

Chaos' Heir 411

Chapter 411 Hand

The symphony of mana was beyond messy. Countless energy sources added their influence to the environment and created a scenery too complicated to contain in a single brain.

However, one specific shade managed to stand out from the rest of the mess and attract Khan's attention. The sensation was faint, unclear, and even disappeared at times, but Khan was sure. Rodney was in the area.

'Did he send her?' Khan wondered while standing up to make his way through the crowd. Of course, he didn't forget to update Luke about that development.

Complaints resounded around Khan as he bumped and squeezed himself through the crowd. Someone stood up to challenge him, but a cold gaze and an alteration of the synthetic mana were enough to put anyone back in their seats.

Even among the glares, Khan ignored the crowd to go over what had just happened. Appointing Raymond as the man behind the woman's warning was almost obvious, but Khan didn't want to leave any blind spot in his preparations.

Did Rodney have the power to hire a third-level warrior? The answer was a resounding: Yes. Still, he probably didn't have the means to learn about Khan's seat right after the purchase, and having someone ready in the area sounded unreasonable without that information.

Moreover, Khan was convinced that Rodney had been honest during their meeting. His fear had been authentic, and their bloody history only added value to that conclusion.

'Why would Raymond send someone to warn me after being so friendly?' Khan ended up wondering once his thoughts moved to a new topic. 'What's the point of continuing to pretend even now?'

Khan couldn't solve those doubts, but he knew what could. The warning had to have some connection with the mission. The secret area was bound to have the answers he sought.

The staircases were immense structures that encircled the whole square, but they had a functional layout. They were firm enough to endure the tremendous weight of the audience while also having passages in their insides.

Khan spent minutes heading for another exit since he didn't dare to follow the woman, and the audience almost fought against him when he climbed the steps that led to the passage.

A similar issue appeared when Khan reached the passage. Staircases that dived directly into the structure stretched from the opening, but a crowd had claimed them. Anyone too poor to purchase seats had settled there, leaving no room for those who wanted to cross the area.

Khan had sensed that situation before he could lay his eyes on it, so he had already made up his mind. As soon as the crowd unfolded in his vision, he jumped forward and proceeded to use heads and shoulders as footholds to cross the area.

The crowd hid the directions depicted on the walls, so Khan stuck to going down. Passages connected to lower seats appeared occasionally, but he eventually found the opening that led outside the square.

The situation didn't improve even after Khan left the staircases. A river of people had invaded the streets around the square, forcing him to keep jumping from head to head until he reached the opposite sidewalk, where he finally found a landing spot.

Complaints flew in Khan's direction as soon as he landed, but he ignored everything and closed his eyes. A torrent of different colors filled his senses and conveyed a seemingly endless stream of information, but he cut the useless noise out until he found a strand of mana that matched his needs.

Someone had tried to approach Khan while he was immersed in his inspection, but the resolve conveyed when he opened his eyes made those people hesitate. The crowd hid his figure during that second, and the complainers lost track of him.

As for Khan, he squeezed through anyone on his path to follow the strand of synthetic mana that carried a trace of Rodney's presence. That scent intensified as he advanced, and his sensitivity eventually brought him to a narrow street on the other side of the block.

That street didn't lack people, but one hooded figure leaning on the metal wall managed to attract Khan's attention. The man wore sunglasses, and pale-blue tattoos covered his mouth, but his unmistakable presence brought Khan before him.

"What are you even wearing?" Khan asked while inspecting the hoodie. The latter was too loose to reveal the items hidden underneath, but traces of synthetic mana seeping out of it gave Khan a vague idea.

"I had to take precautions," Rodney explained. "I'm sure my faction didn't take my betrayal nicely."

"Betrayal isn't new to you," Khan mocked. "You'll be fine."

"You wouldn't talk like this if you knew the full extent of Raymond Cobsend's influence," Rodney scoffed. "You'd take even more precautions than me."

"Like the gun under your hoodie?" Khan wondered, and a smirk appeared on his face when a tremor ran through Rodney's mouth.

"You have become a proper freak," Rodney commented coldly. "No wonder you can't find your place among humans."

"I've been a freak since I was five," Khan corrected. "What's your excuse?"

"A freak chose an alien over a fellow human," Rodney stated.

Even with the sunglasses, Khan knew that Rodney was glaring at him. Tension also fell around the two. They seemed on the verge of fighting, but neither made sudden moves.

"You came to me for help," Khan pointed out. "Don't forget that."

"It was a negotiation," Rodney contradicted, "And maybe I should have given it a second thought. I can't believe you sent your green friends to spy on me."

"You can't blame me for not trusting you," Khan chuckled.

"I blame you for your poor judgment," Rodney explained. "Did you really think the flashiest species on Milia 222 could spy on the Orlats?"

"It's a matter of loyalty," Khan replied. "You wouldn't understand."

"I understand they did a poor job," Rodney declared. "At least I got my money's worth."

Khan could contradict Rodney. The meeting with the woman probably hinted that someone was aware of the mission, but Khan kept that information to himself. He didn't want Rodney to run away before showing the secret area.

"Let's get moving," Khan uttered to change the topic. "I'd rather fight only after seeing this secret floor of yours."

"You can't even take a loss," Rodney sighed. "No fun as always."

Khan snorted without adding anything, and Rodney voiced a faint laugh before leaving the wall to dive into the crowd. Khan followed him closely, and the two began a silent walk that saw them cross many blocks.

"They are endless," Rodney eventually cursed since people continued to occupy every street.

"You can't blame them for wanting to celebrate their home," Khan commented.

"They live on rocks kept alive by criminals and synthetic mana," Rodney mocked. "What's there to be proud of?"

"Arrogance is a human flaw," Khan sighed.

"Please," Rodney sneered. "Milia 222 is nothing more than a glorified space station. I get coming here to enjoy its illegal activities but seeing it as a home... They must be delusional."

"Most of these people have never gone outside the asteroids," Khan pointed out.

"That's their problem," Rodney declared. "The Nele are an exception, but the other species have planets and other settlements. This pride comes from ignorance and entitlement."

"Entitlement?" Khan asked.

"Some factions here are pushing for independence," Rodney laughed. "Can you believe it? They don't even realize that their species are the sole reason they have enough time to waste on those useless thoughts."

Khan couldn't help but agree with Rodney. Milia 222's independence was a nice dream for the natives of those asteroids, but none of them had the power to enforce and protect it without their species' support.

"These people don't know the grim side of the universe," Khan admitted, "But I can say the same for a big part of humanity."

"You are right about that," Rodney voiced. "Still, we don't have idiots asking for independence. We know we are born on the lucky side of the universe."

Khan remained silent, and Rodney turned to show his smirk. An insult seemed almost necessary after that exchange, and he didn't hesitate to throw it.

"Most of us know," Rodney mocked.

"You really want me to kill you," Khan casually threatened while his eyes remained on the crowd.

"I missed your empty threats," Rodney chuckled. "We both know you won't do anything until we reach our destination, and I still have your letter after that."

"I'm willing to bet that you have it on you right now," Khan guessed.

"Why would I be so stupid?" Rodney wondered.

"Because you wouldn't trust anyone with something so important," Khan replied. "Your money and influence can't buy that."

Rodney didn't give his usual immediate answer. Instead, he fell silent for a few seconds and turned to face the crowd again before voicing a whisper that almost lost itself in the surrounding noise. "It would still be stupid."

Khan's eyes flashed with interest. Studying Rodney's mental state among that mess was too challenging, but he knew he had struck a nerve. He only needed the right opportunity to test that out.

The silence continued for a while until it became deafening. Rodney never stopped walking either, so Khan ended up restarting the conversation. "Where is this passage?"

"Why would I even tell you?" Rodney sneered.

"I still wouldn't know how to reach the building you mentioned," Khan explained. "Unless the place has only one path."

"Are you trying to trick me now?" Rodney asked. "Look, Lower Level 1 is the home of many hidden passages. Most go to Lower Level 2, a few directly to Lower Level 3, and only one to the intermediate floor."

"Are you sure it's only one?" Khan questioned.

"No," Rodney admitted, "But there can't be too many since it would increase the chances of getting discovered. I bet there are at most three paths, with two of them known only to the leaders."

"What about the guards' situation?" Khan continued since Rodney's explanation made sense.

"That turned out to be quite lucky," Rodney revealed. "I expected many to abandon their post due to the celebrations, but not so many. We might have it easy down there."

'Don't disappoint him,' Khan repeated in his mind. The woman's warning continued to make no sense, and Khan could only see his mission as a possible connection.

"How far is it anyway?" Khan asked.

"Don't tell me that the pressure is getting to you," Rodney joked. "We are almost there."

Rodney's words turned out to be the truth. The two crossed a few more streets before reaching the corner of a block that featured multiple shops. All of them were closed except for a small door that still had writings flickering on its surface.

"What now?" Khan asked while leaning on the wall to imitate Rodney.

"One second," Rodney said while pulling out his phone and checking a few messages. "There should still be someone inside. We must wait for them to leave."

Khan pretended to move his attention to his surroundings. Multicolored lights shone in the distance, but the many buildings prevented him from inspecting their true nature. The same went for the loud noises coming from different directions. The various events had started, but he couldn't see much from his position.

Of course, Khan wasn't trying to catch a glimpse of the events. His gaze remained on the crowd, but his attention was on the sky. Many vehicles still flew among the buildings, and he tried to memorize as many of them to find eventual patterns.

Luke should have sent orders for the ships on his payroll by then, but Khan didn't know how far Rodney's influence spread. He might have hired vehicles too, and Khan hoped to notice them before it was too late.

The sky turned out to be too messy to spot patterns, at least with a short inspection. Instead, the ground reserved some surprises since someone left the still-open shop in those minutes.

A human second level-warrior, a woman, left the shop and activated a few functions on its entrance before diving into the crowd. It didn't take long before Khan lost track of her, and Rodney's phone buzzed at that point.

"Let's go," Rodney announced after checking his phone.

The two walked in front of the small door, which now showed no writings, and Rodney pulled out a second device before Khan could ask any questions. The black screen started to buzz when Rodney placed it on the metal surface, and a mechanical noise soon resounded.

Rodney stored the device and tapped on the door, which slid open without asking for any authorization. A seemingly ordinary shop with a small counter unfolded, and Rodney immediately led Khan inside.

Khan's wariness peaked as soon as the door closed behind him. He had just barged into enemy territory, and his current companion might very well be his worst opponent. He couldn't allow distractions anymore.

"Be ready," Rodney warned. "Even I don't know what to expect from now on."

A joke popped into Khan's mind, but he suppressed it. He drew his knife to answer, and Rodney nodded at that gesture before lowering his hood and taking off his sunglasses.

"Shouldn't you take out that gun of yours?" Khan wondered while Rodney went behind the counter and crouched to tap on the floor.

"Are you getting worried about me now?" Rodney joked.

"I don't know how useful you are without it," Khan responded, but a clicking noise resounded and ended that bickering.

"Hurry up," Rodney called while part of the floor went slightly down to turn into a platform, "And let's avoid meaningless talks. Lower Level 2 isn't exactly safe."

"Wait," Khan exclaimed as he interrupted his step into the platform. "Lower Level 2?"

"We must go through there to reach the hidden area," Rodney explained. "There might be other paths, but I don't know them."

The situation was different from what Khan had initially believed. Going to the hidden floor from the city was one thing, but lingering in Lower Level 2 was a problem, especially since the platform probably led to human areas.

"Are you chickening out on me now?" Rodney mocked. "I hope you didn't expect this to be too easy."

"I hope you really have that letter on you," Khan sighed as he finally stepped on the platform.

"Why is that?" Rodney laughed as he straightened his position and tapped on the floor.

Khan waited until the platform began to descend to give his answer. "Because if I end up killing you down there, I won't have to look through Milia 222 for it."

Silence couldn't fall due to the whooshing noise of the elevator. The platform was descending through a narrow channel, so every noise echoed between Rodney and Khan.

Still, the two men remained silent as they entered a different world. They glared at each other, fully aware that one might backstab the other at the first chance.

Some might lose their nerves under the tension caused by that constant threat, but Khan found the situation quite reassuring. He didn't need to think or review his stance there. He would show no mercy if Rodney attempted to do something funny.

Rodney seemed able to read the insides of Khan's mind, but he only showed a smirk. He wasn't stupid. The letter was his sole advantage there, but it wouldn't protect him if things turned rough. He had everything to lose, but his expression showed no fear.

In a way, Rodney had earned Khan's respect. Khan hated him on many levels, but he had to admit that no one else had been able to corner him so efficiently.

Rodney didn't have Khan's power of fighting experience, but he still managed to come out on top. His strength came from pure wits and knowledge, and the current situation showed how those qualities could be more valuable than sheer battle prowess.

The exchange of glares ended when the platform entered a room. Rodney and Khan tensed up, but the latter immediately relaxed since his sensitivity told him that the area was empty.

The two men jumped off the platform when it reached the floor, and Rodney swept his surroundings before heading toward one of the two doors.

Khan did the same while following Rodney. The area felt familiar. The place was a small warehouse carrying the same lack of features common on Lower Level 2.

A quick inspection of the phone told Khan that he had no connection and confirmed the arrival in jammed areas. He didn't know if he was precisely in Lower Level 2, but Rodney didn't give him the chance to linger on those thoughts.

The black screen succeeded in unlocking the door and allowed the two men to advance. They crossed an empty corridor that led into another warehouse full of items, but none of those goods managed to distract the duo.

Rodney quickly approached another door, and an area that Khan knew far too well unfolded in his vision. A flat ceiling and a grey floor enveloped an open space that expanded past the entrance. That was Lower Level 2, and Rodney expected them to cross it.

"Hurry!" Rodney whispered as he crossed the entrance.

Khan felt forced to follow Rodney, and the two soon found themselves in the open. They were right in the middle of Lower Level 2, with no other building nearby, and they weren't alone.

Khan was the first to notice the presence of multiple people. Fuveall, Orlats, humans, and even Nele roamed through Lower Level 2. However, they seemed to belong to sparse groups with no interest in their surroundings. Even Khan and Rodney's arrival only attracted their attention for a few seconds.

Khan and Rodney instinctively wore their casual faces. They were both masters of pretenses, so they didn't need words to opt for a slower but innocent walk that could avoid arising suspicion.

The pretense worked. No one approached or even paid attention to the duo. Still, the path was long, and the destination remained unclear.

'Resurfacing on my own might be a problem,' Khan thought while tightening the grip on the knife hidden behind his forearm, 'And I can forget the air support.'

Developing escape plans had become second nature for Khan, and the slow walk through Lower Level 2 gave him all the time he needed to explore every option.

The ships sent by Luke couldn't do anything in that area. Khan didn't even know if they had managed to follow him, but the need to cross Lower Level 2 had already cut them out of the equation.

As for the escape plan, Khan could only imagine himself running back to Lower Level 2 to find the Nele. His lack of knowledge over the distance among floors didn't leave any other viable option.

Khan and Rodney walked for less than half an hour to reach a structure that seemed to border the edge of the floor. The place was large and lacked any peculiar detail, but its entrance opened before the duo could reach it.

Rodney and Khan froze simultaneously when a group of humans crossed the entrance. The crew only had three second-level warriors among its eight members, but it remained too numerous to dispatch without attracting attention.

Khan prepared for the worst, but the faint stench of booze suddenly reached his nostrils. His behavior immediately changed, and a smile even appeared on his face as the crew inevitably inspected him and Rodney.

"Hey!" One of the women among the crew asked as she studied Rodney's tattoos. "Did you just come down?"

"We needed a break," Khan happily laughed before patting Rodney's shoulder. "Can we find anything worthwhile in there?"

"Everything is already inside our bodies," One of the men responded, causing a general laugh.

"We might catch you in the city then," Rodney joined the conversation, smiling like Khan.

"That sounds hard," A third member of the crew exclaimed. "I heard it's a mess up there."

"You have to see it to believe it," Rodney responded. "We also tried to enter the square, but you need a ship just to reach the lower seats."

"I'm sure we'll find something," The first woman declared as the two groups finally crossed each other. The crew advanced deeper into the dock while Khan and Rodney arrived before the building.

Rodney quickly pulled out his black screen and placed it on the door. Time slowed down as the crew's steps grew louder. Someone could notice something if they took too long to enter, and one man even turned at some point, but the entrance opened before he could ask anything.

Khan and Rodney basically jumped into the building and didn't dare to relax until the door closed. They were alone in a small room that featured four exits, and Rodney didn't hesitate to approach one of them.

"You sure know how to handle drunkards," Rodney commented as he deployed the black screen again.

"Do you really want to insult me about Nitis now?" Khan asked, and Rodney snickered without adding anything else.

A long corridor unfolded once the door opened, and Khan and Rodney hurried through it. They weren't outside anymore, so they could run at a decent pace without bothering about the noise they made.

Khan kept the synthetic mana in check to avoid surprises, but the path remained empty. The duo went through more corridors, warehouses, and simple rooms without meeting anyone. They continued to be alone even after reaching a passage that climbed through the building.

'Finally,' Khan exclaimed in his mind as he pulled something from his backpack. Climbing meant reaching the intermediate floor, so he needed his scanner.

"What's that?" Rodney whispered when he saw the rectangular screen in Khan's hand.

"Don't worry about it," Khan reassured as he turned on the device and activated its functions.

The scanner took only a few seconds to light up and inspect the area. Multiple labels appeared on its screen to describe the types of mana perceived, but Khan couldn't find anything odd. The device didn't see anything connected to the chaos element.

Rodney glanced at the scanner before resuming the advance. The two climbed and made a few turns before climbing again. The absence of peculiar artificial gravity allowed Khan to keep track of his position, and it didn't take long before the scenery changed significantly.

A dark area welcomed the duo when they crossed another door. The artificial illumination created a dim environment in the shape of a narrow corridor, and Rodney's increasing tension told Khan that they had almost reached their destination.

The scanner's results remained stable even after entering the corridor. A few percentages changed, but the metal element continued to claim first place. The values matched those found in any other environment, and Khan could only frown when he read them.

'How is this possible?' Khan cursed in his mind. He still felt that odd sensation, but even the Fuveall's technology was failing to pick up anything.

The matter made no sense, especially since the fourth asteroid had theoretically exhausted its hidden areas. Khan had basically been everywhere now, but he still couldn't find the reason behind that odd sensation.

Rodney was obviously unaware of Khan's internal struggles. His entire attention remained on the corridor and its various branches. He lacked Khan's senses, so he had to rely on his eyes and ears to check the area. Luckily for him, that secret maze seemed empty.

Khan remained relaxed for most of the journey since his sensitivity to mana checked the corners before he could even come close to them. Yet, a change eventually happened. Two clear and intense mana sources joined the symphony and grew stronger as the duo advanced.

'Second-level warriors,' Khan thought. His knife was ready, and he was fast enough to get the jump on those enemies. He could probably dispatch them without causing any ruckus, but he remained silent and pretended that everything was fine.

The advance had slowed down after the change in environment. Rodney and Khan had put a limit to their noise, so nothing alerted the two warriors in the distance. However, they were getting closer, and Khan had yet to say anything about them.

'Three turns away,' Khan counted as he crossed a branch. 'Two.'

The countdown reached "zero" after the duo crossed two more turns. Rodney was the first to peek past the corner, and his whole body tensed up when he noticed the warriors sitting on the floor. Khan already knew that his opponents were distracted, but he refused to exploit that advantage.

Three gasps resounded in the corridor. Rodney and the two second-level warriors remained stunned in front of those strangers, but a violent release of mana quickly replaced that feeling.

Rodney summoned his energy, and the same went for the man and woman busy leaving the floor. Rodney had the initiative, and his control over mana was surprisingly smooth, so his attack shot out before his opponents could stand up.

A high-pitched noise resounded in the area and expanded until it reached Khan and the two second-level warriors. The sound made Khan's mind go blank for an instant, and he found Rodney mid-air when he regained complete control over his senses.

Rodney fell on the two opponents, who lost their balance due to their odd stance and messy senses. The second-level warriors slammed on the floor, and Rodney dived toward them once he regained a foothold.

Khan couldn't see much with his eyes, but his sensitivity revealed the truth. Rodney used his mana to turn his fingers into sharp blades that pierced the warriors' heads while they were still confused. The attack dug holes into their skulls and killed them on the spot.

Rodney took a deep breath when he pulled out his fingers and wiped the blood on his hoodie. His gaze lingered on the two corpses for a few seconds, but he eventually turned to glare at Khan.

"You did it on purpose, didn't you?" Rodney coldly asked.

"What did you expect?" Khan questioned before changing the topic. "What element is that?"

"We truly can't trust each other," Rodney sighed. "I'll tell you, but I don't want other surprises."

"Sure," Khan exclaimed without putting any seriousness into his tone.

"Thoughts," Rodney declared. "I turn my thoughts into actions."

Khan remained amazed for a second before scoffing. Those words didn't explain much. They only described the nature of Rodney's element without saying anything about its limits.

"No wonder you told me," Khan shook his head.

"Am I not allowed secrets now?" Rodney wondered.

"Let's move on already," Khan stated, and Rodney smirked before following those directives.

Trying to make sense of that maze turned out to be a problem. Khan did his best to memorize the trod path, but the two crossed dozens of turns and changed directions multiple times.

The general position inside the structure was the only thing that Khan could genuinely keep track of. He knew where he was all the time, so he could opt for breaking through walls if he got lost during an eventual escape.

Except for a few instances, the march remained uneventful. Khan began to warn Rodney whenever he sensed new enemies, and they worked together to dispatch them. Needless to say, having the initiative made things way too easy for Khan.

Rodney didn't hold back either. He didn't use his spells anymore, but his fingers were deadly. It was actually surprising that they could withstand such attacks, and Khan even guessed that the technique hid a lot since he had tested something similar first-hand.

Also, the new enemies found along the way were weaker than the first team. Khan and Rodney never faced more than two opponents at the time, and they rarely had second-level warriors among them.

'This is the fifth team already,' Khan thought while waving his knife to remove the blood on it. 'How far are we?'

Two corpses stood before Khan and Rodney. They belonged to the first-level warriors they had just dispatched, and the blood coming out of their deadly injuries created a puddle that forced the duo to jump over them.

The corridor stretched a bit more, but a door eventually appeared and marked its end. Rodney relied on his black device to open it, and a new scenery finally unfolded.

A vast, dim area expanded past the corridor. The place resembled an emptier version of Lower Level 2, except for the single, large building standing at its center. The structure was tall enough to connect the floor and short ceiling, and its width made it able to contain multiple warehouses.

"I told you it was large," Rodney commented, "Stupidly large."

"And you never went inside," Khan recalled. "How did you even keep track of this area? It took us almost an hour to get here."

"Money can buy a lot," Rodney revealed. "Come on."

Khan and Rodney left the corridor to hurry toward the structure. The absence of windows or other notable details was in line with Lower Level 2's style, and Khan even accelerated when he confirmed that the area was empty.

The structure's front side had a big main door and a few entrances near its corners. Khan and Rodney opted for the smaller openings, and, to their surprise, they found that they were already unlocked.

The discovery added a new layer of tension to the duo, and Khan even replayed the woman's warning in his mind. He couldn't shake off the feeling that everything had been too easy, but he couldn't deny what he saw either. He had really reached the intermediate floor, and he had even found a secret building.

The scanner's results continued to remain stable. The only significant change involved the actual percentage of synthetic mana in the air, which had increased after entering the building.

As for the scenery, the place was an empty and immense warehouse. There was nothing there, and even the dust was absent. It almost seemed that someone had cleaned recently.

"Odd," Rodney commented before that desolate scene.

"Let's check the entire building," Khan suggested, hoping that the other areas would have something.

Rodney nodded and moved toward one of the entrances that led deeper into the building, and his black device turned out to be pointless again. The door was already open.

Khan and Rodney could only exchange meaningful glances as they dived deeper. The next area featured a few broken consoles that failed to fulfill Khan's goal. Yet, when the duo crossed another open entrance, they finally found what they were looking for.

A big, cylindrical machine occupied the center of a circular room. A container filled with greenish liquid and with multiple thick tubes coming from its extremities stood tall and claimed most of the available space.

The huge machine carried an imposing aura, but mere technology couldn't match the item floating among the greenish liquid. Rodney had seen similar images and descriptions during his studies, and his gaze snapped toward Khan as soon as he recalled a scene from Nitis.

"Khan, don't do anything stupid," Rodney warned, but Khan had already stopped listening to the world around him.

Khan simply couldn't divert his attention. The machine contained an azure, six-fingered hand that seemed to have come out directly from his nightmares.

Chapter 412 Answers

Chilling emotions formed inside Khan and spread through every inch of his body. An instinctive reaction fueled by years of desperation engulfed him and tried to take over his actions. He was on the verge of attacking, but he remained still. He didn't even blink.

That stillness worried Rodney. Something told him that the faintest spark could escalate the situation, so he suppressed the gulp rising through his throat and waited for Khan to move.

Khan knew what he wanted. His urges had never been clearer, and that wasn't even his first time experiencing them. The test on Nitis had been a perfect example of his stance, but the situation was different now. The hand in the container wasn't an illusion.

In theory, that would lead to even wilder reactions. However, Khan had matured a lot since Nitis. He didn't have Istrone's trauma looming over his mind anymore. He had actually found some long-deserved clarity after the years spent suffering, despairing, and blaming himself.

That clarity didn't offer an alternative path. Khan had already made his decision. Still, his new maturity granted him the time to think before his inevitable reaction.

The matter wasn't as simple as it looked. Rodney couldn't see the entirety of the situation, but Khan had spent the past months gathering clues. He knew far too much not to connect the dots.

Raymond's interest in the Nak suddenly made sense, and Khan's realization went much further. Their private meeting gained a specific purpose, and the warning from the woman slowly revealed a meaning.

The hand inside the container belonged to a Nak. Khan couldn't fail to recognize it even if he wanted to. Yet, a few details became visible as the inspection continued.

Compared to Khan's nightmares, the hand lacked its azure halo. It was dead in ways that went beyond the simple absence of the rest of the body. That chunk of flesh and bones had mana in its insides, but that wasn't enough to turn it into a Nak's limb.

Moreover, the hand wasn't exactly complete. Its skin lacked some pieces that left part of the muscles exposed to the greenish liquid. Long scars also covered its surface, but the container's glass hid their features.

The workers there had been up to something specific, and Khan had every intention to uncover what. He mustered the entirety of his self-restraint to divert his gaze and inspect the room, but the area didn't have much. Even the tubes disappeared inside the ceiling or floor.

Only a few metal boxes and smashed consoles existed around the huge container, and Khan approached them to check their state. The machines were useless in his eyes, but the cases had something that claimed his interest.

Inside one of the three boxes, Khan found strands and pieces of elastic fabric. Their shape didn't reveal much, and their broken state would be a hindrance even to an expert eye. Yet, Khan only needed a few seconds to realize what he had just found.

'The reinforced fabric,' Khan exclaimed in his mind. He had memorized the material's energy signature on the second asteroid, so he felt sure about his conclusion.

A bitter feeling rose through Khan's mouth. The investigation was finally complete. Khan had found the stolen reinforced fabric after scouring Milia 222 for months, but that success didn't bring any happiness. It simply couldn't with all the issues surrounding it.

Rodney had remained silent even after Khan moved, but he couldn't shake off the pressure that had fallen on him. He could almost taste the tension in the air, but he still didn't know where it would lead.

Nevertheless, Rodney had to abandon the careful approach when he saw Khan returning to the container with his knife ready to strike. His intentions couldn't have been more transparent, so Rodney felt the need to intervene.

"Wait! Wait!" Rodney exclaimed as he stepped forward to stand between Khan and the container. "Don't get all intense as your usual. We must talk about this."

"Move," Khan said in a chilling tone while advancing as if Rodney wasn't even there.

"Do you realize what we just found?" Rodney continued while lifting his arms and retreating a bit. "Do you have any idea how much this thing is worth?"

Khan didn't even bother to answer. His next step pushed Rodney's back on the container. Khan was ready to strike whether Rodney was on his path or not, and the latter understood that very well.

A curse came out of Rodney's mouth as he jumped to his side to clear Khan's path. Meanwhile, Khan reached the container and thrust the knife into the glass, but the attack didn't produce any serious damage. Only a tiny crack opened.

Rodney frowned. He didn't have Khan's senses, but his eyes worked perfectly well, and they had seen how his companion didn't summon his mana. Khan had only relied on his brute force during his thrust.

The glass was obviously reinforced, so it made sense for it to resist the full physical prowess of a second-level warrior. Yet, Khan was a chaos wielder. His element was meant to destroy things, but he didn't use it.

Rodney understood that he was missing something, but he didn't ask questions that Khan wouldn't bother to answer. Instead, he remained silent and shook his head while Khan thrust his knife into the container again.

At first, the knife only dug a crack. However, as the offensive continued, a proper hole opened in the glass, and the greenish liquid poured out of it. That dense substance didn't stop Khan from continuing his assault, so the small gap slowly enlarged.

Cracks spread past the hole's edges during the offensive. The glass held strong, but its structural stability suffered blows whenever Khan attacked, and the gap's expansion inevitably worsened that feature.

The internal pressure caused by the greenish liquid deepened those cracks until a whole fifth of the glass shattered. Khan remained still as transparent shards immersed in that dense substance rained on him. He had already confirmed that the fluid was harmless, so he found no reason to move.

The container emptied quickly as the greenish liquid spread over the floor. The Nak's hand fell at the bottom of the machine, and Khan jumped through the large opening right afterward.

The greenish liquid was dense enough to cover part of the hand even after most of it left the container, but Khan could get a closer look now. Moreover, a mere layer of that substance couldn't hide details anymore, and some conclusive answers finally arrived.

Khan loudly inhaled a few times and even bent forward to get a closer look at the hand before understanding the nature of the scars. They weren't actual injuries. They were patches sewn to the very flesh of that alien body part.

As for what the workers had sewn, Khan had already found the answer. The cut and torn pieces of the reinforced fabric explained everything clearly. That lab had probably overseen the reconstruction of the Nak's hand.

'They used the reinforced fabric instead of the basic material,' Khan thought. 'It must have allowed them to skip a few steps.'

A complete picture formed in Khan's mind. He could imagine Raymond purchasing a maimed Nak's hand and moving it on Milia 222 to perform illegal experiments.

The hand in its wounded state didn't offer much, so Raymond set up a lab to give it new life, and the reinforced fabric happened to be the suitable material for the process.

Khan couldn't be sure about the chronological order of some events. Raymond might have found out about the reinforced fabric's suitability after the factory completed it, or he might have been behind it from the beginning. Either way, the conclusion didn't change. The hand was there, superficially fixed, but internally dead.

'Don't disappoint him,' Khan recalled the woman's warning, which revealed its meaning now that the picture was complete.

The hand was dead. Its structure was fine, and its flesh was even quite impressive. Khan would normally place it between the third and fourth levels in terms of sheer energy in the muscles and skin.

However, Raymond wanted the power of a Nak, not a random body part, and Khan could be the key to that. He didn't have the scientific knowledge to explain why he understood that, but he felt it. The odd sensation had tried to tell him that since his first visit to the fourth asteroid.

Even when less than a meter separated the two, Khan didn't feel any difference in the odd sensation. It was as intense as ever, but watching the hand so closely revealed its true nature and source.

Jenna couldn't find anything wrong with the fourth asteroid because the environment didn't suffer from any pollution. The symphony didn't have any unique mana that only Khan could feel. The odd sensation existed only inside him because he generated it.

Khan stored his scanner and reached for his nape. He could feel it now. His mana core was the source of the odd sensation. His organ had reacted to the presence of another Nak, creating a calling meant to draw him into the hidden lab.

'It must be similar to the Nele's pheromones,' Khan concluded as his mind grew even colder, 'Something that only Nak share.'

Of course, that realization put Khan into complete killing mode. He wasn't only part Nak. He was enough Nak to manifest some of their innate features, and he wouldn't accept it so easily.

Khan grabbed his knife with both hands and placed himself right above the body part. His experience with the cloud told him that his mana could trigger unwanted reactions, so he had held back while destroying the glass, and he planned to do the same now.

'I'll disappoint you as much as possible,' Khan exclaimed in his mind before diving toward the hand.

The knife landed at the center of the hand and pierced through its flesh easily, reaching the container's bottom. Khan made sure not to touch that body part directly, and his weapon's sharpness allowed him to draw it without risking any unwanted movement.

Nevertheless, when the knife was about to leave the wound, a strange twitch ran through the hand. Mana left its flesh and became a fuel that the body part could use, and Khan jumped away as soon as he noticed that reaction.

Khan didn't use his mana, but he had put enough strength into his jump to fling himself out of the container. Still, his abrupt action had widened the injury, and the knife had dragged out some dark-blue blood when it left the hand.

Drops of blood flew through the container and toward Khan while he was still in mid-air. They created a gory path that would fall to the floor in a second, but the hand didn't need anything else.

The world in Khan's eyes slowed down. He saw mana squeezed out of the flesh shooting out of the injury and reaching the closest drop of blood.

That energy wasn't as clear as in his memory, but the drop of blood brightened and turned into a glowing azure dot once it absorbed it. Also, it acted as a bridge that sent the mana even further.

The mana left the azure dot to reach for the next chunk of blood, which brightened and took life after it absorbed that fuel. The process then repeated itself, covering the entire gory path created by the knife until, eventually, Khan's turn arrived.

The mana had taken less than a second to cover the entire bloody path. Khan was still in mid-air by then, unable to perform escape measures. He could only watch as that azure energy shot forward one last time to land on the knife and spread until it reached his fingers.

The impact didn't hurt Khan. It barely tingled, and he would even fail to sense the event's implications if he were a regular human since they were so imperceptible. Still, his sensitivity revealed how the alien mana stole a minute chunk of his energy.

The bloody path broke in the following fraction of a second, but it was too late by then. The alien mana sent back what it had gained after Khan flew out of its range. The drops of blood in the container fell as the azure energy retreated to return inside the hand and deliver what it had stolen.

Khan fell butt-first on the floor before quickly jumping to his feet, but the situation had changed again by then. The hand had started to release a faint glow which was brighter alongside the scars and the new injury. Its insides were also in turmoil. Its very flesh shook as if awakening from a long slumber.

"What have you done?!" Rodney shouted, but his words couldn't reach Khan.

A straightforward goal filled Khan's mind and made him disregard any other input. He had to stop that process and destroy the hand even at the cost of being careless.

The knife alone couldn't destroy the hand in one attack, so Khan joined his palms and summoned his mana. He planned to use the chaos spear to eliminate the threat, but the hand suddenly released a deep noise, and his concentration broke.

Khan would never let himself be distracted in battle, but the noise wasn't a mindless cry similar to what the cloud did. It conveyed precise and intense meanings that resonated deep inside him. The hand expressed pure hunger, and Khan experienced that feeling for an instant, which ultimately interrupted his spell.

More changes happened during those seconds. The hand's brighter parts dimmed to create a homogenous halo that revealed the new state of its flesh. The holes and scars had disappeared, and its skin now appeared completely intact.

Khan didn't give up on his plan. As soon as he snapped out of the feelings that the hand had forced him to experience, he summoned his mana again, but his opponent turned out to be one step ahead.

The hand's glow intensified until a series of lightning-like flares shot out of its figure. Khan and Rodney had to deploy evasive maneuvers, and loud, sizzling noises resounded once those attacks landed on the various surfaces.

When Khan managed to look at the hand again, he found it floating in the middle of the broken container. Its azure halo had intensified once again, turning it into the spitting image of his nightmare.

Another deep noise came out of the hand, and a spherical wave of mana accompanied it. The attack couldn't hurt Khan and Rodney, but the broken glass completely shattered.

As for the noise's meaning, Khan instinctively translated it inside his mind. It was another expression of hunger, but it had something else now. It conveyed the firm desire to fulfill that urge in any way possible.

Chapter 413 Crumbling

Rodney couldn't keep his thoughts straight. He had initially seen the Nak's hand as nothing more than a valuable body part, but the current state of the lab depicted a very different truth.

The hand shone with azure light while floating at the center of the broken machine. The glass shards on the floor reflected that halo, almost encircling the body part into a bright crown, and smoke came out of the spots where the lightning-like flares had landed.

The hand wasn't a piece of merchandising that Rodney could sell anymore. It had transformed into an alien threat brimming with enough power to kill him on the spot. Retreating was the only option, but his companion had different ideas.

Khan inevitably saw more than Rodney. His sensitivity played a big part in the matter, but his mutations added a deeper layer of understanding to the situation as a whole.

The hand was definitely a threat, but not only for those inside the hidden lab. Its hunger wouldn't stop anywhere soon. That feeling was bound to push the body part far past the intermediate floor, and even Khan didn't know if that would be enough to satisfy it.

'Imminent chaos,' Khan thought as his mind transformed into an icy environment that didn't allow distractions.

The entire fourth asteroid was at risk, and the celebrations worsened the situation. The body count could be terrible if the hand reached the surface, but Khan didn't even get to those topics. He had only one goal, and he was willing to go to any lengths to accomplish it.

Khan joined his palms as he straightened his position. Purple-red mana accumulated between his hands faster than ever, and he separated them when the spear was ready to take life.

The Nak's hand had stopped moving after the last deep noise, but its glow grew even brighter during that stillness. It was sorting out its mana to prepare for the next move, but the appearance of the chaos spear attracted its attention.

Heavy pressure fell on Khan, and a mixture of curiosity, hunger, and confusion spread through the synthetic mana. The hand didn't have eyes or a brain, but it looked at Khan while adding its emotions to the environment.

Khan didn't miss any of that, but his course of action didn't change. He lifted the glowing spear with his free hand, and he threw it without showing any hesitation.

The Nak's hand was relatively close, so missing it was simply impossible. The spear flew in a straight line and pierced the azure halo to land on that bright body part, but no explosions followed.

Sizzling noises filled the room when the spear's tip touched the Nak's hand. Sparks came out of the alien body part and created circular structures around the glowing weapon that interrupted its momentum and prevented it from detonating.

Khan could only watch as the spear dimmed. The sparks around the weapon were suppressing its unstable nature, and mana seeped out of it whenever the sizzling noises intensified.

The spear leaked mana that the circular structures pushed toward their source. The Nak's hand absorbed that energy inside its flesh, and the purple-red light soon vanished from the lab, leaving only the azure color in its place.

The desperation that Khan knew far too well managed to pierce through the coldness of his mind and show its presence. The same powerlessness of his nightmares invaded him. The chaos spear had failed. The arsenal accumulated in the past years seemed useless before a mere piece of a Nak.

"No!" Khan shouted as he joined his palms again. He couldn't believe that his training had been for naught. He would show his desperation that he could vanquish it.

Rodney watched everything from the sidelines. He had long since abandoned any plan that involved selling or exploiting his findings. He only wanted to leave, but seeing Khan set on attacking the hand forced him to act.

The Nak's hand had grown brighter after absorbing the chaos spear, allowing even those without great sensitivity to mana to understand that its power had increased. Rodney knew what would happen if Khan used his spells again, so stopping him came before running away.

Rodney used his mana to release a high-pitched noise that filled the room and continued to echo. The loud attack made the azure halo tremble and Khan frown. The latter even struggled to remain on his feet, and Rodney used that chance to run toward him.

However, Khan pushed against the noise assaulting his ears to regain control over his body. Blood flowed out of his nose as he struggled to remain on his feet and add fuel to his spell. His hands soon separated to give birth to the spear, but someone suddenly bumped into him.

Khan had been in a frenzy. His eyes and senses had been on the Nak's hand, severing his connection with the rest of the world. His incredible concentration had allowed him to resist Rodney's spell but also left him open to other attacks.

The chaos spear shook to no end when Khan fell to the floor. The outside world returned, forcing him to realize where he was. Rodney was lying on him, and his angry face hinted at the incoming scolding.

"Get a grip on yourself!" Rodney scolded. "You'll only make it stronger with that!"

The chaos spear flickered, forcing both men to look at it. The spell was reaching the critical point, threatening to explode while it was still between Khan's hands. Its state filled Rodney with fear, but something even more dangerous distracted him.

Rodney's spell exhausted its energy when both men hit the floor, and the Nak's hand took only one second to recover. The azure halo stabilized and brightened even more, transforming into a blinding glow that overcame the flickering light radiated by the chaos spear.

The Nak's hand released another deep noise filled with pure rage. Even Rodney understood that his recent attack didn't please it, and the sizzling sounds coming out of the blinding halo made his heart plummet.

Twenty or so lightning bolts left the azure halo and flew in different directions, with at least three of them targeting the area where Khan and Rodney were. The two men were still on the floor, so running away wasn't an option, but Khan couldn't be taken by surprise in his current state.

Khan threw the unstable spear toward the incoming lightning bolts, and an explosion happened when the attacks touched. A purple-red pillar expanded in the room and connected the floor to the ceiling, creating enough pressure to send the two men rolling away.

Rodney stopped rolling when he slammed on the metal wall, and his eyes widened when he found Khan half-crouching before him. Khan didn't lose his balance even after the recent explosion, and he had even managed to retain his grip on his knife.

Khan was still in a frenzy, even if a more controlled one. His desperation had almost made him lose control of his actions before, but Rodney's intrusion and the result of the previous clash had brought new calm to his mind.

The Nak's hand didn't absorb the second spear. Instead, Khan's spell had managed to stop the incoming lightning bolts. He had a chance to win. He only had to find weaknesses to exploit.

"Khan, stop it!" Rodney shouted since he understood what Khan had in mind. "We have to run!"

Khan heard Rodney but didn't address him. The hand couldn't be allowed to reach the surface, and Khan couldn't ignore a Nak standing in front of him.

The grip on the knife tightened as Khan closed his eyes and sprinted forward. The azure halo made his sight useless, but it contained so much mana that his sensitivity was more than enough to gain a clear image of the room.

Khan instantly pierced through the blinding halo and jumped when he felt the Nak's hand growing close. His knife descended as he fell toward that alien body part, but violent sizzling noises resounded when his weapon touched the azure skin.

The light in the environment would normally prevent any inspection, but Khan was close enough to sense everything clearly. His knife's tip was on the Nak's hand, but a dense membrane prevented him from piercing it.

Khan disregarded his techniques and grabbed the knife with both hands to force it through the membrane. The entirety of his physical prowess and body weight fused to add power to his attack, and the defensive layer bent under it.

Nevertheless, as the knife dug through the membrane, a series of sparks shot wildly through that gap. Marks appeared on the weapon, and holes opened in Khan's arms. He lost his grip for an instant, but the [Blood Shield] activated to cover his limbs and bring new stability to his offensive.

Khan and the Nak's hand seemed to have reached a stalemate that no one could witness. The halo was so bright that Rodney had to cover his eyes while standing up. Truth be told, he was ready to leave, but he couldn't see the exit due to that blinding light.

As for Khan, he knew that the stalemate was only a temporary situation. The limits of the [Blood Shield] were an issue he couldn't ignore, and the Nak's hand had also started to prepare another attack.

Masses of mana gathered all over the Nak's hand. Khan had already sensed a similar reaction. New lightning bolts were about to shoot in every direction, but he remained in his position and waited for his chance to attack.

Khan didn't know why the hand didn't absorb the second spear. The distance could explain the event, but the same went for the previous energy discharge.

The Nak's hand might be unable to absorb and release energy at the same time, and Khan wanted to test that out. Usually, he wouldn't take those risks, but his physical strength had proven itself unable to pierce through the sizzling barrier. He needed his mana, so he decided to use it when it was less likely to fall under his opponent's control.

Only one second had to pass for the lightning-like flares to shoot out. A mess of violent mana threatened to dig holes in the entirety of the hidden lab, but Khan promptly released a spherical version of the Wave spell while covering his knife in the purple-red membrane.

The Wave spell crashed on the lightning bolts and made them explode. Of course, it didn't reach all of them, but it created a safe area for Khan.

Meanwhile, the arrival of the sharp mana allowed the knife to pierce the sizzling membrane and reach the hand. The latter was nothing more than exposed flesh without its defenses, so the glowing weapon easily cut through it.

Everything suddenly went silent and still. The azure halo stopped its seemingly endless brightening, and the sizzling noises also vanished.

Khan wouldn't let any second go to waste. His attack had only cut through a quarter of the hand, which wasn't enough to kill it, so he swung his knife upward with the intention of severing a chunk of flesh away.

However, the Nak's hand suddenly became the source of an intense pulling force that lasted for less than a second. Khan's feet slid over the floor, making him lose his balance and miss the hand with his slash. He quickly stabilized himself to prepare for another attack, but a terrifying realization put an end to his offensive.

The short burst of the pulling force had affected Khan, but he had never been its target. After stabilizing his footing, he realized that all the mana in the hidden lab had disappeared. Even the azure halo had vanished.

Khan's sensitivity promptly provided answers. All the energy in the room had entered the Nak's hand, which had grown dimmer after the process. Still, its current darkened state didn't reflect its power. The alien body part had actually never been stronger.

The mana absorbed from the environment wasn't healing the new injury or spreading through the flesh. The hand had accumulated it into a single spot at the center of its structure. Through the symphony, Khan could sense a blinding dot existing in almost complete darkness.

It didn't take an expert to understand what was happening. Condensing so much mana in so little space could only lead to one outcome, and Khan didn't have the power to withstand it.

Rodney had started to move toward the exit after the unbearable illumination left the room, but a figure ran past him before he could reach the opening. Khan had actually beaten him in the escape, but that merely put him one step farther from the incoming catastrophe.

An almost imperceptible whooshing noise shot out of the Nak's hand, carrying all the mana absorbed previously. The alien body part even used most of the energy inside its flesh during the attack, but Khan and Rodney only felt a faint gust of wind hitting their backs.

Khan ran even faster than before when he sensed where all the mana had gone, but an earthquake suddenly took control of the hidden area and forced him to slow down. He even completely stopped at some point, which called for another scolding.

"Get out of the way!" Rodney shouted as he caught up with Khan, but his foot ended up piercing the floor when he stopped before his companion.

Rodney glanced at his foot in disbelief. The hidden area didn't have the latest technology, but its structure remained firm. However, part of the floor had given in under his weight, and the hole he created even opened cracks that spread in multiple directions.

The cracks seemed to spread randomly, but Khan knew that they followed precise marks left by the previous attack. The Nak's hand had targeted the hidden area, and the consequences were about to reveal themselves.

More and more cracks opened as the earthquake grew violent. The whole area past the lab transformed into a mess of fissures that covered the floor, walls, and ceiling. Khan even knew that the damage spread outside the building, so he prepared himself for the inevitable destruction.

Rodney only had the time to shoot a desperate glance at Khan before the floor under him gave in. The walls and ceiling followed the same fate until the entire hidden lab crumbled.

Chapter 414 Fall

Khan was strangely calmer than ever. Metal boulders were falling everywhere, and even the floor under his feet had crumbled, leaving him with an unstable foothold. However, his mind was at peace. He almost felt at home.

The coldness caused by the meeting with the Nak's hand and the mess in the environment fused to bring Khan's mindset to the next level. Nothing escaped his senses, and his thoughts reached

incredible levels of sharpness. He began to exist only to overcome that catastrophe, which gave him power beyond reason.

The whole hidden lab transformed into a rain of metal boulders, and the same went for a significant chunk of the intermediate floor. An unfathomable weight fell through the fourth asteroid, spreading the destruction past the range of the hand's spell. The lower levels suffered an absurd amount of damage, and Khan stood at the very center of that mess.

Khan didn't stop in a random spot before. He had been able to sense the cracks traced by the hand's mana, so he had chosen a place that would provide a relatively spacious foothold.

The sensitivity to mana didn't betray Khan. After everything crumbled, he found himself on a two meters wide chunk of metal. The makeshift platform was only one of the many boulders among that metal rain, and he could stand comfortably on it.

Khan didn't need to focus on a single aspect of his senses to get the best out of it. His eyes darted left and right while his sensitivity added details to his inspection. Everything worked at full power, providing a multicolored and detailed understanding of the situation.

Boulders filled every corner of Khan's vision. Some were as big as houses while others couldn't even fit a child. The area was also dark since most artificial lights were among the rubble. The scene could make anyone despair, but Khan saw it as nothing more than an amusement park.

That wasn't Khan's first time using falling boulders as footholds. He had never faced such an ugly situation, but he had also improved a lot. He could almost walk on mana now. He would mock himself to no end if he couldn't do the same with metal.

The landing wasn't an issue. Khan could easily vanquish his momentum once a surface that could resist the metal rain revealed itself. Yet, he couldn't simply jump out when he had an entire floor falling with him.

The crumbled ceiling and the higher areas affected by the hand's spell didn't leave any safe spots. The rubble would squash Khan if he tried to run away after the landing. He needed to climb through the rain to ensure his survival.

Blasting the rubbles open with a series of spells was an option. Khan had the power to create a passage above him that would allow him to avoid moving altogether.

However, Khan couldn't pinpoint the hand's exact location among that mess. The latter had even depleted most of its mana during its last attack. It could be right above him, and he wouldn't know it, so using spells sounded too dangerous.

Differently from Khan, Rodney didn't retain a shred of calm. Everything under him had crumbled, so his body rotated and spun freely. His eyes even added fuel to his panic since they kept catching glimpses of the metal cage ready to submerge him.

Rodney knew that he was falling to his death. He had been lucky enough to avoid a direct impact with any surface, but something able to withstand that incredible weight was bound to arrive, and his life would end at that point.

Accepting death wasn't Rodney's style, especially after his awakening on Nitis. He wanted to find ways to survive, but his spells couldn't do anything against the metal mountain ready to squash him.

His element was also ill-suited against that sheer and brute weight, and the lack of footholds added insult to the injury.

Eventually, Rodney's back hit a boulder, and his survival instincts roared for him to get a grip on it. He somehow succeeded in clinging himself to that chunk of metal, but he found himself upside-down, in the same horrible situation as before.

Still, the boulder prevented Rodney from spinning freely and allowed him to get a good look at the situation. The area was mostly dark, but random glows managed to enter the metal rain and send reflections on the various surfaces.

Some might find beauty in that desperate scene, but Rodney wasn't the type to waste time in those thoughts. He only wanted to survive, but that seemed impossible. His strength began to abandon him as he realized how doomed it was, but that changed when he caught a glimpse of Khan.

The dim area didn't let Rodney see every detail, but he knew to have found Khan when the faint reflections highlighted his figure. Khan was only a few meters above him, but his stance radiated a completely different vibe.

Rodney's panic went silent when he saw Khan calmly jumping upward. The latter flew among the rubble and lightly stepped on various boulders to use them as steps. He climbed through the rain while making it look extremely natural and easy.

Khan had sensed Rodney's gaze but didn't care enough to address it. His thoughts had transformed into sparks that exploded with ideas and paths whenever the rain of boulders changed. His mind contained the layout of that chaotic environment, and he used it to avoid dead ends.

Step after step, Khan climbed through the rain. Each move had a precise purpose and direction. Each jump led him closer to the top of the mess, but the hand continued to escape his senses.

A sense of freedom enveloped Khan. The boulders couldn't offer endless footholds, but they created an environment where he could ignore gravity. He fell only when he wanted to fall. He was one with the rain but also the sole being who could bend it to his will.

Rodney soon lost track of Khan due to the many boulders hindering his sight. Yet, seeing Khan turning certain death into nothing more than footholds brought a new wave of power to Rodney's body. Khan had actually inspired him. Rodney wouldn't give up just yet.

The heavy rubble eventually crashed on the surface between the intermediate floor and Lower Level 2, and the latter didn't even try to withstand its weight. The metal ceiling bent and shattered, adding power to the rain and sending everything to the grey floor.

Light shone among the rain. Lower Level 2 had better artificial illumination, but that only gave Khan, Rodney, and any bystander a better sight of the catastrophe.

The ceiling was short, so the rubble only took a second to reach the floor and make it suffer a terrible fate. Holes opened on the grey layer as giant boulders pierced it. Lower Level 2 never stood a chance, and the many secret passages under it also crumbled to add weight to the catastrophe.

The rain never managed to slow down permanently since its spreading destruction added weight to its overall structure, and the situation worsened once the path to Lower Level 3 opened. A long fall separated the boulders from the array of streets, which was bound to push their speed to disastrous levels.

Khan reached the top of the rain only to widen his eyes in terror at the sight of the dome. He couldn't keep track of everything during his climb, but that scene confirmed his arrival at Lower Level 3, which increased the amount of trouble he was in.

The dome probably was sturdy enough to withstand all those boulders, but Lower Level 3 had a structural flaw. The gate at its bottom might break during the disaster and leave no barriers between the fourth asteroid and space.

If the gate fell, most of the fourth asteroid would end up in space, which meant certain death. Khan couldn't do anything to avoid that, but he could strive to reach areas outside of that catastrophe.

Sadly for Khan, he had reached the end of the rain. He was out of boulders to use as footholds. He could only watch as the giant hole in the ceiling grew distant, without offering anything that might bring him into safe areas.

Khan didn't give up just yet. He didn't have solutions, but he could still try a few things. He knew he could walk on mana as long as it reached a certain density, and he hoped that his request would be enough to get him out of that disaster.

"Create a path," Khan asked while sending a whiff of his mana into the environment.

The synthetic mana listened to Khan's request and accumulated above him to create three irregular platforms. Of course, he had to use his sensitivity to see them, and they looked anything but stable, but they were the best he could accomplish for now.

Khan jumped toward the first platform, hoping that he could step on it. He even prepared another request for the synthetic mana. However, a pulling force suddenly affected his body, disturbing his trajectory and removing the invisible steps.

The rain continued to fall, so Khan found himself floating mid-air, without any foothold. A single jump seemed to have doomed him, but he couldn't focus on that detail for now. He was more worried about the complete absence of synthetic mana in the area.

Khan steeled his resolve and summoned his mana. His body began to spin on its own, and he waited until he faced the broken ceiling to launch a purple-red needle.

The spell didn't go far. It exploded when Khan was still in its range, but he had already crossed his arms and activated the [Blood Shield]. The small detonation pushed him downward, slamming him back on the boulders and granting him footholds again.

Khan ignored the pain and straightened his position to inspect the area, and what he was looking for quickly touched his sensitivity. The Nak's hand was also above the rain, and the mana it had absorbed made it impossible to miss.

The hand was quite far away from Khan, but he could reach it relatively quickly with his speed. Nevertheless, the boulders hit the array of streets at that point, and the rain condensed for an instant, making him lose his balance and eventual initiative.

Khan was torn between two threats now. The Nak's hand shone with an unfathomable amount of mana, and the heavy rubble pierced the streets to continue its descent toward the gate. The situation didn't offer any right decision, so he let go of any restraint and let his urges take over.

The mental state that Khan had managed to appreciate properly only on the battlefield returned to show its new depths. Khan transformed into a puppet ruled by his urges and shot at top speed toward the hand.

The boulders shook as they separated once again, but Khan adjusted his steps to those tremors to keep sprinting at full speed. His face burnt due to the friction generated by his acceleration, but he pressed on, adding even more power to his advance.

The Nak's hand quickly grew close. The clash with Khan was bound to happen in a few short seconds, but a deafening noise suddenly came out of the dome, and the pale-blue light of its surface began to flash with scarlet shades.

Both Khan and the hand suffered under that noise. It was too loud, but it only brought positive news. Khan couldn't see it, but some safety measures had activated, and a series of metal layers had come out of the gate's edges to seal it.

The alarm rang to no end, and the rain hit the bottom of the dome when Khan managed to ignore it. A force ready to break his legs and squash him climbed through the boulders as they fell on each other, and he noticed that in time to perform his evasive maneuver.

Khan jumped, putting as much power as possible into his gesture to disperse the momentum accumulated during the fall. Meanwhile, the rubble completely crashed on the dome and transformed into a tall and unstable metal mountain.

Somehow, the dome endured the crash and sheer weight of the rubble, allowing Khan to land safely on top of the metal mountain. Still, he wasn't alone there. The Nak's hand was also floating nearby.

Khan didn't have the time to sigh in relief. He raised his knife and prepared himself for the second round with the hand, but he wasn't the only one wanting a piece of that alien threat.

The rubble had covered a fifth of Lower Level 3. The celebrations had left it almost empty, but some crews still existed, and many had survived the catastrophe.

Multiple ships rose from the surviving streets and descended toward the metal mountain to surround Khan and the Nak's hand. In less than a minute, Khan found seventeen vehicles floating around him.

Warnings couldn't work in that situation, and the Nak's hand acted before Khan could even snap out of his peculiar mental state to develop a plan. The azure halo intensified, and lightning-like flares shot in every direction.

The hand had far more mana now. It was safe to assume that most of the energy between Lower Levels 2 and 3 had entered its flesh. The alien body part might not have completely absorbed it, but the superior power of its lightning bolts showed that it had used it.

Khan jumped backward, deciding to fall through the mountain instead of facing the attacks, but the ships didn't have his agility. The lightning bolts hit every vehicle and pierced them before continuing to fly toward the dome. Some also reached the streets, spreading even more destruction.

Most ships exploded on the spot, while a few released black fumes as they fell uncontrollably toward the streets, dome, or metal mountain. Another short pulling force also followed, draining the engines of the mana they had produced.

The metal mountain kept Khan safe, and he regained his footing fast enough to run through the rubble and point his eyes at the hand again. However, he discovered that the alien body part had already escaped his reach. It had begun to float toward the hole in the ceiling since it felt mana coming from it.

Khan's thoughts ran wildly. The intermediate floor was right under Lower Level 1. An opening might have appeared during the destruction, which would explain the presence of synthetic mana even after two attacks from the hand.

Still, that also explained the hand's next destination. It wanted to reach the city, and Khan couldn't even imagine how strong the alien body part would become if it absorbed all the mana there. He had to stop it or at least warn everyone about the imminent threat, but he had to find a way to the surface first.

Khan glanced at the array of streets. Panic had spread among the surviving crews, but that played in his favor. The disaster had made most workers abandon their posts, which left a few ships unprotected.

The plan formed on its own at that point. Khan sprinted through the rubble to reach an area that could bring him to the streets. Yet, a familiar presence suddenly entered his senses' range and forced him to stop to look at its source.

Khan turned only to see Rodney walking out of a narrow hole in the metal mountain. Heavy boulders floated around him and rotated to create simple shields, and blood flowed out of his nose non-stop.

Rodney seemed able to sense something since he also turned to look at Khan, and a broad smile immediately appeared on his face. A trace of insanity invaded his eyes as a laugh escaped his mouth.

"I'm in your debt once again," Rodney laughed. "So, are we going after that thing or not?"

Chapter 415 Slaughter

Rodney's survival surprised Khan. In theory, thoughts couldn't do much against metal, but there he was. Rodney even smiled proudly, and fervor filled his expression.

The question also hinted at a completely different stance. Rodney seemed to have awakened his thirst for battle during the disaster.

"What?" Rodney laughed as the boulders around him fell to the ground and joined the rubble. "Don't tell me that this short fall made you scared."

Blood kept flowing out of Rodney's nose, tainting the tattoos on his mouth before reaching his hoodie. He didn't care about any of that, but the event forced Khan to take notice of his state.

The assault on the Nak's hand had left Khan's arms full of burns and holes. One injury even ran through his forearm, creating a hideous spectacle that leaked blood. The needle spell had also dug away chunks of his skin, and his nose and cheeks itched due to the previous acceleration.

The frenzy pushed away the pain radiated by those injuries and kept Khan battle-ready. Yet, that state was bound to have a time limit, which would arrive faster if he allowed himself to rest.

Khan knew that his emotions would make him ignore his limits, but that was a danger on its own. He might kill himself if he went too overboard, but the situation didn't leave room for those worries.

"I'll leave you here if you don't keep up," Khan eventually announced before turning and resuming his sprint.

Rodney scoffed and wiped his nose with the back of his hand before chasing after Khan. Rodney was obviously slower than Khan, but losing ground didn't worry him. He was actually strangely calm and happy even while Khan got farther away.

Khan ran as fast as he could while the recent events played in his vision. He reviewed the hand's attacks and actions, hoping to find a weakness to exploit, but the situation didn't look good.

The Nak's hand on its own wasn't too strong. It wielded the power of a third or fourth-level mage, but Milia 222 had equally strong warriors. They weren't many, but they existed, and the celebrations had probably brought most of them to the fourth asteroid.

However, the ability to absorb mana was troublesome. The Nak's hand could overcome its structural limits with that skill. Moreover, removing energy from the environment would weaken some of Khan's potential allies. The Nele wouldn't be able to fight at full power without it.

The destruction of the intermediate floor also created a worrisome picture. The hand had known exactly how to shatter that metal, meaning that it had studied its texture before unleashing its attack.

In short, the Nak's hand was a sentient opponent with overwhelming control over the mana. Its set of skills was unclear and probably boundless, and Khan's most trustworthy allies would have problems helping him defeat it.

Rodney could help spread awareness to the rest of Milia 222's population, but Khan could already predict how the various species would react. The Orlats weren't reliable, and the Tors and Bise would probably never accept to cooperate against a common threat.

That left Khan with the Fuveall and humans, which wasn't too bad. Both species were incredible in their own ways. Getting their help was the only issue, but Rodney could play a valuable role there.

Khan kept his gaze straight, but part of his attention went on the man struggling to catch up with him. Something had changed inside Rodney, something that might make him useful in that catastrophe, but Khan hesitated to trust him.

The metal mountain was mostly uneven, with spikes growing from every corner. Most of them were too short to be of any use, but a few created makeshift staircases that could lead to the streets.

Khan went straight for the closest suitable path. The uneven and unstable terrain would usually slow him down, but he found himself growing faster and faster. Somehow, he already knew how the metal rubble would react to his weight, so he adjusted his steps according to those sensations.

Rodney was in the very opposite situation. He often lost his balance and fell since the ground under him slid or caved in, but he always stood up and resumed his chase. He even laughed whenever sharp rubble ended up cutting him.

Meanwhile, the chaos on the array of streets had intensified. The various crews were either running away or trying to contact their superiors. However, many knew how to reach Lower Level 2 only through the elevators, and they had crumbled or stopped working after the disaster.

As everyone realized the amount of damage caused by the disaster, the panic spread even more, and the lack of communication with the surface only worsened the situation. Those aware of secret passages for the superior levels found crowds chasing after them to avoid remaining stuck on the dock. Many even began to opt for the ships on the streets.

Khan climbed on one of the metal spikes and leaped forward to land on a broken street. Sparks came out of its broken edges, and the floor's dim light flickered due to the damage, but his attention immediately went to the mess that welcomed him.

The surviving buildings didn't allow Khan to gain a complete view of the area, but the shouts, screams, and cries that filled the streets described the situation well enough. Sharp surges of mana even happened in the distance, hinting at the presence of fights.

Khan wasn't there to bring peace to the dock, but that new chaos went against his goals. The array of streets had become dangerous, so he had to hurry to find a way out.

Finding available ships wasn't too hard. The lower areas of the streets had landing spots and similar platforms, but most of them contained cargo ships too big for Khan's needs.

Khan would settle for one of them if he ran out of options. Still, he had spotted suitable vehicles while on the metal mountain, so he ignored the closest ships to run toward deeper areas.

Khan's surroundings were mostly empty, but random people entered his vision or ran past him from time to time. No one bothered to waste time in pointless conversations, and the shouts continued to be the predominant sound in the area.

Eventually, Khan laid his eyes on something that met his standards. A district nearby had a small, triangular ship resting in a lower area. Yet, its streets weren't empty. Three Orlats were running through them to reach the vehicle.

The Orlats were closer to the ship, but they were only first-level warriors. Khan could probably catch up with them, and he didn't hesitate to try.

The Orlats hurriedly descended the staircases connected to the landing area and approached the ship. One of them opened the glass-like surface above the small cabin and jumped inside to tinker with the control desk.

Meanwhile, the alien's companions also jumped into the cabin and squeezed inside it before pulling down the glass. The ship only had two seats, but the Orlats were small enough to fit.

The single, spherical engine on the ship's back turned on and released mana. Whooshing noises enveloped the landing area as the vehicle began to set off. It even left the floor at some point, but a glowing spear exploded above it and pushed it back down.

The ship didn't suffer any damage during the forced landing. Still, the Orlats inside it widened their eyes in fear when a figure flew from the streets and landed on the glass. A glowing knife even pierced that transparent surface, creating cracks that threatened to expand at the slightest movement.

Khan supported himself on the knife and placed his feet on the glass before smacking his free hand on it. The gesture attracted the three Orlats' attention, and Khan explained himself by pointing his thumb down.

The gesture didn't have the intended effect. Khan's abrupt and violent landing only terrified the Orlats, and the pilot even tried to set off again, but the glass shattered before the ship could leave the floor.

The falling shards forced the Orlats to raise their arms to protect their faces, and more fear arrived when they lowered them. The pilot wanted to get his hands back on the steering wheel, but he found a foot on it, and lifting his eyes revealed the rest of Khan's figure.

"Out," Khan ordered while standing on the steering wheel and cabin's edge. His knife was already glowing, so the Orlats didn't dare to mess around.

"W-, we can-" The pilot tried to say something, but the leg on the cabin's edge shot forward to deliver a precise kick on his jaw.

The attack made the Orlats fly out of the seat and land outside the ship. Khan had held himself back to avoid killing him, but the remaining two aliens understood that they had to go anyway.

Khan jumped off the steering wheel once the two Orlats left the ship and grabbed their fainted companion to approach the metal staircase. Faint curses left their mouths, but Khan didn't mind them. He had actually done them a favor, but he didn't have time to waste explaining himself.

Khan used his foot to remove the glass shards from the pilot's seat before storing the knife and sitting behind the steering wheel. He had already recognized the ship's model. The vehicle was a fast ride with two small wings on its sides, and he knew how to pilot it.

Keys beeped in Khan's vision. The destruction of the glass had triggered a series of safety measures that hindered the set-off, and he took a few seconds to study the control desk to plan his next move.

'Enforce complete manual control first,' Khan eventually decided before scouring his memory to recall the code required for that type of ship.

Khan pressed a combination of keys until the control desk turned from azure to red. He had overridden the safety measures, so he began to insert new commands needed for the set-off.

"Can you really fly it?" Rodney's voice resounded from the streets above while Khan was still messing with the control desk. Of course, he had already sensed his arrival.

Khan ignored the question, but a thudding noise followed it, announcing Rodney's landing next to the ship. He had jumped off the streets above, and he didn't hesitate to climb on the vehicle to take his seat behind Khan.

The engine whooshed before Rodney could ask another question, and the ship began to rise when Khan pulled the steering wheel down. The vehicle soon surpassed the streets, and Khan instinctively spread his legs to cling them to his seat's sides.

"Wait, aren't you putting your belt on?" Rodney asked, and the ship gave him the answer he sought.

Khan pressed a key on the steering wheel before pushing the latter forward. The ship immediately accelerated, and a violent gust of wind blew through the cabin, sending away the shards lying at its bottom.

Rodney grabbed Khan's seat in panic, and that feeling only intensified when he peeked past it. A building that marked the end of the district was growing close, and the ship was on a collision course with it.

"Turn! Turn!" Rodney shouted before regretting to have spoken those words.

Khan couldn't help but smile when he spun the steering wheel. The right wing rose to bring the ship to its side and allow it to perform a sharp turn. The vehicle dodged the building, but Rodney was in no position to enjoy the event.

When the ship spun, Rodney slid away and risked falling off, but his grip on Khan's seat ended up saving his life. He clung desperately onto the tough fake leather while his legs fluttered in the wind, and his desperate cry for help remained stuck in his throat when he noticed Khan's thrilled expression.

Khan could barely contain his emotions. The wind on his face and the strength required to keep him on his seat brought him back to Nitis. He didn't have a feathered back under him, and metal surrounded him, but that was the closest he could get to what he had experienced with Snow.

The ship was still in the buildings' range, and another tall structure soon appeared on its path, but Khan promptly spun the steering wheel before pulling it as hard as he could.

The vehicle regained its horizontal stance, pushing Rodney back into the cabin. Still, he only had the time to sit before the ship rose until it went completely vertical.

Rodney recalled his training on Nitis during that sharp rise. He clung to the seat with his legs before reaching for the safety belts and fastening them in a hurry. He finally managed to relax at that point, but Khan made that feeling short-lived.

The hole in Lower Level 3's ceiling was immense, and the same went for Lower Level 2. However, Khan needed to go even higher, and he didn't know if a passage that could fit his ship existed.

The ship flew through the first gap and crossed Lower Level 2 in mere seconds before reaching the same heights as the intermediate floor. A mess of narrow and hidden passages had become clear after the disaster, but Khan kept his gaze straight to look for an opening.

The areas above the intermediate floor had crumbled, but the path to the surface was still closed, at least for ships. A cracked ceiling with a few man-sized holes stood at the very edge of the destruction, and Khan's ship was flying right into it.

Khan quickly inspected the holes before relying on his sensitivity. The gaps were big enough for the Nak's hand, and synthetic mana even seeped out of it. Moreover, that energy carried the countless features added by the celebration.

That synthetic mana had probably attracted the Nak's hand, and Khan saw it as proof that Lower Level 1 stood right above him. He only needed to create a passage.

"What are you doing?!" Rodney shouted when Khan left the steering wheel and lifted his legs to crouch on the seat.

The ship was vertical, so Khan slowly stood on the seat's back while mana flowed between his joint palms. He knew he could dig a hole in that surface. That was one of the first things he had confirmed on Milia 222.

Luke couldn't refuse Raymond's offer, so his group flew to the highest areas of the stage, where some workers had put together three large platforms.

The cabs had enough space to land comfortably, and a few crews welcomed the group with drinks before escorting everyone to a long, interactive table with seats only on one side.

The table had screens depicting the events on the square and enough room for food or other items. Luke and the others only had to choose how they wanted to watch the celebrations while the crews began to serve various refreshments.

Small talks went by before the celebrations began. Seven multicolored pillars came out of the square, and smoke soon flowed inside them. The gas followed the lights and gained their shades until it spread to blend them.

The smoke seemed alive as it followed precise directions that made the various shades generate incredible images. At first, the gas depicted the seven asteroids before zooming on the fourth and pressing on.

The picture completely changed after reaching the asteroid's rocky surface. The smoke began to depict the first floor and the city below while continuing to zoom on a replica of the very square it was in. It even showed the platforms and staircases occupied by the audience.

Then, when the square filled the entirety of the picture, fireworks shot through the smoke and exploded among the staircases to create bright and moving images. Strange animals, flags, and other figures shone on the audience, who had already started to cheer and clap.

Luke couldn't focus on the celebrations and often diverted his gaze to check Khan's devices and his phone. The ships hired to follow him had seen him disappear inside a small shop, but no updates had come since then.

The tracker on Khan worked for a long time but eventually went dark. Luke had to suppress a curse at that sight, but he didn't let panic overwhelm him. That outcome had always been a strong possibility.

Minutes went by in which the celebrations continued peacefully. Luke did his best to appear happy and exchange casual chats with his uncle or companions, but he never missed the chance to check his devices. Sadly for him, the tracker didn't light up.

Eventually, an earthquake hit the square and spread through the entirety of Lower Level 1. Luke and the others in the air actually had to hear the rest of the audience's screams to notice it, but no one panicked or left the staircases. Many even believed the event to be part of the celebrations.

That belief vanished when cracks opened on the square. A few crews were performing an athletically demanding spectacle there, and seeing them run away told everyone that the situation wasn't scripted.

Chaos spread on the square. The staircases were already packed, so leaving them quickly wasn't an option. Most people remained stuck on those tall structures, but their problems had only begun.

Luke and the others in the air studied the situation calmly. They were outside the danger's range and had ships nearby, so they had no reason to run away until they understood what was happening.

Random questions flew, but no answers arrived. The people in the air could only keep their eyes on the cracked square and wait. Still, when the source of the earthquake became clear, they also experienced the same panic as the rest of the audience.

The square had fallen into complete chaos by the time a glowing, six-fingered hand flew through one of its gaps and strode upward. The mess would typically make many people miss the event, but the Nak's body part was too bright to ignore, so everyone turned to inspect it.

The Nak's hand rose until it reached the halfway point of the staircases. Silence fell while everyone held their breath to try to understand what was happening, and the alien body part seemed to share that mindset. Everything remained still, but the calm didn't last long.

Someone among the crowd eventually shouted the word "Nak" in their language, and panic even stronger than before arrived. The messy and dangerous escape resumed, but the hand had decided what to do by then.

Dozens of azure lightning bolts shot out of the hand to target many crowded areas. Some even flew toward the ships and platforms above the staircases, and a slaughter unfolded.

Luke widened his eyes when he noticed a lightning bolt flying toward his platform. He felt the urge to move, but he was too slow to do anything about the situation. His instincts made him glance in Master Ivor's direction, but someone else stepped forward to deal with the threat.

Everyone in Luke's group stared in amazement at Raymond's figure standing proudly at the platform's edge. Smoke came out of his stretched right arm, but waving it revealed its intact state. Even his elegant suit had remained in one piece.

The scene made the group think about Khan since he had done something similar with Francis, but the situation didn't allow those comparisons. A single glance at the square could fill anyone with dread. Raymond had been there for Luke's group, but the rest of the audience wasn't so lucky.

Fuming and charred corpses now occupied various areas of the square and staircases. Some ships and platforms fell due to the damage suffered during the attack, and the Nak's hand even released a deep noise to announce its successful offensive.

Most of the audience continued its desperate escape, but a few figures decided to deal with that alien threat. Leaders from different factions stepped forward to show their stance against their common opponent.

Second and third-level warriors took their place on platforms, ships, and staircases and summoned spells that they didn't hesitate to launch toward the hand. Attacks of various natures and colors flew through the square to converge on the alien body part, and someone even fired guns at it.

However, the clash only generated loud sizzling noises that the crowd's shouts and cries couldn't cover. The Nak's hand stopped the attacks before they could pierce its skin, and various sparks left its flesh to begin the absorption of mana.

In a few seconds, the Nak's hand sucked the spells dry and launched another series of lightning bolts fueled by the very mana it had absorbed. Needless to say, many died under that assault, but most of the warriors involved in the previous offensive managed to dodge the attacks.

The various leaders held back from attacking again and did their best to exchange glances. One assault had been enough to confirm that a random offensive couldn't take down the Nak's hand. They needed a plan, even if that meant cooperating with enemy factions.

Of course, the hand didn't stay still for long. It had taken a break to study the situation again, but it eventually decided on a course of action. The remaining mana inside it even moved to prepare for the attack, but something under it attracted its attention and interrupted the process.

A piece of the square exploded into a mess of purple-red light and smoke, and a small ship flew through them. The vehicle was completely vertical, so it only took a few seconds to cross the Nak's hand and reveal the people inside it.

Rodney had yet to decide if he was terrified or excited, but the ship was going too fast for him to think. Meanwhile, Khan stood on the back of the pilot's seat, and his eyes quickly found the Nak's hand before moving to another scene that claimed his attention.

Raymond was on the platform's edge, so Luke's group couldn't see his face. Yet, when the two exchanged glances, Khan could study every detail in his expression. Raymond couldn't look any happier.

Chapter 416 Landing

Time slowed down in Khan's eyes. His efforts and the dangers faced in the past months led to that moment, with Raymond's happy face waiting on the finishing line.

A sense of defeat tried to invade Khan. Raymond had won. That much was undeniable. Khan had been nothing more than a variable immersed in a bigger plan, and he had ended up delivering exactly what Raymond wanted.

Nevertheless, the presence of the Nak's hand made Khan unable to fall prey to the sense of defeat. His mental state was currently unshakable, but that only led to sourer conclusions. Khan could think clearly, so he knew that Raymond was his best bet at defeating that troublesome opponent.

Raymond appeared almost proud to see Khan joining the battlefield. To Khan's surprise, he even managed to muster a nod while the hand kept everyone distracted.

The urge to jump at Raymond showed its presence, but Khan immediately disregarded it. He had bigger problems to handle, and they required him to swallow his pride for the time being.

Raymond's smile broadened when Khan diverted his gaze to assess the situation. The square was a mess of fuming corpses, cracks, and screaming people. Ships had crashed on the staircases, and trails of smoke surged behind them.

There wasn't much to say about the situation. Most of the people in the square were simply useless. They might even become a hindrance to any potential plan, but the scene carried some hope.

Khan's arrival had been quite theatrical, and many of those who had tried to take down the Nak's hand couldn't help but focus on him. That gave Khan a vague idea of the number of warriors willing to fight, which turned out to be far higher than his initial prediction.

The Tors were nowhere to be seen, but a few Bise disregarded the panicking crowd and held their ground while moving their eyes between Khan and the Nak's hand. The same went for some Orlats, who mostly wielded guns already pointed at the alien body part.

Humans and Fuveall were the majority among those willing to fight, and a small group of Nele also stood proud while waiting to decide what to do next. The latter actually was the calmer team for obvious reasons.

Khan recognized some familiar faces among the various warriors. Awiza, Ta-ei, Maban, Jenna, and others who had interacted with Khan in the past months were in the square, and they were ready to fight.

That group wasn't too big and featured only a few third-level warriors. Still, the presence of almost every species could give birth to spectacular cooperation as long as everyone could express their innate qualities.

The unexpected outcome made sense when Khan thought about it. The celebrations brought together multiple factions with deep ties to the asteroids. It was only expected that they would defend it against any threat.

However, the full power of those factions was still unclear since only a few leaders had decided to step forward. Moreover, it would take a miracle to establish proper cooperation. Khan also needed a reliable plan, but he knew where to get that.

"Khan! The street! The street!" Rodney shouted while Khan was busy inspecting the square.

One of the giant streets on the first floor expanded in Khan's vision when he raised his eyes. The ship was on a collision course with that massive structure, and the crash was bound to happen soon due to the high speed.

Khan spread his legs to abandon his footholds, and the seat's back almost instantly landed on his butt. The pressure generated by the high speed hindered his movements, but his training with Snow allowed him to adjust his position and get his hands on the steering wheel.

Rodney shouted in excitement when the ship made a backflip that left it upside down. Khan smirked when he heard that cry, but his face regained its coldness as soon as he looked at his destination.

Raymond was still at the platform's edge. Chaos had spread everywhere, and the group behind him had also started to panic, but he remained unfazed. He behaved like a mere spectator to that terrible crisis.

Khan couldn't help but scoff as he dived toward Raymond's platform while making the ship regain a normal stance. He had to ask that mysterious and unpredictable figure how to defeat the hand, and something told him that he would get answers.

Nevertheless, Khan's sudden arrival could only buy so much time. The Nak's hand snapped out of its surprise and resorted to its most annoying ability in that confusing situation.

Khan's eyes widened when he felt a soft pull. He didn't move, and the same went for the ship, but he knew what had happened and what would follow.

The synthetic mana in a radius that went far beyond the square disappeared, ending inside the Nak's hand. Every trace of energy in the air vanished, and the many engines suffered a similar fate.

Khan's thoughts raced when he saw the control desk going dark. He could sense that the tank still had synthetic mana, but the sudden disappearance of energy from the engine had turned the ship off.

The issue didn't affect only Khan's ship. The vehicles in the ability's range and the platforms also went dark. The latter even saw their tanks turning empty since they had fewer protections against those attacks.

"Khan?" Rodney asked when he noticed that the ship began to turn downward.

Khan pressed a few keys, but nothing worked. The ship had turned into a metal cage ready to crash on Lower Level 1.

"We must jumpstart the engine!" Khan shouted once he found an option that might solve the problem.

"Jumpstart what?" Rodney responded.

"Hit the damn thing!" Khan explained.

Rodney would typically avoid danger, but he was already strapped to a falling ship. Also, he felt heavily inclined to follow Khan's orders after surviving the disaster, so he unfastened the safety belt and did his best to turn without losing his grip on the seat.

The back of the ship wasn't crawling-friendly, especially at that speed. Its surface was smooth, lacking any handhold or similar spot. Still, the vehicle was small, so Rodney only had to cross a short distance to reach the engine.

Khan would have never left that task to Rodney, but he needed to be behind the control desk once the engine turned on. As for Rodney, he revealed his resourcefulness, and Khan had the chance to admire it a bit when he turned.

The back of the ship didn't have handholds, so Rodney created them. He stabbed his fingers into the vehicle's metal and pressed himself down through his thoughts while crawling toward the engine. His advance was clumsy and slow, but Khan couldn't really complain.

Rodney was basically lying on the ship's back when he reached the engine, and he mustered the entirety of his courage to let go of one handhold to deliver a slap.

The engine shook slightly, but nothing happened, and Rodney promptly conveyed his worry. "It didn't do anything!"

"Hit it harder!" Khan shouted. "Hit it until it turns itself on!"

Rodney followed the orders even if he didn't know the reason behind them. In short, the slaps were meant to push some synthetic mana into the engine. The machine would handle the rest afterward.

The second slap didn't lead anywhere, and the same went for the third. The ship continued to descend in the meantime, and its tip had started to tilt toward the floor. The crash seemed inevitable, but a whooshing noise reached Khan's ears when Rodney hit the engine a fourth time.

The control desk lit up, and Khan punched a few keys before pulling the steering wheel. The ship regained its horizontal stance, and Khan made it slow down so that Rodney could jump back on his seat.

The chaos in the square intensified while Khan and Rodney tinkered with their ship. The absorption of mana had made many vehicles and platforms fall, bringing panic even where there had once been calm.

Raymond had to move once his platform began to fall, and he nodded in approval when he saw that Luke had already led his companions to the ships nearby. Those vehicles had been turned off, so the pilots could activate them without issues.

The fall of the platforms forced the entirety of Luke's group to gather on a single ship. The vehicle didn't have enough room for all of them, but Master Ivor opted to go on the roof, and Bruce and Monica imitated him.

Luke's ship was fairly large, so it managed to set off even with that extra weight. As for Raymond, he performed an incredible sprint that brought him before another ship that the pilot had already turned on.

The members of the crews on those platforms weren't as lucky. They moved toward the last free ship when they saw that their employers had discarded it, but they weren't as fast as Raymond. The floor under their feet soon tilted sharply, making them fall into the destruction below.

The crews weren't the only ones to fall. They actually had plenty of company due to the air traffic caused by the celebrations and disaster. Ships and platforms crashed everywhere, with merely a couple of them managing to jumpstart their engines to avoid hitting the city.

Of course, most ships were crash-proof, and the city had enough buildings to dampen the landings. The lack of mana running through the various engines also prevented random explosions, which preserved many lives.

Yet, the Nak's hand was full of energy after absorbing the mana in that vast area, so an offensive arrived. Lightning-like flares shot forward, and Khan barely had the time to prepare the landing when one of those attacks crashed on the ship's tip.

A wave of black smoke invaded Khan's vision and forced him to close his eyes. The absence of synthetic mana in his surroundings made his sensitivity unreliable, so he used the pressure landing on him to gain a vague idea of the ship's movements.

Sadly for Khan, the pressure alone wasn't enough to make him fly blind. His hands remained on the steering wheel, but he could only do his best to keep the ship horizontal.

Rodney voiced cries that Khan couldn't describe with a single adjective. Some shouts made him sound excited, while others resembled complaints. Still, everything turned silent when the ship crashed on a firm surface, forcing both men to hold strong.

The ship's metal screamed as it bent and broke during the crash, but nothing flew toward Khan. When everything stopped, he didn't sense any new injury on himself, but the smoke had increased, and it took him a few seconds to exit it.

Khan took a deep breath when he gained access to clean air. He rubbed his eyes before opening them, and his surroundings became clear. He had landed inside the square, near the staircases' base, and his ship had lost both wings.

Rodney coughed as he stumbled out of the ship before straightening his position and coughing again. He reached Khan, but the destruction around him prevented him from speaking. He was at the very center of the chaos, with the Nak's hand standing in the air behind him.

Khan noticed how the latest attack had taken more lives while also bringing together a few factions. Part of the crowd had given up on escaping and had begun to reach the various leaders to create joint fronts. Some Orlats had even teamed up with humans, but no one attacked just yet.

Various gazes fell on Khan even after the landing, but he only paid attention to the Nele in the distance before turning toward the whooshing noises above him. Two ships were descending toward him, and he recognized both of them.

"Lieutenant Khan!" Master Ivor called from the top of one of the ships. "We must leave! Mister Cobsend's ship has room for both of you."

Master Ivor was sure that an evacuation was necessary, but the second ship startled him when it continued to descend until it landed on the lowest part of the staircases. Its side door then opened, and Raymond crossed it to enter the square.

Khan ignored the first ship to march toward Raymond, and Rodney hesitated for a second before following him. Raymond calmly straightened his suit while the two men jumped on the staircase to reach him.

"Rodney Semmut and Lieutenant Khan," Raymond announced once the two men stood before him. "You two make a surprisingly good team."

Raymond showed a smile that made both men wear cold faces. They were at the center of a battlefield, but Raymond was perfectly calm. Even the sight of the corpses didn't faze him.

"Do we need to play these games even now?" Khan asked.

"Oh, Khan," Raymond voiced. "Nothing I do is a game."

Raymond glanced at the Nak's hand in the distance at that point, and the two men did the same. The alien body part had gone silent after its last attack, but its break would end soon.

"How do I kill it?" Khan went straight to the point as he brought his eyes back to Raymond.

"Kill it?" Raymond wondered. "That thing is not alive."

"Fine," Khan sighed. "How do I make it stop?"

"Brute force should work," Raymond suggested, "As long as you can pierce through that defensive shield."

"There has to be another way," Khan stated. "It must have a weakness."

"It does," Raymond said, and a mysterious meaning joined his smile. "That hand can absorb mana from the environment. You should be able to do the same with its flesh."

Chapter 417 Assault

Rodney was out of his depth. He couldn't follow the conversation, and standing before Raymond took the entirety of his courage. He wouldn't even be able to pull that off without Khan. After all, Raymond had the power to destroy his hopes for political redemption with a single phone call.

As for Khan, he struggled to accept Raymond's words, but he had to admit that they made some sense. He had confirmed that he shared far more than azure shades with the Nak, and those similarities might make him able to replicate the hand's annoying ability.

Khan glanced at the Nak's hand before bringing his eyes back to Raymond. His level of control over the mana probably made that plan feasible, but he couldn't accomplish it from far away. He would need to be as close as possible to hope to succeed, and the sizzling barrier remained an issue.

The last discharge of lightning bolts gave Khan the time to think about the situation, but it wouldn't be long before the hand decided to move again. He had to devise a plan quickly, but distractions continued to arrive.

The second ship had Bruce, Master Ivor, and Monica sitting on its roof. It had even gotten closer to the staircases after Raymond's landing, so everyone above and inside could see that Khan had no intention of escaping.

Bruce and Master Ivor already had experience in disasters, so they kept their cool while waiting for the situation in the square to evolve. Yet, that was Monica's first time in the middle of a tragedy, and seeing the poor state of Khan's arms made her move before she could even realize what she was doing.

Monica's landing attracted the trio's attention, but only Khan noticed the surprised expression that flashed on her face for less than a second. Monica couldn't believe that she had thrown herself into the square, but she hid her confusion when she began to approach Khan and the others.

Monica was the last person Khan wanted to see in the square since the area had turned into a dangerous, bloody battlefield. He wouldn't have the power to protect or even check up on her while he fought, but it was too late to worry now.

"You shouldn't be here, Miss Solodrey," Raymond was the first to speak when Monica reached the group. "The situation is quite unstable."

"That's why I've come down to help," Monica politely responded. "I wouldn't be worthy of my family name if I just ran away."

"Mister Raymond is right," Khan added. "We barely know what we are up against."

"More firepower won't hurt," Monica stated while smiling casually to hide her glare at Khan.

"Miss Solodrey, you might get in the way," Khan declared, hoping that his rude words could get through Monica's stubbornness.

"I am the proud descendant of the Solodrey family, Lieutenant Khan," Monica responded without hiding the faint annoyance seeping into her voice. "I'm afraid you don't have the authority to tell me where I should be."

"I was talking from a purely strategic perspective," Khan explained.

"Which sounded like an insult to my training and status," Monica rebuked.

"You know I didn't mean that," Khan exclaimed.

"And what did you mean?" Monica asked. "Besides, you have a better chance of becoming a hindrance since your arms are about to fall off."

"I'm fine," Khan reassured while stretching his arms. "I've fought in worse conditions."

"And with less battle experience," Monica continued. "So, how come I shouldn't get the chance to defend Milia 222?"

Monica knew exactly what Khan wanted to say, even if he never voiced those words. He simply couldn't in Rodney and Raymond's presence. He could only hold his tongue and accept that Monica was now part of the battlefield.

Rodney and Raymond could smell the awkwardness in the air. The Nak's hand was still at the center of the square, ready to make its next move, but Khan and Monica had chosen to waste time bickering.

Moreover, as much as Khan and Monica had tried to hide it, their conversation had still revealed something. The two didn't say anything specific, but they sounded too used to bickering.

"Where do you even find the time?" Rodney commented when a vague idea formed in his mind.

"Lieutenant Khan, your profile doesn't do you any justice," Raymond chuckled.

Khan and Monica ignored those comments while their exchange of glances continued. They wanted to say far more, but their conversation would have to wait. Milia 222 might lose an asteroid if they wasted even more time.

"Mister Raymond," Khan called when he diverted his gaze to look at the floating hand again, "Will you help us?"

"What do you have in mind?" Raymond voiced.

"Brute force," Khan announced, "And your last suggestion."

"It will take more than me to pull that off," Raymond uttered while looking at the hand. "Its shield seems quite strong."

"We need the help of the entire square," Khan revealed before turning toward Rodney. "I need you to convince the various factions to attack simultaneously."

"They just did," Rodney pointed out. "Adding people might not change anything."

"That's why we need to keep the assault going for a while," Khan explained. "That thing must have limits, especially when its flesh lacks mana."

"Flesh?" Raymond repeated. "Can you sense its state from down here?"

Khan glanced at Raymond before heaving a sigh and voicing a vague answer. "It's hard to miss it."

Raymond's smile widened, but he didn't add anything. He appeared proud, but Khan couldn't confirm that due to the bottomless darkness radiated by his emotions. Reading him was impossible, so Khan could only hope for the best.

"The square is a bit too big for me," Rodney admitted.

"You'll take care of the human factions," Khan ordered before turning toward Monica. "You dealt with Awiza. See if you can convince her and the Orlats to stick around."

"I believe you'll take care of the Nele," Monica stated, wearing a fake smile that Khan did his best to ignore.

"I'll take care of protecting them," Khan revealed, "At least until I find my chance to dive in."

"Dive in?" Monica promptly questioned, but Khan had already turned again to sprint toward the second ship.

"Lieutenant Khan," Master Ivor called once Khan arrived under the ship, "It's not safe down there."

"Can you contact the Fuveall for me?" Khan asked. "I need them to join the offensive."

"You know my priorities," Master Ivor declared.

"You can drop the others in a safe area before sending the ship here," Khan suggested. "I just need someone to deliver the message."

One of the windows on the ship's side went down, and Luke peeked past it before announcing his stance. "Khan, just tell me what you need."

"I need you to go somewhere safe," Khan declared. "The same goes for the other first-level warriors. They'd be dead meat if that thing shoots more lightning bolts."

"Alright," Luke quickly accepted, "But I'm sending the ship back to contact the Fuveall."

"Make it fly low," Khan warned. "It might save it from an unexpected crash."

Luke nodded, and the ship took off to reach the streets on the first floor. Meanwhile, Khan returned to his companions on the ground to deliver one last order. "Hurry up before that thing does something."

"Well, it can't be worse than flying with you," Rodney announced before turning to run toward the closest human team.

"Don't do anything reckless, Lieutenant Khan," Monica said as her voice gained teasing tones. "You insulted my pride. You need to be alive to make up for it."

"Hey, be careful," Khan voiced.

"Right back at you," Monica smiled before leaving in the direction of the Orlats.

Khan stared at Monica's departing figure before looking at Raymond again. The latter had smiled during the entire process, and he seemed to have no intention of adding anything to the plan.

"That's it?" Khan felt forced to ask. "You must have spent a fortune to purchase and fix this prototype. Are you really okay with us shooting it down?"

"It's too crowded to throw such accusations," Raymond exclaimed. "Also, every scientist knows that field tests always become necessary at some point."

"So, will you take this loss?" Khan wondered.

"There is no loss," Raymond joked. "You should know why."

Khan didn't answer. Raymond wanted to see what would happen after Khan absorbed the hand, and that didn't deserve a reply. Actually, it was better to cut the conversation short before his pride became too big to swallow.

"We will need your support during the offensive," Khan warned before looking at the purple areas. The Nele were on the other side of the square, and Khan planned to take the shortest route to them.

The square had debris, corpses, and crumbled ships, but Khan could overcome all of that with his agility. The hand was the only real danger in that shorter route, but he felt ready to face it to reach the Nele.

It felt strange to run in an environment so devoid of mana. The various people in the square and the vehicles' broken tanks were slowly leaking energy, but that was still far from what Khan had grown used to.

The environment appeared somewhat dead without its energy, but the many people on the staircases kept the symphony alive. Sadly for Khan, he wasn't the only one able to sense them.

The hand had completed its inspection long ago, but it had remained silent and still anyway. The remaining mana in its flesh flowed without showing specific patterns, so predicting its next move was impossible.

Those movements didn't cause any reaction in the outside world. Khan could run past the hand without sensing anything odd, and the faces immersed in the purple halo slowly grew bigger in his vision.

Jenna had wanted to leave her team ever since Khan's theatrical entrance, but multiple issues had forced her to remain. The lightning bolts and the sudden disappearance of mana had put her in a difficult spot, and Maban had chosen to restrain her when her emotions risked taking over her actions.

However, Jenna calmed down when she saw Khan running toward her. She was about to reunite with him, and the seriousness on his face told her that she didn't have to abandon her post.

Jenna revealed a stunning smile, but a frown soon took control of her expression. She didn't feel anything specific, but her gaze instinctively rose toward the hand. She could almost predict that something would happen, and Khan didn't miss that meaningful gesture.

Khan turned to look at the hand above him only to be interrupted by an abrupt pulling force. The technique lasted for a fraction of a second but was far stronger than before, and the darkening scenery revealed its new features.

The various buildings around the square went dark, and the same went for the street lamps, vehicles, and roads. Even the illuminated areas of the sidewalks lost their light.

Khan was looking at the hand, so he could inspect the street on the first floor, and his mind almost froze when he saw it going dark. The pulling force had now affected a far wider area, and it didn't stop at the mana in the air. It had sucked dry any structure or machine relying on that energy.

A helpless shout tried to enter Khan's mind but found no available room. He felt only coldness and surprise seeing a large portion of Lower Level 1 losing its light. The Nak's hand had gotten stronger, and it wasn't clear if it would ever stop improving.

Nevertheless, Khan noticed something strange. The Nak's hand would typically store all that synthetic mana inside its flesh, but Khan found it lingering outside its skin. That huge mass of energy had created a vast, spherical area that spread faint azure light.

At first, Khan believed that the improved technique featured limitations, but that thought crumbled when he sensed an almost clear voice echoing through the synthetic mana. He even recognized it. Someone had made a powerful request, preventing that energy from entering the hand.

Khan only had to turn toward the group of Nele to find the source of that request. Caja stood on the dark staircase with an arm lifted into the air and eyes closed shut to achieve complete focus.

The Nak's hand released a deep noise that resembled an angry scream. The synthetic mana was right there, but the alien body part couldn't absorb it as long as Caja's spell remained active.

Khan accelerated as much as possible since the square had turned into a danger zone, but things didn't go as planned. He had hoped to achieve complete cooperation among the species, but someone fired a gun once the scream ended, and many shots followed.

The first bullet pierced through the synthetic mana and landed on the hand, which remained unaffected due to the sizzling shield. The second shot achieved similar results and the thirty that followed also failed to put a scratch on the barrier.

The Nak's hand even locked those bullets in their place before generating the circular sparks meant to absorb the mana inside them. Still, more attacks arrived, which rendered Caja's efforts useless.

The synthetic mana stuck around the hand carried Caja's request, and the attacks that flew through it disturbed its flow. That energy began to disperse and shoot in every direction, which ultimately made Caja's spell too weak to affect that vast area.

Mana flowed and expanded through the square, overwhelming the staircases and stretching behind them. Lower Level 1 regained its usual environment, but Khan didn't take any joy in that, especially since the hand was still trapping many attacks on its surfaces.

Khan ran as fast as possible, but the hand reacted before he could reach the Nele. All the attacks and bullets stuck in its circular sparks suddenly disappeared, and new ones quickly took their place, but it was too late now. The alien body part had refilled its mana reserves.

Countless masses of mana gathered around the hand while attacks continued to land on it. Some managed to interrupt the process, but many didn't, so a storm of lightning bolts eventually shot out.

Khan liked that he could rely on his sensitivity again, but the scene it depicted was far from happy. A rain of fast flares shot in every direction, forcing him to zig-zag through the square while explosions reached his ears. Screams soon followed, but he found some comfort in the fact that the Nele had mana to use.

The offensive filled the square and staircases with smoke and holes. Seeing clearly became impossible, but Khan could move comfortably as long as the environment had mana. He eventually reached his destination, and a warm figure fell into his arms before he could open his eyes.

"[I'm not leaving you ever again]," Jenna announced as she tightened the hug on Khan's neck.

"[Jenna, floating hand that shoots lightning bolts]," Khan reminded.

"[Coming here was dangerous]," Maban exclaimed as the smoke on the staircases began to disperse.

"[I wanted to coordinate an attack]," Khan explained as Jenna left his arms and allowed him to turn toward the hand. "[That plan failed]."

The latest lightning bolts had taken many lives, but the entirety of the square had gone to full battle mode afterward. Everyone fired weapons or threw spells at the hand without managing to achieve much.

Someone always followed up with more attacks, so the joint offensive never stopped. In a way, the square was cooperating to take down the hand, but the sizzling barrier held strong.

The never-ending offensive was preventing the hand from absorbing the mana from the city, but the attacks trapped on its surface continued to provide fuel.

Khan joined his palms and poured mana between them as the offensive continued. As expected, the Nak's hand soon released another wave of flares, but he had the chaos spear ready by then, and throwing it forward generated a pillar that blocked many attacks.

Caja focused on sending the synthetic mana away while the rest of the Nele summoned attacks that the environment inevitably weakened. Still, Khan was among them, and he provided as much support as possible.

The battlefield fell into a seemingly inescapable cycle. The people in the square would fire everything they had at the hand, and the sizzling barrier would block it, allowing the circular sparks to absorb that mana.

The absorbed mana fueled lightning-like flares that shot in every direction, and the cycle would restart. As long as the sizzling barrier existed, the Nak's hand could endure any attack and turn it against its source.

Khan focused on defense while continuing to study the situation. He threw chaos spear after chaos spear whenever he knew the hand was about to unleash its power, but that never fixed the initial issue.

The whole offensive would be pointless if the barrier remained up, and Khan scoured his mind to find something that might work. However, he would need to get up close to execute those plans, and the hand was mid-air, surrounded by a barrage of incoming attacks.

Right now, the hand was unapproachable, and the messy state of the battlefield made a cease-fire impossible. Everyone was firing freely, hoping that their bullets would do something different than the previous.

Khan killed his thoughts and immersed his mind in the chaos of the battlefield. He needed a viable path that could lead him to the hand, but he couldn't find anything. There were too many incoming attacks.

That situation obviously couldn't last forever. The lightning bolts always managed to kill someone, and the audience was bound to run out of mana eventually. That offensive wasn't sustainable for too long, so Khan felt that he needed a solution immediately.

Reinforcements arrived at some point. The central structure sent ships that encircled the square and added their firepower to the joint offensive. The hand was literally submerged in a wave of attacks, and its defenses finally started to give in.

Khan was in no condition to rejoice, but new strength filled his body when he saw the offensive pushing the hand toward the floor. That cracked surface broke due to the many explosions, but the attacks kept flowing.

The arrival of the ships made the offensive so intense that the lightning bolts struggled to reach the square. The hand was completely overwhelmed, which forced it to switch tactics.

Khan and some Nele were the first to notice the different behavior. The hand had stopped sending lightning bolts and had focused everything on amassing mana.

The barrier inevitably suffered under that unrestrained assault, and holes opened in it, finally inflicting some damage on the hand. Of course, the area had too much mana and lights to check the alien body part's condition, but the square was doing it. The audience was defeating that threat.

Khan sensed that the hand was accumulating mana, but he couldn't do anything about the situation. He had no influence over the offensive, so he prepared for anything that was about to arrive.

The circular sparks around the hand expanded as more mana flowed into their structure. The number of spells they could trap increased, and the same went for the amount of energy absorbed.

The Nak's hand was optimizing its efficiency and range, and the amount of mana in its insides increased, turning it into a blinding spot in Khan's sensitivity. He managed to sense it even among the barrage of attacks, and all that energy eventually exploded outward.

The explosion resembled a soundwave similar to what the hidden lab had witnessed. Still, the attack also affected the entire barrage of spells. Darkness returned, and an earthquake took control of the city before opening cracks that spread throughout Lower Level 1.

Chapter 418 Priority

Everything shook. The staircases became unstable as mana traced lines that spread far beyond the square.

Cracks opened on the already damaged surfaces and expanded to create an array of large chunks. The entire city seemed ready to fall, and the audience held their breath, hoping to delay that catastrophe.

Khan, the Nele, and those able to sense the mana under them knew that nothing could prevent what was coming. The city continued to shake, and the floor screamed as its metal bent and shattered. It only took the fall of a minute piece to destroy the frail balance and cause a chain reaction.

The square caved in, and the same went for the staircases. The buildings past the area also crumbled before falling through the floor. The Nak's hand had replicated the attack unleashed in the hidden lab, but its range went far past anything Khan had ever witnessed.

Khan had been conflicted since the beginning of the joint offensive. A duality existed in his feelings. He wanted to kill the hand, but he couldn't leave the Nele alone in that unfavorable environment.

The nature of the offensive had ended up making that choice for Khan, but the crumbling of the city opened a new path. That chaos could give Khan a chance to reach the hand.

The joint offensive had stopped during the earthquake, and Caja had taken care of sending synthetic mana away. The Nak's hand had depleted its energy after the last attack and didn't have any immediate way to refill its reserves.

That could be the opportunity Khan had been looking for. The debris could create a path toward the powerless hand, giving him the chance to touch it directly.

Khan had to make his decision quickly. The city had just started to fall, but the hand could fly. He would need to start sprinting now to hope to find suitable footholds along the way.

However, familiar cries reached Khan's ears as everything began to crumble. The Nele had moved according to the traces of mana left behind by the soundwave, but they didn't share his incredible balance, so many fell off once the makeshift platforms tilted and spun.

Jenna had been close enough to Khan to share his boulder, but she lost her footing when the ground under her became unstable. She let out a faint cry when she began to slide away, and a trace of regret appeared on her face when Khan turned to look at her.

Jenna didn't know everything, but she could understand how important the Nak's hand was to Khan. The fact that her cry had distracted him from his mission made her feel guilty since she only wanted to support him.

On the other hand, Khan partially snapped out of his extreme mindset when he noticed that Jenna was about to fall. His desire to kill the Nak's hand wanted to be uncompromising, but he understood his priorities when he saw Jenna's regretful expression.

Khan had left Nitis because he needed the Global Army to fulfill his main goal, but that disaster was different. Taking care of his desperation was his priority, but he couldn't let the people he loved pay the price.

Jenna couldn't help but smile when Khan shot in her direction. Her arms instinctively opened, and she closed them around Khan's neck once he reached her.

That wasn't Khan's first time sprinting at full speed while carrying someone. He and Jenna had actually already gone through something similar together, and their trust created perfect teamwork.

Khan wrapped one arm around Jenna's waist to lift her while he immersed himself in the surrounding chaos. The situation became clear, and his thoughts grew wild as he tried to decide how to handle it.

The lower levels had a vast hole, but most of the audience had been on the staircases. The increased range of the Nak's attack played in their favor since the fall would probably lead everyone into intact areas of the intermediate floor.

Still, the fall wasn't safe. Many could remain trapped among the crumbling boulders, and the intermediate floor might also fail to withstand that additional weight.

Khan couldn't save everyone, and his thoughts never reached those topics. He worried about Monica, but she was in a different part of the square. He could only hope for the best while focusing on those within his reach.

Jenna was safely in Khan's arms, but that wasn't enough for him. The Nele had long since become his people, so he wanted to do as much as possible to keep them safe.

The symphony, the extreme mindset, and Khan's affection toward the Nele fused to create a precise path through the chaos. His sight became pointless. Khan didn't even move his eyes when he jumped to his left while stretching his free arm downward.

A Nele weaker than Khan had lost his balance as soon as the earthquake took control of the city, making him fall under the boulder he hoped to use as a foothold. In that position, the Nele would be submerged by the rubble, but Khan grabbed his stretched arm and pulled him along.

Khan felt heavy when he landed on a tilted surface. His feet threatened to slide on the smooth metal and push him under the boulder, but he jumped before he could lose his balance.

Carrying two people simultaneously was a problem, but Khan threw the Nele to his right during his leap. The alien looked at Khan in terror, but confusion replaced that feeling when he ended up in Maban's arms.

Khan didn't even bother to look at Maban. He landed on a boulder only to jump again in the direction of another Nele. The latter had leaped when her boulder fell, putting herself in a free dive that was bound to kill her once the rubble settled.

Panic had taken control of the Nele, but tears of joy fell from her eyes when Khan bumped into her. Jenna grabbed her companion, and Khan proceeded to land on a boulder ahead.

The Nele spoke, but Khan didn't hear her. He felt heavy again, but his job wasn't done, so he pulled the alien from her wrist and crouched to put her on his right shoulder.

Caja, Maban, and other strong Nele didn't let Khan do all the work. They also reached for their companions and deployed techniques or leaps to grab them. Soon, only a few Nele remained in dangerous positions, and Khan summoned the entirety of his strength to jump again to reach one of them.

The left arm had Jenna, and the right shoulder had a Nele, so Khan could only use his right arm to catch another falling alien before landing on a tilted platform. That surface was too steep even for him, but he clung his leg to its upper edge to remain latched onto it.

The situation was far from ideal. Khan was carrying three people, and he had an awful foothold. He would have to bear the weight of the fall and his baggage once his boulder hit the floor, and he couldn't disperse the momentum in that stance.

Yet, panic couldn't enter Khan's mind. He remained utterly calm and ready for his next move. He couldn't perform the Lightning-demon style perfectly with three people on him, but he could still save everyone's life.

Most of Lower Level 1 fell. The soundwave didn't affect the entirety of the city, but the damage ended up spreading on its own. The destruction of many pillars and important structures stretched the range of the disaster, almost fusing two floors during its duration.

Khan waited and waited. Clanging noises reached his ears, but he remained still. He needed the right opportunity, and that came when most of the rubble under him touched the intermediate floor.

The prediction had turned out to be on point. The hole in the intermediate floor became visible during the fall, showing how most of the audience would land on intact areas.

Khan's boulder was no different. His tilted platform was on a collision course with the rubble accumulated below, which proved how the intermediate floor had withstood the new weight.

Getting that proof pushed Khan to make his next move. When only a few meters separated his boulder from the rubble, he retracted his bent leg to make it slide over the tilted surface.

The two Nele on Khan inevitably panicked. The landing wasn't only imminent. Khan had also given up on their sole hope. However, Jenna remained calm since she knew that Khan had a plan.

Khan let his feet slide on the tilted surface until the friction with the smooth metal reached the level he needed. He could stomp on the boulder at that point, and cracks appeared under him as he performed a short jump.

"Fuck," Khan softly cursed while mid-air. He had plenty of experience with those situations, so he knew he had messed up. The weight of three people had turned out to be too much even after training on the third asteroid.

Khan flew diagonally for a single second before gravity captured him. He fell, and the ground didn't hesitate to greet him. A thudding noise welcomed his landing, but the pain that followed made him ignore it.

The rubble that had landed on the intermediate floor was unstable, and Khan was in no condition to retain his balance. His legs gave in as soon as a metal tile under him slid, making him fall on the sharp and bent mess together with the three Nele.

Jenna's companions had it easy. They merely had to push themselves away while Khan fell. Their landing remained messy, but they could avoid violent meetings with eventual sharp boulders.

Jenna was calmer than her companions, so she realized the situation Khan was in. Still, remaining on him would only worsen his landing, so she also decided to push herself away at the last second.

Instead, Khan basically crashed. His body even dived a bit into the rubble due to the momentum accumulated during the fall.

A buzzing noise resounded inside Khan's mind. The abrupt landing had shattered his coldness and dampened his thoughts. He had a hard time realizing where he was or recalling what had happened, but someone promptly lifted him out of the rubble.

Khan was still confused, but a warm sensation suddenly spread from his cheeks and brought clarity. His vision stabilized, and his sensitivity returned, allowing him to see Jenna's focused face standing right before him.

Jenna had released her mana and had voiced specific requests before sending it inside Khan. Her energy didn't have healing properties, but it brought some strength to Khan's flesh, which resulted in that new clarity.

Nevertheless, being able to sense what was happening allowed Khan to study his condition. A lot hurt, especially his legs, and the check-up technique revealed that he was far from good.

The violent landing didn't only damage his legs. His left shoulder felt odd, and the same went for his elbow. Also, his left side was a mess of small metal shards stabbed into his flesh, and one of them went pretty deep into his torso.

Khan reached for the longest shard stabbed inside him, but Jenna grabbed his wrist before he could pull it out. She even shook her head, which said enough.

Jenna wanted to go back to sending mana to Khan, but they both sensed the arrival of a bright presence at that point. The Nak's hand had descended with them, and a series of lightning-like flares shot out before they could turn.

The assault was unexpected. The hand had depleted its energy to launch the soundwave, but Khan didn't have the time to think about those matters. Jenna's face filled his vision, and he could recognize her expression. He was wearing it too.

Jenna didn't have Khan's battle experience, but she knew what could happen if a lightning bolt hit him. The environment didn't have much synthetic mana, but she was willing to use herself as a shield if the situation required it.

A lightning bolt ended up flying toward Khan and Jenna. The hand had actually targeted every survivor, and it would only take an instant for its attacks to land.

Jenna let go of Khan's face and prepared to jump ahead, but he moved before her. Khan threw himself at Jenna, and the lightning bolt landed on his back, blasting them away.

Chapter 419 Hybrid

Familiar images played in Khan's vision. He found himself among flames, screams, and thick smoke, which carried details he had long since committed to memory. His recurring nightmare had started.

'I must have fainted,' Khan realized when he recalled what had happened during the disaster.

Khan had activated the [Blood Shield] right before the impact, but the lightning bolt had probably been stronger than his technique. Also, he had suffered multiple injuries, so fainting didn't come as a surprise.

An azure halo came out of the crater and pierced the smoke. The Nak climbed the deep hole and turned its mana into branches that ravaged the remains of its spaceship.

Khan had seen that scene countless times, but his meeting with the hand made him realize that something was off. The Nak from his nightmare had smooth control over its mana, which didn't involve violent outbursts, even when used to destroy its broken vehicle.

'I can't compare a severed hand to a complete Nak, can I?' Khan half-joked, even if the scene continued to claim his attention.

The lightning-like flares and the Nak's technique were too different to belong to the same species. Khan didn't know everything about those aliens, so he could accept his ignorance, but the hunch in the back of his mind grew stronger anyway.

'Maybe Raymond has something to do with it,' Khan wondered.

That conclusion sounded reasonable. The hand wasn't only a severed chunk of a Nak. The reconstruction through the reinforced fabric might have been the last alteration, but Raymond had probably experimented far more with it. It made sense for that body part to display different abilities.

Finding reasonable answers didn't change Khan's situation. He was stuck in the nightmare, and he had long since learnt that nothing could make him escape it. He would need an external source to help him, but his condition made that outcome unlikely.

Still, Khan soon realized to have underestimated his companions. A dampened voice began to resound inside the nightmare, and it grew louder until it became a clear word.

"[Khan]!" Jenna shouted before breaking into a smile when Khan opened his eyes.

Khan coughed, and his breath grew ragged. Countless sensations assaulted his sensitivity and made it impossible for him to concentrate. He was starting to panic, but Jenna promptly reached for his cheeks and forced him to focus on her.

A familiar warmth invaded Khan and brought peace to his panicked state. Sensations still flew toward his mind, but they felt slower while he kept his eyes on Jenna's face. He could even notice a few details there. She had cried.

The pain soon returned. Khan's legs and his whole left side hurt, and his back joined the party. He was a mess, and his check-up technique only confirmed that conclusion. Still, he was alive, and the disaster wasn't over.

Noises and bursts of mana managed to reach Khan's senses once he grew used to his pain. Powerful presences and explosions occupied his surroundings, and he recognized some of them.

Everything was still confusing, so Khan relied on his eyes. He saw the wreckage caused by the soundwave, and some injured people occupied the corner of his vision. Yet, when he tried to lift his head, Jenna pushed it back down.

"[You are done with this fight]," Jenna stated, and her tone expressed far more than concern. She was angry and scared.

"[Let me see]," Khan whispered.

"[No]!" Jenna sobbed. "[You won't stop if you do]."

"[Jenna, I'm not sorry for protecting you]," Khan smiled.

Jenna lowered her head as her voice turned into a whisper. "[I thought I lost you]."

"[I'm not going anywhere]," Khan reassured as he mustered the entirety of his strength to immerse his right hand in Jenna's hair.

"[Don't move]," Jenna scolded. "[You are a mess]."

"[Help me move then]," Khan replied. "[I need to do this]."

Jenna sniffed before diverting her gaze. She couldn't look at Khan when he was so straightforward. She would decide to help him get back into the battle otherwise.

"[Hey]," Khan called while caressing Jenna's hair. "[I can't do this without you]."

A tremor ran through Jenna. Her eyes went on Khan on their own, and a sense of defeat invaded her mind. She knew she couldn't refuse him, but she still expressed her annoyance.

"[You are so unfair]," Jenna complained.

"[I guess we are both impossible]," Khan chuckled.

"[I jump in front of you the next time]," Jenna warned before moving herself away and carefully lifting Khan's head.

The state of the disaster quickly became clear. Khan saw what remained of the audience hiding behind the small hills created by the debris. Some even helped the injured, but everyone always shot glances at an area near the central hole.

Khan's vision also fell prey to the scene. A relatively large area near the huge central hole had turned into a battlefield that only featured powerful players. The Nak's hand was one of them, but Khan recognized a few others too.

Caja, Raymond, a powerful Fuveall, and a small group of Orlats had surrounded the Nak's hand. The latter sent lightning bolts every few seconds, but its opponents fended them away while launching their own attacks.

The scene was mesmerizing. Caja danced among the incoming lightning bolts while touching them to change their trajectory. She also stole some of their mana during those interactions before sending it toward her companions.

The Orlats ducked and threw themselves on the debris whenever attacks flew in their direction, but they always stood up to fire their weapons. The group only had a couple of third-level warriors and a few second-level warriors, but their guns launched bullets that could match attacks from third-level mages.

The Fuveall was a fourth-level warrior completely covered in silver plates. His clothes had disappeared, so Khan could witness him facing the lightning bolts head-on. Those attacks were unable to pierce his protective metal and allowed him to accumulate mana that he spewed back in the form of a dark beam.

Those players were expressing the best qualities of their species, but Raymond managed to outshine all of them. He crushed every incoming lightning bolt with his bare hands and even found the time to launch dark needles. Still, that wasn't the reason behind his apparent superiority.

Caja was holding her ground, but it was clear that she was struggling. The area didn't have much mana, so she mostly focused on defending the members of her species.

The Orlats were simply too weak. They could dodge the lightning bolts and fire back, but their weapons couldn't pierce the sizzling shield. Their efforts only showed their incredible teamwork.

The Fuveall's performance was spectacular, but he appeared as powerless as his companions. His silver plates had also started to darken, showing how he was heading toward his limits.

Instead, Raymond appeared perfectly calm, bored even. He moved elegantly among the barrage of attacks without breaking a sweat. He also kept his suit intact, which sounded impossible after everything that had happened.

It almost seemed that Raymond was holding back, and Khan confirmed that when the incredible happened. The hand launched lightning bolts non-stop, but Raymond still managed to shoot a glance in Khan's direction. He even smiled after seeing that he had regained consciousness.

Khan didn't have the time to think about the event since another important detail claimed his attention. The Nak's hand wasn't absorbing mana from the environment anymore, but its attacks never stopped, and the reason behind that oddity became clear once Khan managed to focus.

'It's producing mana on its own,' Khan thought.

As impossible as it sounded, the Nak's hand could generate its own mana now. Moreover, it could refill its reserves quickly enough to keep up with its relentless assault. The alien body part had grown, and everything witnessed before told Khan that the process wasn't over.

The Nak's hand had started as a damaged body part, but it had now turned into a terrifying threat. It grew with each exchange, and it wasn't hard to figure out what it wanted to become. Its ability to produce mana was only one of the pieces it needed to turn into a fully-fledged Nak.

Khan could see that the offensive wasn't going anywhere. The hand was probably buying time, and it wouldn't take long before the situation became impossible to contain. He had to do something, but he couldn't do it alone.

Jenna was already looking at Khan when he glanced back at her. She had no interest in the fight when he was in that condition, and she also knew what he had in mind.

"[No]," Jenna uttered.

"[I need to stand up]," Khan said.

"[You can barely breathe]," Jenna pointed out.

"[I only need a clear mind]," Khan explained.

"[I won't let you kill yourself]," Jenna stated. "[I don't care how angry you get]."

"[Lend me your strength then]," Khan responded. "[I know you can]."

Jenna went silent. She wanted to lie, but that was impossible before Khan. Leaving him wasn't an option either, so she stopped thinking and let her emotions take over.

"[This should make up for something]," Jenna teased as she lowered her head again.

"[Wait]," Khan called when Jenna's mouth grew dangerously close to his.

"[You can't stop me today]," Jenna whispered before planting her lips on Khan's.

Khan wanted to escape the kiss, but he didn't have the strength to reject Jenna. Moreover, a blissful sensation invaded his mouth before filling his mind and spreading through the rest of his body.

Jenna and Khan had been on the verge of exploding many times, and their kiss made them experience all those emotions in that single instant. The two could almost hear each other's thoughts and understand the mad love they could share.

Khan was no stranger to those emotions. He had actually predicted them when thinking about a possible relationship with Jenna. He knew she could fill Liiza's spot quite well, but that was the issue.

Jenna experienced the same emotions, so the kiss made her realize Khan's mindset. The two had already talked about it many times, but feeling it added a new perspective to the matter, which inevitably brought some sadness.

The kiss didn't only make Khan and Jenna share the same mental and emotional space. That had actually been an unexpected reaction caused by the movement of Jenna's mana. The two could experience each other's feelings when that energy entered Khan.

Khan would lie if he said that he hated that moment. The kiss and the emotions it brought were incredible and reminded him of the type of love he sought. Yet, Jenna couldn't be the one giving it to him, and she understood that.

Jenna revealed a sad smile when she lifted her head, and Khan wore a similar expression. They had almost experienced the entirety of their potential relationship during those seconds, so they didn't need words to comment on it.

"[I hope Monica can give you more than this]," Jenna whispered.

"[If she ever forgives me for kissing you]," Khan joked.

"[She will]," Jenna reassured. "[She would be crazy not to]."

"[Hey]," Khan called. "[Our love would have been wonderful]."

"[It was wonderful]," Jenna giggled. "[I wish we could have experienced it during sex]."

"[Don't get naughty already]," Khan laughed.

"[Though, I'm glad]," Jenna said while caressing Khan's hair. "[You became mine for a bit]."

"[You need someone to be yours forever]," Khan pointed out.

"[And you need someone who can surpass Liiza]," Jenna continued. "[Monica will hear from me if she doesn't try]."

"[Monica needs to hear from you to justify this kiss]," Khan stated.

"[I'll tell her that you couldn't contain your emotions in the middle of the battle]," Jenna teased, "[And that she needs to take care of your urges if she hopes to stick around]."

"[You are impossible]," Khan sighed.

"[And you are unfair]," Jenna replied before both of them exploded into a laugh.

A lightning bolt hit some rubble nearby, causing an explosion and forcing Khan and Jenna to snap out of their intimate moment. The two recalled where they were and realized what they had to do.

Khan wasn't fine, but Jenna's mana was keeping his condition stable. That didn't make him battle-ready, but it brought him out of his powerless state.

Jenna put her hands under Khan's shoulders before helping him stand. Getting back on his feet made his poor condition even clearer, but he couldn't let that stop him.

Khan felt off. His footing was unstable, and his left side didn't move as well as he had hoped. His back also hurt, and his missing shirt told him that the lightning bolt had burnt far more than his skin.

Nevertheless, Khan's attention remained on the fight. The hand was growing stronger, while its opponents were in the opposite situation. Only Raymond continued to hold his ground, and another faint smile appeared on his face when he noticed Khan.

Caja was doing her best to keep her companions safe, but her stamina was about to run out. Holding back from using the mana in the environment tired her faster too, but her species was counting on her, and she couldn't let it down.

Still, the situation was taking a bad turn. Caja's understanding of mana told her that the hand was growing stronger, and it wouldn't take long before her superior techniques became unable to keep up with the lightning bolts. She would eventually have to rely on the mana in the environment, but that wouldn't ensure victory either.

Anyone would give in to desperation in that situation, but Caja was different. Jenna's prediction brought some comfort to her mind. Even if everyone on the fourth asteroid was to die, her species had stashed enough resources in that period. The Nele were bound to do better than ever.

The presence of the Nak's hand remained the only problem. Goods would be useless if the threat reached the other asteroids, so Caja was ready for the ultimate sacrifice. If everything failed, she would make sure that her opponent ended up in space.

Caja was completely immersed in those thoughts when an abrupt mass of mana appeared behind her. She turned in time to see a purple-red spear fly past her and explode on a few incoming lightning bolts, which granted her some breathing room.

The fact that a spell from a second-level mage could fend off the lightning bolts was surprising, but Caja found her answers when she noticed Jenna supporting Khan. The chaos element was obviously more effective against the hand.

That answer didn't clear Caja of her surprise. Actually, she couldn't believe her eyes, and her disbelief only intensified when Khan joined his palms to summon another spell.

Caja knew how much Khan had fought. He had spent the time on the staircases defending the Nele, but that wasn't the end. His violent fall and the direct hit from the lightning bolt should have put him out of combat for good, but there he was.

Jenna's presence could explain Khan's resilience. Caja knew how powerful emotions could be. Still, Khan's mana reserves were simply unreal. They actually resembled her opponent's.

The scene from the lake appeared in Caja's vision. She finally understood why she had felt strange when she saw Khan covered in the [Blood Vortex]'s marks. She had never treated Khan as a human, but his uniqueness went beyond mere mutations. His diverse arts had turned him into a proper hybrid.

Caja continued to look at Khan while he summoned another chaos spear and threw it with his right arm. The spell flew past Caja and exploded again, creating a shield the lightning bolts couldn't pierce.

Khan wasn't done. He quickly prepared another spell, and Caja couldn't help but acknowledge his resolve at that point. She glanced at one of her companions before nodding in Khan's direction and turning to face the hand again.

The third chaos spear took shape between Khan's palms, but a familiar presence approached him before he could launch it. Maban stepped in front of him and hindered his path toward the hand.

"[Don't burn yourself]," Maban ordered. "[Come on. We need to get out of here]."

"[We can't leave Caja here]!" Jenna complained.

"[That's what Caja wants]," Maban revealed. "[Hurry. We don't have much time]."

Khan wanted to complain, but the Nak's hand acted before he could speak. The alien body part had remained stuck in that stalemate long enough to study its opponents, and its following offensive showed its countermeasures.

Two lightning bolts flew toward Caja, and she swiftly side-stepped them before stretching her arms to alter their trajectory. However, the attacks exploded when she touched them, flinging her away.

A dozen lightning bolts flew toward the Orlats, who promptly dived behind their cover. Yet, the hand's attacks split into multiple flares that exploded everywhere, even hitting the aliens' hideouts.

A thick, azure beam flew toward the armored Fuveall. The latter faced it head-on, and its metal plates managed to endure the attack for a few seconds, but they eventually cracked, and the azure mana overwhelmed him.

Raymond simply faced a higher number of attacks and found no problem dodging them. Still, once the offensive ended, he remained alone near the hand. The alien body part had wiped out everyone else.

"[Maban]," Khan called among the silence and disbelief that had fallen on the destroyed intermediate floor, "[I need a favor]."

The Nak's hand focused on Raymond, but he showed no fear. A barrage of lightning bolts flew in his direction, but he sprinted ahead to duck under them and deliver a punch to the alien body part.

The hand didn't like that, and a chaotic mass of flares promptly left its skin, but Raymond swung his arm to cut a passage through that mana. He even jumped into it, and another punch fell on the alien body part.

To everyone's surprise, Raymond was dealing with the hand on his own. His precise movements, sharp attacks, and incredible reflexes allowed him to remain one step ahead of his opponent. He even retreated when explosions threatened to overwhelm him.

The experienced warriors in the audience were even more surprised than their peers. Raymond wasn't using any specific spell or technique during the fight. He was only dodging, punching, and throwing needles without ever suffering any injury.

Raymond's calm face only added awe to his incredible performance. His battle sense was spectacular, but that alone couldn't make him win.

Understanding what was going on in Raymond's mind was impossible, but his calm expression eventually broke to reveal a frown. Something in the area claimed his attention, but his eyes darted left and right, unable to find that.

A smile broadened on Raymond's face when he understood what was happening. He swiftly dodged the incoming lightning bolts while making his way toward the hand, and he threw a violent punch once it reached it.

The Nak's hand had withstood the previous punches easily. None of them had pierced the sizzling barrier, but Raymond's latest attack flung it on the floor and made it crash among the rubble. Its shield even flickered, leaving a big chunk of its flesh unprotected.

Raymond retreated at that point, and his smile only broadened when Khan materialized next to the hand. Synthetic mana even appeared in the environment before returning to the source of the spell. Maban had created one of his illusions to help Khan reach his opponent.

Khan's legs gave in. He had run to get there, but that had turned out to be too much in his state. Yet, he had reached the alien body part and didn't hesitate to throw his hands at it when his knees hit the floor.

The sizzling barrier tried to stretch toward Khan's palms, but he released his mana before the impact could happen. His energy created a connection between him and that body part, and a series of foreign urges invaded his mind.

Khan felt on the verge of losing control of his energy, but he retained enough mental clarity to abandon himself to his emotions. He let go of everything while sending even more mana into the Nak's hand.

That process would typically give birth to the cloud spell, but it caused a new reaction with the hand. Those foreign urges suddenly found themselves at home and stopped belonging to two different beings.

As for Khan, he struggled to keep track of what was happening. His vision eventually went dark, and familiar scenes appeared. The nightmare showed itself again.

Chapter 420 Hair

Khan could remain lucid during his nightmares, but his thoughts failed to enter the scenes triggered by his interaction with the Nak's hand. Only his consciousness reached the memories of the Second Impact.

The fire, the corpses, the smoke, the crumbling buildings, and the scorching crater didn't fill Khan with the usual desperation. He was still watching everything from his perspective, but a sense of peace invaded his mind.

That peace was odd, almost inhumane, and a coldness that didn't allow the presence of other emotions soon joined that sensation. Understanding dawned upon Khan at that point, and he hated to be unable to feel disgusted.

Khan couldn't think, but his mind still worked, so he could connect the dots. He knew where that inhumane coldness came from. He shared the same mental space as the Nak's hand, so he could experience its perspective.

At first, Khan hated that emotional detachment from the scene. Yet, as the memories flowed, a positive side to the matter appeared. He had been on many battlefields but had never reached that level of inhumanity. He was still different from a Nak.

Of course, those realizations happened on an almost subconscious level. Answers became clear without ever turning into thoughts. Khan could only watch, and interesting details eventually appeared.

The Nak's perspective added a new layer to the nightmare. Everything happened as Khan recalled, but the sensations that enveloped those scenes were completely different.

It turned out that the inhumane coldness had something more than mere detachment. A faint sense of duty filled the whole area. Khan felt nothing because his attack had a higher purpose.

Khan wasn't too surprised about that discovery. He had long since suspected that the Nak's attack had been more than a mere invasion, but the nightmare didn't go past those faint sensations.

The nightmare moved forward. The Nak came out of the crater and ravaged its spaceship, but Khan couldn't focus on that scene. His attention had fallen on the alien's eyes as soon as they became visible.

The Nak's eyes had always been the most vivid detail of the nightmare, and the new perspective added value to that feature. The intense anger, desperation, and fear carried by that gaze turned into bright lights that conveyed confused meanings, and Khan couldn't help but fall prey to their glow.

The target of the Nak's anger was easy to spot. The spaceship had something to do with it, hinting that a malfunction had happened. Maybe the crash had been a mistake, or perhaps the vehicle had something to do with that solitary attack.

The desperation was harder to explain, but Khan couldn't miss it in his current state. The Nak was alone, stranded on an alien planet. Its species was nowhere to be seen, and it seemed to know that reinforcements wouldn't arrive.

As for the fear, Khan could only experience it without understanding its reasons. He felt terrified about something, but he couldn't explain why, and that emotion left a deep mark in his mind.

The sense of duty returned when the Nak noticed Khan and pointed its finger at him. Azure shades invaded the scene, and the mutations began. Still, the new perspective added something surprising to the event. Khan heard words while under the effect of the Nak's mana.

"Potential... Hosts," A deep, hoarse voice resounded among the nightmare.

Khan's mind went blank. He could accept that his connection with the Nak's hand had automatically translated those words into the human language, but their potential meaning left him speechless.

Suddenly, countless hypotheses formed and branched out to transform into vague scenarios. Khan had collected various clues throughout his life. Many involved a deeper understanding of the mana, but his old questions and Raymond's explanations could give birth to something unbelievable.

Why did the Nak attack Earth? Why did the Nak assault various planets? Why did they apparently lose most of those wars? Why did they disappear afterward?

Similar questions had afflicted Khan for a long time, but he had always left them in the back of his mind. He simply didn't know enough to come up with reasonable ideas.

However, a seemingly solid hypothesis came to life when Khan put everything together. He had already found something odd with the First Impact, but now he had a potential explanation. The Nak's intentions probably involved their element.

The chaos element was unique, and the Nak's mana could easily infect beings without control over that energy. The mutations were violent and often deadly, but someone was bound to survive, and others would even pass those alterations to future generations.

Raymond had explained the importance of those mutations, and they gained even more value due to the peculiar situation of the Nak. Those aliens were the embodiment of mana. They might have reasons that went beyond what ordinary minds could comprehend.

Nevertheless, that conclusion generated more questions. The Nak might have attacked to spread mutations and chaos, but their purpose remained unclear.

Khan couldn't help but focus on the Nak's eyes again. The fear they radiated was almost unreal. He couldn't understand how such a powerful creature could be so afraid, but that gave birth to a new guess.

Bret had stressed how humans could surpass the Nak, and that couldn't apply only to one species. There had to be others with higher potential, and the mutations could be the key to unlocking it.

'The Nak can't be so selfless,' Khan cursed before realizing something else. 'Wait, I can think now.'

The nightmare had almost turned entirely azure. The solar system was about to appear, and Khan's memories would restart from the beginning afterward. He hoped to wake up before that, but he didn't have a choice in the matter.

Yet, when everything turned azure, the solar system remained hidden, and that blinding color slowly dimmed to reveal surprising scenes. Metal debris became clear, and Khan held his breath when he saw the Nak's hand held tightly in his grasp.

Khan noticed that the hand had gone dark before his body started to convulse, forcing him to crouch on the floor. Retches rose through his throat as his muscles and organs shook, and a scorching sensation invaded every inch of his flesh, leaving him powerless.

For some reason, Khan found himself unable to calm down or let go of the Nak's hand. Meanwhile, his body continued to burn and shake, and pain soon joined the process.

Everything began to hurt, especially the places where Khan had suffered injuries. His knees seemed on the verge of falling off, his left side wanted to abandon his body, and his back burnt like never before.

The process left Khan unable to do anything. He couldn't even think. The intense pain threatened to make him faint, but he remained perfectly awake. His mind was clearer than ever, but that only made him experience everything more vividly.

Khan puked, spewing out a black and smelly substance that fell on the rubble and tainted his face while he convulsed. Screams tried to come out of his mouth, but his throat didn't listen to his urges. The process was excruciating, but it quickly lost intensity, eventually allowing him to regain control of his body.

A deep breath welcomed Khan's newfound control over his lungs. He could finally let go of the Nak's hand, but his palm went on the rubble while he tried to calm down. He planted his knees on the floor in an attempt to stand up, but his eyes began to burn, forcing him to close them and crouch down once more.

The Nak's iconic azure color filled Khan's vision when he opened his eyes, but those shades slowly dimmed as the scorching sensation waned. A piercing pain located on his skull followed, and the reason behind it became clear when he managed to see again.

Azure strands fell from Khan's head and stretched until they reached the floor. Hair that radiated the Nak's color grew until it replicated what Khan had witnessed in his nightmare. The mutations were taking over, but they didn't feature the irregular patterns seen on Nitis.

Khan's condition continued to improve until everything stopped. The pain vanished, leaving him numb and confused. Something had changed, and a surprising scene unfolded when his senses returned.

The injuries had healed. Khan felt that his left side and legs were brimming with strength now. Even the rubble that had stabbed his torso had vanished.

The same went for Khan's back. He didn't feel any discomfort anymore. Actually, everything seemed to have grown stronger, but he couldn't appreciate those changes since a troublesome detail kept filling his vision.

Khan had been too confused to realize that before, but he couldn't ignore the issue once clarity returned. His hair had turned azure and had grown exponentially. It probably reached his waist, but that wasn't the main problem.

A series of worrisome thoughts invaded Khan's mind. He feared that he was turning into a Nak even if everything told him that the process had ended, and his desperation gave birth to panic.

Khan grabbed a strand of his new hair and ripped it off. Pain spread, but he didn't care and reached for another to repeat his violent gesture.

Still, a hand reached Khan's wrist before he could rip off another strand. He lifted his gaze, and seeing Jenna's warm face made him express his mental state.

"[I can't turn into a Nak]," Khan voiced as he put strength into the arm held by Jenna. "[I won't allow it]."

"[You are stable now]," Jenna reassured, but Khan couldn't accept her words.

Khan still didn't know how he felt about Bret, but he was sure he had suppressed some mutations. Yet, everything had gone to waste now, and Khan's instinctive reaction was to rip away the evidence.

Jenna put more strength into her grip, but Khan turned out to be too strong for her. He pulled her down while he reached for another strand of hair, but her fall on him interrupted the process.

Khan didn't lose his balance. He planned to rip off his hair even with Jenna on him, but she wrapped him into a tight hug, and the warmth she radiated forced him to snap out of that panicked state.

Khan ended up with a strand of hair in his right hand. He wanted to burn it to erase any trace of that color, but helplessness eventually took over him. He couldn't solve that problem through brute force.

However, there was someone to blame, and Khan's raging emotions soon made him turn toward him. Raymond was relatively close, and his curious smile added fuel to Khan's anger.

Khan hurriedly stood up to march toward Raymond. Jenna knew that stopping him was impossible, so she followed along and prepared for an imminent battle.

"What have you done?!" Khan shouted once he reached Raymond.

"Me?" Raymond feigned innocence, and his smile also vanished. "I fought the hand. Didn't you see that?"

Khan was in no mood for games, but he couldn't just jump on Raymond. The difference in power was too big, but holding back his anger turned out to be impossible.

"Stop playing around," Khan muttered. "Did you know that this would happen?"

"No," Raymond casually admitted. "I remember you not caring either."

"Enough!" Khan snapped. "What do you know about this?"

"They are mutations, obviously," Raymond continued with his pretense. "They seem stable."

"What were you even trying to achieve?" Khan asked as he took a step forward, almost bumping into Raymond.

"Lieutenant Khan," Raymond said while his voice gained a chilling tone. "Remember where you are and who you are talking to."

Khan wanted to retort, but his senses warned him about the potential danger he was in. Raymond appeared ready to kill him, and even Jenna trembled before that potential threat.

The situation wasn't ideal. The battle had scattered the audience, but everyone was still on the intermediate floor, and Khan had become the center of their attention. Anyone could listen to his conversation with Raymond.

Khan couldn't care less about exposing Raymond, but he wasn't alone. Jenna was with him, and the same went for the rest of the Nele. He also had to look for Monica, and he didn't know how far Raymond would go to keep the experiment a secret.

A snort eventually left Khan's mouth before he turned to reach the Nak's hand. Jenna continued to hold his wrist during the walk, and she said nothing when Khan stomped his feet on the alien body part.

The Nak's hand appeared virtually dead, and no mana flowed in its insides, but its flesh was still exceptional. Yet, Khan's stomp dug a gory hole in its structure, and he repeated the process until only a bloody pulp remained.