lot, and he definitely has secrets, but he is also incredibly reliable, strong, and driven. Also, I know his heart is in the right place even if everything he has experienced would give him a free pass on being an insensitive idiot."

Liiza fixed her glowing eyes on Veronica while continuing to hide her face behind the cup. She could see the girl's affection in her expressions, but she couldn't feel jealous about that when her words complimented her boyfriend so openly. Liiza actually felt a bit proud to be with Khan.

"He seems the kind of guy who would give up on the world for those important to him," Veronica said as her smile became slightly playful. "I don't think that's exactly a good thing, but I feel warm when I imagine myself as one of his important people."

Liiza had to drink to suppress her blush. Veronica had made her think about all the sacrifices that Khan had made for her. She also recalled the hesitant and twisted words that he had voiced during their intimate moments. Khan's mind could reach dark places, but it felt too good to be at the center of his bright thoughts.

"Is everything okay?" Veronica repeated when she saw that Liiza had fallen silent again.

"I'm sorry," Liiza responded quickly, showing that she didn't forget about her surroundings at that time. "I-, I have someone but don't say anything to the others. Let it remain a rumor."

"Of course!" Veronica promised as her eyes lit up. "How is he? You are so beautiful, so he must be handsome. Are you keeping him a secret because of Ilman? Is it because of your mother?"

Veronica had lowered her voice during her last line, but she didn't hide how curious she felt about Liiza's situation. Everyone believed that her man belonged to tribes that could cause troubles for her mother, and the Niqols had quickly grown excited at the idea of a forbidden relationship.

"I won't say anything," Liiza announced as her voice gained sweet tinges. "He is just the best."

Liiza found it strange to have that type of conversation since her unique situation had forced her to give up on friendships and similar relationships. She had never gotten the chance to talk with another girl so openly, and even Azni couldn't fill that role since her schedule often conflicted with Khan's free time.

"Tell me more about it!" Veronica begged.

"My lips are sealed," Liiza giggled before bending forward and pointing at Veronica's cup. "Why don't you tell me more about your hesitation about jumping on your guy?"

"I need another drink for that," Veronica stated before hiding her laugh behind her hand.

"Don't worry," Liiza assured. "This palace is built on drinks."

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The meetings lasted only a few hours, and each group gathered in the hall on the first floor afterward. They moved back to the palace's entrance, and inspections happened among all of them to understand how that event had gone.

Brandon and Kelly had been with two Niqols who often exchanged words with them. However, everyone could see how a wall existed between them and prevented the arrival of honest laughs or casual conversations. They had done nothing but voicing political ideas and hopes connected to the relationship between their species during their meeting.

Gabriela, Rodney, and George were in a group with three Niqols, but only the two boys seemed to have dropped the manners required by that political event. They often joked with their escorts, hinting at how successful their meeting had been.

Helen's situation was quite surprising. She had been alone with a tall Niqols who radiated nobility with all his gestures and expressions. His manners were calm but firm, and Helen couldn't help but respond with faint flirts and attractive smiles that made her appear as Yeza's younger and inexperienced version.

The surprising aspect of the two was that the Niqols appeared attracted by those gestures, and Helen didn't hide from his attentions either. They were basically flirting in the open by the time they reached their companions.

Liiza and Veronica's situation was quite peculiar since both girls had ended up drinking a lot after their topics had digressed to more intimate matters. They had never revealed anything specific, but it was clear that their conversations didn't involve the relationship between their species. Their unstable steps also proved how they had limited themselves to have fun.

Nevertheless, Khan and Ambassador Yeza created the most surprising scene as they regrouped with everyone in the hall. The two appeared to be at ease during their conversation. They were talking about something superficial which seemed to involve the Lysixi seen in the tunnel, but a few details in that scene left the other humans and Niqols speechless.

Everyone noticed how Khan was wearing a different robe. Yeza's fame was far from a simple rumor, so the others immediately connected it to the scene. The Niqols felt amazed that Khan had actually managed to make Yeza get under his clothes, while the humans experienced different reactions, which went from envy to pure astonishment.

Liiza and Veronica almost froze at that scene, and no one noticed their peculiar reaction because everyone was busy staring at Khan and Yeza. The two didn't even see that they had worn the same face since they were too busy inspecting Khan's new robe. They couldn't ignore what that detail meant, but the boy didn't hesitate to make their confusion intensify.

Khan had noticed how Veronica and Liiza were having fun, and the sight of his girlfriend's honest smiles made him truly happy. He knew that Liiza had trouble making friends due to her past, so seeing her so relaxed brought him joy.

Khan revealed an honest smile when he looked at the two girls, which made them divert their gazes in confusion and awkwardness. Veronica ended up blushing even, but Liiza regained her composure. She knew that the gesture was for her, so she started to doubt whether Khan had cheated on her.

Yeza's relaxed approach to the conversation also stunned the group inspecting the scene. Her laughs, smiles, and light touches on Khan's shoulder remained captivating, but she didn't seem to do them on purpose. They resembled a consequence of her habits, but she didn't back them with the intention of making Khan fall for her.

The confusion and astonishment couldn't last long since Professor Supyan waited for everyone at the end of the corridor and forced humans and Niqols to separate. The two groups exchanged the usual polite bows and smiles before splitting to return to their duties.

Liiza remained still for a few seconds in front of the sliding layers of the palace and its closing doors. She was tipsy, and her confusion didn't help her situation. Yet, a strange urge spread inside her as her fears intensified. She felt the need to confront her mother about her meeting.

The Niqols and Yeza had grown used to Liiza's behavior by then. They knew that she would leave in a matter of minutes, so they didn't even bother to talk with her as they resumed their tasks inside the palace.

Liiza could wait a few minutes and climb the familiar staircases to reach a dark room that featured one of the largest windows in the palace, a big bed, and a vast wardrobe that covered an entire wall. Her mother was there, browsing through the various clothes to pick something more comfortable now that the meeting had ended.

"[It's rare for you to visit me]," Yeza said as she recognized Liiza's unique aura. "[You usually are already flying away by now]."

Yeza didn't stop browsing among her clothes, and Liiza made sure to close the door behind her as she reviewed the questions prepared during her walk there. She couldn't just ask about Khan, but her unique position gave her access to things that other Niqols might ignore.

"[Did the human know a way to revert the mutated Niqols?]" Liiza asked.

"[No]," Yeza sighed. "[Apparently, reverting that state would require new mutations, and that would only affect their bodies. Their minds are long gone]."

"[Understood]," Liiza announced while pretending to leave.

Her plan relied on everything she knew about her mother's personality. Liiza had used the word human on purpose to bait out Yeza's reprimands, and she fell for that trap.

"[That boy's name is Khan]," Yeza corrected. "[He is actually an interesting boy. I believe he will become an important figure among the humans, so we should keep him close]."

"[What makes him interesting?]" Liiza voice while suppressing a smile.

"[His resolve is off the charts]," Yeza scoffed while peeking out of the wardrobe and showing her surprised expression to Liiza. "[He didn't only refuse me because of his Niqols girlfriend. He even stabbed his own leg to resist me after I insisted. I had to make him change after all the blood that had fallen]."

Yeza laughed, and Liiza reminded herself to shake her head in disgust. That was their usual interaction, and Yeza didn't address the slight hesitation that her daughter had shown.

"[He reminded me about your father]," Yeza continued while bringing her gaze back to the wardrobe. "[I wonder if he'll fail his woman in the same way]."

"[Dad didn't fail you]," Liiza snorted before opening the door in a hurry. "[You just can't expect love if you sleep with other men]."

"[That's what I used to think before Deni]," Yeza sighed again, "[But I ended up being right all along. Love simply isn't enough at times. You have his same character, so make sure that you can follow through your emotions before making important decisions]."

A third sigh escaped Yeza's mouth when she heard the door of her room closing. She knew that Liiza would probably never understand her reasons, but she didn't care as long as she could prevent her from making the same mistakes.

Chapter 169 - Deal

The political meeting left the eight recruits satisfied. They had a clear advantage over the companions who had remained in the training camps, and they had even made sure to expand that gap.

The Global Army had sent their best eight recruits to the academy, which had created an elite team with a high chance to become a core aspect of the relationship between the two species in the following years. Their political role wouldn't only award them with merits. It would also benefit eventual promotions, especially if they involved Nitis' environment.

Brandon and Kelly didn't feel to have fallen behind their companions when it came to their merits. They had shown competence and seriousness during their meeting, which were the exact features they wanted the Niqols to know them for.

Instead, the others had a more relaxed approach since they believed that the Niqols would appreciate humans capable of blending with their culture.

Helen and Veronica had sort of forgotten about their political purpose for different reasons. However, they had still obtained positive results since they had established decent relationships with two important figures of the alien species. Liiza would have some relevance in the future due to her mother, and the Niqols who flirted with Helen seemed to belong to a distinguished tribe.

Still, everyone felt that Khan had been one step ahead of them again. They didn't initially care that Ambassador Yeza had chosen him for the meeting since the Niqols already saw him as the face of the envoys. However, the scene seen when the groups reunited had left them curious, doubtful, and envious.

The presence of Professor Supyan on the Lysixi that led them back to the academy didn't let them question Khan properly, and the latter didn't give them the chance to talk even after exiting the secret passage. Snow was already waiting for him when everyone stepped on the mountain, and he jumped on it right after performing a bow toward the Niqols.

That behavior made the recruits even more curious, but running away from questions wasn't Khan's intention. That was the last free day of the week, and he wanted to spend the rest of it with his girlfriend, especially since he imagined her anxious state.

'Things are finally turning for the better!' Khan shouted in his mind as Snow accelerated through the air.

Khan could finally see a path in front of him. He didn't know if Yeza would fulfill her side of the deal, but the fact that she could rely on him to learn details about the Global Army already ensured a future political relevance.

The decision to sell classified information for personal benefits made Khan a traitor, and it could easily turn him into a spy. Yet, he didn't care. He had betrayed the Global Army without the slightest hesitation, and his secret relationship was only one of the reasons behind that decision. Khan still loathed the soldiers for what they had chosen to make the Niqols and the eight recruits face.

Paying back part of the injustice suffered during the solar wind felt good, but Khan couldn't enjoy that feeling thoroughly. He had only shared a minor detail that the humans almost viewed as common knowledge. His actions might have prevented his species from gaining a few more permissions, but that couldn't compare to all the deaths and pain that the humans had caused.

The benefits that gave Khan hope about Liiza and his personal power felt better than that pointless payback. He couldn't wait to see what the Niqols' old ways had to offer, and the sole idea of experiencing his relationship in the open made him ecstatic. He actually had the chance to establish himself on Nitis and gain a position that could give him a future with his girlfriend.

The mental training for the chaos element was over, but Khan had yet to approach the Wave spell. The program gave an example of proper execution of the ability, but it was unclear whether that would help.

Mages needed to rely on specific thoughts and emotions to activate their elements and turn them into spells. Yet, the chaos element was different in its requirements.

The program stated that the emotions couldn't be part of the casting process due to the innate instability of the chaos element. Moreover, Khan couldn't rely on studies to follow precise instructions on how to gain access to that power. The mages had developed lists of thoughts and feelings that helped and triggered specific effects with their elements, but chaos respected no rule. Its approach was highly personal and required Khan to develop his own method.

Khan felt lost about that part of his training. He planned to imitate the expert in his program for the time being, but the innate instability of the chaos element made him decide to approach everything carefully. Also, he couldn't try to summon such unstable energy with people around him, so he noted in his mind to test the spell only when he was alone.

That left Khan with only two choices when it came to how he had to spend the hours flying toward the marsh. He couldn't use his knife correctly there, so only his meditations and sleep remained.

Calculations quickly happened in his mind and made him aware that he still had hours of sleep to fill to meet Liiza's requirements, so he lay on Snow's feathered back and closed his eyes. The usual nightmare didn't take much to arrive.

Khan had to go back to the academy before flying toward the marsh, so Liiza took less to arrive there since she didn't have intermediate destinations. He sensed her presence when the entrance of

the cave unfolded in his vision, and a smile appeared on his face when he saw her figure jumping in his direction.

Liiza flew in Khan's embrace. She quickly wrapped her arms and legs around his neck and waist as she dug her face on his neck. Khan could only reply by hugging her tightly, and Liiza didn't hesitate to fill him with kisses.

"Hey, let's get inside first," Khan laughed as Liiza stormed his neck and side of his head with kisses.

"[I love you so much]!" Liiza exclaimed before taking his cheeks in her hands and keeping him still to leave a deep kiss on his lips.

Khan understood that there was no stopping to Liiza, so he replied to her kisses while entering the cave. He quickly reached the simple bed made of blankets and pillows, and his knees went on the ground before he bent forward to lie Liiza down.

The girl had never stopped kissing him, and she started to open his robe when her nape touched one of the pillows. Khan didn't have the time to say anything before he found himself captured in her pushy and captivating passion.

Khan had never seen Liiza in that state, but he didn't fail to enjoy the following hours. When everything ended, he found himself staring at the ceiling while wearing a pleased smile. Liiza was resting on his sweaty chest. An evident blush filled her smiling face as she slowly caressed Khan's side and left lazy kisses on his torso.

Liiza almost purred whenever Khan caressed her hair. He had never seen her so happy, and the sight was dazzling. Betraying the Global Army felt completely worth it if it could lead to that.

Liiza eventually decided to move. She climbed on Khan's torso and lay on his chest. Her hands went in his hair as she left a deep kiss on his lips before raising her head and revealing an affectionate smile.

"I've never been happier," Liiza whispered while moving the hair that had fallen on Khan's forehead.

"To think that I only needed to refuse your mother for that," Khan teased while joining his hands on her lower back.

The two had yet to speak about what had happened during their respective meetings. The previous burst of passion didn't leave them any time to say much. They had only voiced their feelings multiple times, but everything else had been a loud mess of deep breaths and moans.

Khan knew Liiza well enough to guess the reason behind her unusual ardor, but he was unaware about everything else. He wasn't even sure if Liiza had learnt about the mutated Niqols in the basement.

"Did you really stab your leg to resist her?" Liiza asked happily.

"How do you even know that?" Khan uttered.

"I know how to trick my mother," Liiza boasted before moving her gaze on the ground. "I also know that she made you see the basement."

"[Liiza]," Khan whispered, and Liiza's eyes immediately went back on him at the sound of the Niqols' accent.

The two kissed again, and their lips remained close when Khan responded to Liiza's previous words. "What's a wound compared to this? Also, I managed to get a decent deal out of your mother after accompanying her to the basement."

Liiza retracted her head to show her curious expression, and Khan didn't hesitate to explain everything that had happened with Yeza. Then, it was Liiza's turn to tell him how she had ended up spending a lovely morning with Veronica.

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Life in the academy continued as usual, except for a change that everyone noticed but no one mentioned. Liiza started attending the parties more often, and Khan could never hold back from joining her in casual and vague interaction. Luckily for the couple, Azni always dragged Doku and other Niqols around them to hide the real reason behind that behavior.

Someone guessed that Khan liked Liiza. It made sense due to the rumors from his first day on Nitis and the gentle rejections he reserved to the other girls flirting with him. Still, no one believed he had a chance with her since her blush seemed to have become a regular part of her face. The aliens didn't think that Liiza could mind others when someone was keeping her so happy.

Of course, Khan and Liiza had planned the timing for their arrivals and departures from the parties perfectly. No one suspected that Khan could be the man behind the blush, and Azni even used her ability with gossips to spread fake rumors that led the other Niqols completely off track.

Liiza simply couldn't hold back from leaving Khan alone among girls flirting with him after the meeting. His ability to refuse her mother had made her surrender to her feelings. She would literally go crazy if she had to wait an entire night alone in the cave without knowing what the other Niqols were throwing at Khan.

The gathering around her wasn't ideal since it could still reveal something about Khan, but Liiza solved it by leaving a few marks on his neck from time to time.

That created the perfect alibi, even if it put Khan in the awkward situation of having to stick to two different lies at the same time. The Niqols believed that his partner was one of the humans, while the recruits were confident that he was hooking up with an alien. It was a mess, but Khan managed to handle it pretty well, especially since he never remained inside the academy longer than necessary.

The only one who started to guess something was Doku. The boy was an honest friend, extraordinary even. He had all the right cards before him, but he still refused to think about the matter.

Azni was helping Liiza and Khan openly, and Doku could see that better than anyone else. His girlfriend was lying about gossips to protect them, and Liiza and Khan shared the same wild scent. That could be a coincidence, but ideas inevitably formed in his mind as all those clues piled on.

A change happened at the beginning of his tenth week on Nitis. Eight days had passed from the meeting, and Khan had just attended his last lesson. He was about to reach a mountain and summon Snow, but a hooded figure suddenly appeared on his path.

Khan immediately prepared himself to fight. The figure was like Professor Supyan. It managed to hide its presence completely and ignore the defenses inside the forest. That alone made Khan consider running away, but his fears dwindled when he saw a dark-blue hand coming out of the robe's long sleeve and placing a scroll on the ground.

The scroll featured one of the azure symbols on its seal, but its light appeared dimmer than the others seen throughout the academy. Still, Khan couldn't focus too much on that item since he found out that the hooded figure had disappeared during that second of distraction.

Awe immediately filled his mind, but that feeling didn't stop him from reaching the scroll. The wax-like seal divided itself as soon as he touched it, and it turned into a lock that he could close by rejoining its two halves.

Khan inspected his surroundings before unfolding the scroll. His eyes lit up when he read the contents of that item. It resembled an interactive list with many Niqols' names and brief descriptions in the human language. Yeza had finally started to respect her side of the deal.

Chapter 170 - Discussion

"We aren't picking the [Blood Graph]," Khan declared.

"It's [Blood Vortex]," Liiza corrected, "And we are definitely picking it."

Khan had hurried toward the cave in the marsh after the meeting with the hooded Niqols. His knowledge of the aliens' old ways was basically non-existent, so Liiza walked him through them. She didn't know too much either, but she could inspect them from a different perspective, and that was already a lot.

"I'm not picking a method that will hurt you," Khan stated seriously while turning to glance at his girlfriend.

Khan was sitting between Liiza's legs. His back was on her chest, and she played with his hair or left soft kisses on the top of his head whenever he said something that made her emotions burst.

The two had studied the scroll together, but they had quickly come to the conclusion that all the methods were outside the range of Khan's abilities. The list described advanced techniques that only Niqols with excellent proficiency in the manipulation field could approach, and Khan didn't even come close to meeting those requirements.

Moreover, a good level of expertise in the manipulation field was only the initial requirement. Most methods had at least one additional material or condition which only Nitis could fulfill. The plants, or wood, or liquids described on the scroll were iconic of the alien planet.

Khan hoped to remain on Nitis as long as possible, but he didn't delude himself. Finding the Nak remained one of his priorities, so he would eventually leave the planet, and he didn't want to end up with a method that he couldn't use. He couldn't even confirm whether the Global Army could grant him access to those materials, but he guessed that the prices would be far higher through that channel.

The list described many interesting methods. They went from an old version of the azure symbols that filled every Niqols' structure to many branches of the alien alchemy. Yet, they all had steep requirements in terms of manipulation of mana, and they even needed many materials, which even Liiza struggled to recognize.

Only three methods appeared somewhat approachable, even if they would still force Khan to wait until his expertise in the manipulation field reached the intended level. They were respectively a defensive ability, a technique that allowed to absorb mana from the environment, and an offensive skill.

The offensive skill was interesting, but it required many steps. It described how it was possible to replicate an enemy's unique aura and control its mana. It was actually terrifying to think about the applications of the technique.

The only problem was how long it could take to gain an exact idea of an enemy's aura. The method described how Niqols might even require to suffer direct injuries to reach that level of understanding. They could achieve the same results by eating pieces of the opponent, but the technique almost lost its meaning at that point since they could already hurt it.

Also, the level of control of the opponents' mana depended on how deeply the Niqols understood it, which could lead to long battles. The method seemed to go against Khan's fighting method, so he didn't feel too interested in it.

Instead, the defensive method was interesting. It required some preparations since the user would need to eat specific materials to gain the ability to clot blood and turn the skin into a shield. The only problem there was that the ingredients usually involved coagulated blood that could even belong to monsters or similar creatures. The abuse of the clotting skill could even lead to lasting injuries, and the limits changed according to the body's resilience.

In the end, the absorption method, the [Blood Vortex], used tattoo-like marks to attract the mana in the environment. Applying those signs on a body would increase its attunement with mana and could replace human meditations. The only issue was that blood usually was the best ingredient for the ink, and it also required infusions with mana that carried a specific nature.

Khan had felt stunned during his first read of the list. The old ways were gruesome, barbaric, but powerful. All of them could cause backlashes, but that felt almost normal since they allowed the Niqols to use abilities able to surpass spells in terms of power. Those methods could also ignore the differences among the various elements since they relied on external materials to achieve their effects.

Liiza didn't need to think too much about it. She felt that the [Blood Vortex] was perfect for Khan since he could use the monsters' blood once his manipulation ability increased. The other techniques required too many materials of complicated procedures, and he might need years to start practicing them.

Khan's current ability didn't allow him to use the [Blood Vortex] either, but he wasn't alone. Liiza's proficiency in the manipulation field was outstanding. She also fell short when it came to the method's requirements, but she could fill that gap by using her own blood during the procedure. Needless to say, Khan was completely against that.

"Your hair is getting long," Liiza whispered while fixing her gaze on each azure strand she found. "I never understood why humans cut it short."

"I'm not using your blood to get stronger," Khan repeated.

"You won't," Liiza stated after leaving a kiss on Khan's lips. "I will."

"[Liiza]," Khan scolded while turning to face his girlfriend.

Khan took Liiza by her sides and lifted her while turning completely. Liiza ended up on his lap when he put her down, and she instinctively wrapped her legs around his waist. She showed an affectionate smile at his concerned face, and the two inevitably exchanged another deep kiss.

"Look," Khan while raising the scroll to their side. "I can pick the [Blood Shield] and get your help gathering materials. It feels right to get a defensive ability."

"You said it correctly," Liiza voiced a sweet smile while squeezing Khan's head in a hug. "You are getting good at my language."

"I have my reasons to learn," Khan teased while bending forward to lie Liiza on the ground.

The two started to exchange intense kisses, but Liiza didn't forget the previous topic, and she didn't hesitate to remind Khan as soon as their lips separated. "You are still picking the [Blood Vortex]. It's the only method that can give some results before the daylight."

Khan heaved an exasperated gasp while lying on her. His head pointed at the dark wall, but Liiza pulled his hair softly and giggled until he turned to face her.

"[I don't want to use you]," Khan revealed when their eyes met.

"[This is me being selfish]," Liiza stated while placing her hand on his cheek. "[I want to sacrifice something for you]."

Liiza had never stopped smiling since the beginning of that discussion. It was as if she knew that Khan wouldn't give in unless she showed him how much that mattered for her.

Khan knew that the [Blood Vortex] was the best option. The fact that Liiza could probably help him right away was too important with the daylight getting close. Even a slight one or two percent increase in his attunement with mana could help during the crisis. It might also turn him into a first-level warrior before everyone else in his year.

Khan would even become able to use the technique on his own at some point, and blood was everywhere in the universe. The method also affected something that he could easily justify with his talent or mutations. After all, he would have to keep his new ability a secret from the Global Army since it would immediately investigate otherwise.

"How much blood are we talking about?" Khan eventually gave up in front of Liiza's loving expression.

"I have no idea," Liiza revealed in an awkward tone. "It might be a lot."

"I'm definitely picking something else!" Khan shouted, and Liiza laughed happily.

It took a while, but Liiza slowly made Khan accept that he had no better option. She actually had to explain how resilient Niqols were and had to make him promise to be as accommodating as possible after each procedure. Khan would have never accepted such a big favor otherwise.

"Are you sure my mother said that you can pick only one of them?" Liiza asked while reviewing the list. "The [Mana Control] feels too difficult, but the [Blood Shield] doesn't sound bad. I think I've even heard Zalpa mentioning it."

"She said one field," Khan explained.

"I think she added these abilities on purpose then," Liiza uttered. "She knew that the various alchemic fields and our runes would have been too hard for you to learn, so she put something more approachable for a human."

"How nice of her," Khan commented before laughing when Liiza glared at him.

Khan continued to laugh as he straightened his position to sit cross-legged. Liiza didn't hesitate to lay her head on his lap while handing him the scroll. The item was interactive, so he only needed to press on one of the names to make his choice.

"Do you think I can pick two?" Khan asked.

"Try to press them at the same time," Liiza suggested. "Maybe someone on the other side will notice it and accept to give you both."

Khan didn't need explanations on how to interact with the item. He placed the scroll on the ground and gathered mana on his forefingers before pointing them at the names of the absorption and defensive technique.

"Don't try to get slow on your right hand," Liiza warned since Khan's right forefinger was on the [Blood Vortex] label.

"I can't control it completely," Khan joked. "I'm left-handed."

Liiza snorted and turned the scroll upside-down while making sure that Khan's glowing left forefinger pointed at the [Blood Vortex] now. She then left a kiss on his knee before resting on his lap again.

Khan could only laugh before lowering his fingers at the same time. The [Blood Vortex] and [Blood Shield] labels lit up together with their descriptions, but nothing happened when he interrupted the contact.

Khan tried multiple times, but the scroll kept rejecting his choice. He had to reach his twelfth attempt to trigger a reaction on the item.

The names and descriptions of the two techniques continued to glow even after he removed his fingers. The scroll had accepted Khan's choice, but it surprised him by catching fire on its own.

Khan's first instinct was to suppress those blue flames, but Liiza promptly grabbed his wrists to stop him. She also shook her head before explaining the nature of that event. "That's how secret conversations among tribes happen since it's incredibly hard to delete something once it enters the cubes."

"I guess we can only wait now," Khan sighed as he watched the scroll burn.

His hand went on Liiza hair as multiple thoughts filled his mind. Liiza experienced something similar as her eyes remained on the flames. The flickering noises resounding in the silent cave made both of them fall in a daze and reminded them that the daylight would arrive in less than two months.