

# **Formula 1: The GOAT**

## **#Chapter 21: Race Weekend |**

### **Saturday V | A New Challenger - Read Formula 1: The GOAT Chapter 21: Race Weekend | Saturday V | A New Challenger**

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"....."

"You see? I told you we should wait and see if someone good showed up," Aron Michael remarked, his gaze fixed on his son, Jackson. The boy's eyes were locked on Fatih, who was slowly making his way back to the pitlane after setting a blistering single lap early in Group B's qualifying session.

"He's good," Jackson conceded, his young face attempting a serious expression that made his father chuckle inwardly, "but I had people hindering me on my lap, unlike him. I'm confident I can still win."

Aron was privately pleased; his son finally had a rival to truly push him. This was Jackson's third and final year in this category. His assignment as a director in Turkey had brought the family here, and Jackson, already training at a karting academy in England since he was four, had quickly made his mark. He'd been runner-up in his first year at six, the champion then an eight-year-old, and had decisively won the championship the following year. Aron had worried his son might grow complacent, only to be humbled upon returning to England's more competitive scene. Now, it seemed, a solution had presented itself: a younger, potentially better competitor. This would undoubtedly force Jackson to train even harder.

"Do you want to watch the rest of qualifying, or should we go pick up your mother from work?" Aron asked. Jackson seemed to have lost interest in the other karts, many of which were struggling on the still-damp track, inadvertently highlighting the brilliance of Fatih's clean, early run.

"Can we go talk to him before we leave?" Jackson asked, a spark of excitement finally lighting his face.

"We can try," Aron said, slinging his bag over his shoulder, "but don't be disappointed if he's not available." He suspected Fatih would be in high demand or deep in discussion with his team.

To their surprise, they found Fatih still sitting in his kart in the pitlane, his helmet visor slightly raised. His foot remained on the brake, the engine intermittently revving as if he were poised to re-enter the track should anyone dare challenge his lap time.

'He's not just doing this for enjoyment,' Aron mused, observing the boy's intense focus. They approached Burak, Fatih's coach, who stood just beyond the divider rope in the designated viewing area.

As Aron introduced himself, explaining his son's wish to meet Fatih, the track commentators' voices filled the air.

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"And it seems there's no need for Fatih to return to the track!" the first commentator announced as the Group B karts began to file into the pitlane, their qualifying session concluded. "His single lap time is enough to put him on pole for his group and secure the top spot in the current overall qualifying rank! No one in his group came even within a second of his time!"

"I know I'm repeating myself," the second commentator chimed in, "but this is shaping up to be a very interesting championship! Fatih is the dark horse against two relatively more experienced drivers. I can't wait for tomorrow! There's a real chance we could witness the youngest race winner ever in this championship, and on his first official race weekend!" Their voices faded into a lively discussion about karting as they awaited Group C's session.

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Jackson, however, had already made his way to Fatih. "I look forward to racing you tomorrow," he declared, his voice clear and confident. "And winning." With that, he turned and walked away, leaving Fatih, visor still open, staring after him.

"..." Fatih appeared speechless at the sheer audacity of the kid who had just introduced himself with a direct challenge. Internally, however, a different sentiment was brewing.

'I need more people to challenge me,' Fatih thought, a familiar System prompt flashing before his eyes the moment Jackson had spoken.

### **[CHALLENGE MISSION!]**

The championship title defender has challenged you after seeing that you have the capability to make his title defense difficult. The greats do not back down from a challenge.

**Objective:** Finish every remaining session in this race weekend ahead of JAKSON as a direct response to his challenge.

**Reward: 30 SP**

**Punishment in case of failure: -50 SP**

**[ACCEPT] [DENY]**

"The prompts only appear for those the System evaluates as talented enough to mount a genuine challenge against you," Apollo's voice echoed in Fatih's mind. His mentor's translucent form materialized beside him, visible only to Fatih, as he watched Jackson rejoin his father. Aron offered an apologetic smile.

"I apologize for his words," Aron said to Fatih and Burak. "He's just excited to finally have someone who can match him."

"I like a challenge," Fatih said, a smile touching his lips, hidden by his helmet, as he mentally clicked [ACCEPT]. "See you tomorrow," he called out to Jackson, who, now slightly less bold, waved from behind his father's legs. Fatih and Burak then began pushing the kart on its stand back towards their garage, ready to store it for the next day's battles.

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"Here comes our pole-sitter!" Rümeyza exclaimed, opening her arms wide as Fatih finally reached the grandstands. He readily accepted her hug.

"Was it exciting, dear?" his grandmother, Güldane, asked as he moved to embrace her too.

"Yes, Grandma," Fatih replied, taking a seat between them. Murmurs and curious glances still came from those nearby, but the family paid them no mind, engrossed in their own quiet celebration.

"Do you want to watch the Group C qualifying, or should we head home now?" Rümeyza asked.

"I want to watch, to see how they drive," Fatih said, his eyes already fixed on the track where the next session had just begun. One driver attempted to emulate Fatih's strategy of leading the pack out slowly for a clean run, but fumbled the execution, misjudging his pace and running into rear traffic, losing over five seconds.

Fatih observed that this group seemed to comprise many amateurs. 'Perhaps this group was deliberately composed of individual entrants, not those from academies,' he pondered. 'It would ensure at least ten independent kids make it to the final races, rather than being eliminated early if mixed with more seasoned, academy-supported drivers.' It was a shrewd thought, showcasing his developing tactical awareness. The session was punctuated by a few stoppages as karts became stranded, and the tire

walls took enough of a beating to subtly alter parts of the track, requiring repairs before the next day.

Once Group C's chaotic session concluded, the combined qualifying list for all three groups flashed on the main screen.

### **[COMBINED QUALIFYING STANDINGS]**

**P1 - #213** Fatih YILDIRIM - GROUP B - Lap Time: 01:19.001

**P2 - #200** Jackson MICHAEL - GROUP A - Lap Time: 01:20.149

**P3 - #247** Selçuk ASLAN - GROUP A - Lap Time: 01:20.637

**P4 - #115** Huzeyfa TAŞKIN - GROUP B - Lap Time: 01:21.472

**P5 - #188** Emre KAYA - GROUP C - Lap Time: 01:22.150

**P6 - #210** Ayşe YILMAZ - GROUP B - Lap Time: 01:22.880

**(Further positions followed, with lap times decreasing accordingly)**

### **Chapter 22 - Race Weekend | Sunday | Dominance in the Wet**

The smile didn't leave Fatih's face for the entire ride home. Peering through the car window, he replayed the qualifying session in his mind. Not even the third group had come close to his lap time, cementing his pole position for tomorrow's qualifying heats. Starting at the front meant he could avoid the chaotic midfield battles; while the track allowed for overtaking, not needing to fight through the pack was always preferable.

"Are you that happy, dear?" his grandmother Güldane asked, noticing the persistent grin.

"Yes, Grandma! Very happy that I'm getting closer to getting a camera!" he chirped. Both his mother and grandmother laughed, amused by his reasoning. They had expected him to be thrilled about starting P1, not because it made winning easier, thereby increasing his chances of Rümeysa buying him the promised camera.

"I'll keep my promise as long as you keep your end of the deal," Rümeysa said, her eyes meeting his in the rearview mirror. "So, make sure to do your best."

"Why are you saying it like that? You're just increasing the pressure on him," Güldane interjected gently. She turned to Fatih. "Don't listen to her, sweetie. Just focus on enjoying yourself. Even if you don't win, I'll make her buy you the camera."

"Are you going to be the one paying for it then?" Rümeysa teased her mother.

"I'm not his mother, you are!" Güldane retorted with a laugh, while Rûmeysa just shook her head, a smile playing on her lips as she refocused on the road.

The rest of the journey home was filled with lighthearted chatter. The evening concluded on a happy note, and Fatih went to sleep with eager anticipation for the races ahead. True to his routine, however, he still entered the Simulation for his nightly practice, a discipline he never skipped.

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The next morning, the Istanbul Karting Park was slick with fresh rain.

"I don't see this first qualifying heat ending without a few slides! Ooooooh, and it seems I'm right! The track is thoroughly wet from last night's downpour," the main commentator exclaimed as a line of forty karts embarked on their formation lap.

"It's certainly a challenge for many of these young drivers," Zakir, the co-commentator, took over. "For some, this is their first-ever heat race, and to do it in these conditions, with little to no rain experience, must be incredibly unnerving. Surprisingly, Fatih, starting from P1, looks remarkably stable. He and Jackson in P2 are at the very front, effectively becoming the first to test the track's grip, yet they're handling it well." The screen showed Fatih and Jackson slowing the pack into a neat double file as they approached the T11 left-hander, preparing for the rolling start.

"This is where experience can often triumph," the main commentator resumed, his voice building anticipation. "Jackson, and Selçuk who's right behind Fatih in P3, have prior race experience. But this is a first for Fatih, meaning the pressure on him is immense, especially starting from the front."

The karts crawled towards Turn 12, engines buzzing, drivers poised. "And they approach the final turn, feet hovering over the accelerators, waiting for the green flag... AND THE FLAG DROPS! Fatih gets a phenomenal start down the straight! Selçuk immediately tucks in behind him, while Jackson tries to close the kart-length gap Fatih has already opened as they drag race towards the first corner!"

"Fatih shows his bravery, keeping the power down, while Jackson lifts slightly and slots in behind him, Selçuk following in third! Fatih goes off the usual dry racing line for Turn 1, trail-braking expertly... OOOOOH! Selçuk attempts a divebomb from the conventional line but goes wide! Fatih holds his nerve and keeps the lead, followed by Jackson, then Huzeyfa, as Selçuk loses a position for his audacious but ill-fated move! A brave attempt nonetheless!"

"Fatih now leads onto the longest straight – two hundred and fifty meters to Turns 2 and 3! Jackson, tucked neatly into Fatih's slipstream, benefits from the tow, even inducing a mini-DRS effect by ducking his head, reducing the gap Fatih was punching in the air for him," the first commentator paused for a quick breath, allowing his colleague to jump in.

"They're nearing the end of the straight, Jackson has caught right up!" Zakir's voice rose with excitement. "But it seems he's learned from Selçuk's earlier mistake! He aborts his overtake attempt and tucks back in behind Fatih, letting the leader carve the path. But unlike Jackson's caution, Selçuk is still pushing! He dive-bombs on the inside of Turn 2 again! AND IT WORKS THIS TIME! He masterfully overtakes Huzeyfa and regains P3 through Turn 3! Wooow, this is thrilling racing!"

"It looks like Fatih has weathered that early storm perfectly," the main commentator observed. "The pressure we anticipated doesn't seem to have hindered him at all. He's now leading this qualifying heat at the end of lap one by more than five kart-lengths, as both Jackson and Selçuk appear to be having a much harder time navigating this treacherous wet track. The same can be said for the rest of the field."

"Ooooooooooh, and it seems the commentator's curse is in full effect!" Zakir interjected. "We have another slide-out further down the pack in lap one! Since he was already last, he hasn't lost a position, but a significant gap has opened between him and the kart ahead. And speaking of gaps, one is certainly opening at the very front! Fatih seems to be reveling in these conditions, pulling away decisively from P2!"

"Indeed! His proficiency in the wet, showcased yesterday in FP2, clearly wasn't just because the track was drying then," the first commentator agreed. "He's proving it now on an even wetter surface. It's as if he's driving on a dry track while his competitors are struggling for grip, despite their wet tires! He crosses the start-finish line to begin his second lap! Let's wait for Jackson to complete his... YES! Three seconds! In a single lap, Fatih has opened a gap of three seconds! Now that is what you call being comfortable in the wet! One lap down, nine more to go in this ten-lap heat race!"

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Once Fatih took the lead, he never looked back. Lap after lap, he consistently widened the gap, making minimal errors while his rivals struggled. By the fifth lap, he had already established an astonishing ten-second lead over P2.

'This kid is a monster,' Burak thought, watching Fatih navigate the second double hairpin – T9 (left-hander) and T10 (right-hander) – before powering onto the straight. Fatih expertly kept to the drier racing line, a stark contrast to the sodden off-line sections. He lifted only slightly for T11, carrying incredible speed for the wet conditions – another area where he was gaining significant time, as other drivers lacked his bravery on the edge. He executed the final corner, T12, with similar precision before blasting across the line to complete his sixth lap, extending his lead over P2 by another second.

Burak had always considered Fatih exceptionally talented. He'd expected him to be a front-runner, but this level of dominance, especially in the wet, was beyond anything he'd anticipated. He had never tutored Fatih specifically on wet-weather driving; there simply hadn't been an opportunity. Yet, here was his student, driving as if born to race in

the rain, outclassing competitors who had far more race weekend experience than Fatih had total training days at the academy.

'Looks like I need to request the academy to increase their investment in him,' Burak mused, a determined glint in his eye. 'He might just be our golden goose if he maintains this form.' He made a mental note. 'But first, let's observe him for the entire weekend.' He refocused his attention on the track.

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"You see? Even Jackson is having trouble!" Selçuk's mother, Fatma, said pointedly to her husband, Aslan. His gaze was fixed on the track, watching Fatih, now on his way to completing his ninth lap, his lead over P2 an almost unbelievable fifteen seconds. "Are you going to berate Jackson now and say he isn't talented either?"

"....." Aslan didn't respond. He knew his wife was right but found it hard to accept. A lifelong motorsport enthusiast, his own impoverished upbringing had denied him the chance to race.

He had poured his unfulfilled dreams into his car equipment shop chain and, later, into his son when Selçuk showed an interest in motorsport. He'd vowed to give his son every opportunity, but it was becoming painfully clear that Selçuk's passion wasn't matched by transcendent talent – good, yes, but perhaps not exceptional enough to secure a long-term future in the cutthroat world of motorsport. Still, he'd ensured Selçuk had ample practice and training. 'Maybe I should.....'

His thoughts were shattered by the commentators' booming voices, their excitement reaching a fever pitch. "And Fatih, having not put a single wheel wrong, has already completed more than two-thirds of his final lap! He exits T10, enters the straight, and despite it being his final lap and holding a lead of over fifteen seconds, he shows no signs of easing off! He only lifts slightly through T11, enters the short straight before taking the final corner... He started this race from the lead, and he finishes it in the same commanding fashion! FATIH YILDIRIM WINS THE FIRST QUALIFYING HEAT RACE OF HIS FIRST-EVER CHAMPIONSHIP WEEKEND! WOOOW!"

## **Chapter 23 - Race Weekend | Sunday II | Jealousy**

### **Chapter 23 - Heat Race Triumphs and Unexpected Overtures**

"With the qualifying heat between Groups A & B now complete, we'll have a twenty-minute break before the second qualifying heat, this time featuring Groups B & C. That will be followed by a heat with Groups A & C, after which the full starting grid for the Final will be determined," the first commentator announced as the applause from the attendees subsided and the karts completed their cool-down lap, heading towards the pitlane.



Zakir immediately took over, elaborating for the audience: "For those who might be unfamiliar with how these heats work, let me explain. Qualifying heats are designed to ensure that a single mistake during the initial timed qualifying doesn't derail a driver's entire weekend. Karting is, after all, considered training for higher levels of motorsport, so drivers are given multiple opportunities to prove themselves. The starting grid for the Final is set by awarding points based on finishing positions in all heat races. The winner of a heat race receives zero points, with each subsequent position earning one additional point, and so on, down to the last finisher. This system applies to all heats a driver participates in. At the end of all qualifying heats, the driver with the least total points will start on pole position for the Final, the one with the second-least will be P2, and the rest follow the same principle down to P30."

He paused for a breath. "As for what happens to those in the bottom thirty of the combined points list? They will be eliminated from direct entry into the Final but will get one last chance in a Pre-Final race. The top ten finishers in that Pre-Final will then join the main grid, starting from P31 to P40, which is the maximum number of karts this track can safely accommodate for a race."

The main commentator seamlessly picked up. "So, as it stands, Fatih currently tops the leaderboard with zero points, followed by Jackson with one, and then Selçuk with two. Our top three are shaping up as expected, though the performance gap Fatih has demonstrated, especially in these wet conditions, is quite jarring."

Zakir followed up, "I agree. However, I suspect the significant gap is largely due to the rain, forcing other drivers to be more cautious to avoid spinning and losing positions. Even Selçuk's bravery, while commendable, resulted in a costly error in the first heat, serving as a warning to others. I believe the Final, which should be on a dry track, will be a much closer contest. Fatih has shown incredible bravery and car control in the wet, but a dry track presents a different challenge."

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A short while later, the excitement in the main commentator's voice was undeniable. "And once again, he proves the first time was no fluke! Fatih Yıldırım wins his second and final qualifying heat of the day!" he shouted as Fatih's kart streaked across the start-finish line, securing another dominant victory in the Group B & C heat.

"But this time, he wins with a similarly commanding gap, despite the track having dried considerably since the first heat!" Zakir added, his tone still buzzing with enthusiasm. "This truly showcases his remarkable ability to adapt to constantly changing track conditions."

"I believe this performance solidifies it," the main commentator declared. "The first win wasn't luck, nor was it a one-off. If he continues to deliver at this level, we are witnessing the emergence of a true racing prodigy!"



"Indeed! If he can drive like that in the wet, I can only imagine his performance when the track fully dries," Zakir mused. "And judging by the schedule, it should be completely dry by the time the Final race begins later today."

"With him winning both his heat races, he has unequivocally secured pole position for the Final," the main commentator confirmed. "Barring any unforeseen disqualifications – which seems highly unlikely given he hasn't had any contact, always being at least five seconds ahead – he's the man to beat."

As the commentators continued their effusive praise, discussing Fatih's future prospects based on the raw talent displayed, Fatih himself was calmly climbing out of his kart. Burak immediately began his post-race inspection, then lifted the kart onto its stand. Together, they started wheeling it back to their team tent, the eyes of many in the paddock following their every move.

"We have about four hours before the Final race," Burak said once they reached the tent. He was already beginning to disassemble parts of the kart. "You can go join your mother and grandmother. I'll come find you once I'm done with these deep inspections, cleaning, and ensuring everything is perfect for the Final."

"Okay, thank you, Burak," Fatih replied. He carefully placed the wet-weather tires Burak had just removed onto the designated rack before changing out of his race suit and heading to find his family in the grandstands.

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"Looks like there's no need for me to force your mother to buy you that camera after all!" Güldane said, welcoming Fatih with a warm smile and a hug.

"Hahaha," Fatih chuckled, returning the embrace before moving to hug his mother.

"What do you think, sweetie?" Rûmeysa asked, her eyes shining with pride. "Do you think you can win the Final race?"

"Ye—" Fatih began, but before he could finish, a voice interjected from behind them, causing all three to turn.

"I'm pretty sure if he doesn't win, it will be a very surprising outcome indeed."

A man stepped forward. "Ah, where are my manners? My name is Aslan," he said, extending a hand. "I'm Selçuk's father, a student from the same academy as your son is from."

"Ah, nice to meet you. I'm Rûmeysa, Fatih's mother, and this is my mother, Güldane," Rûmeysa replied, shaking his hand before Aslan politely greeted Güldane as well.

"I couldn't help but want to see the talented student of this academy up close," Aslan continued, his gaze shifting to Fatih, who listened calmly, though inwardly wondering why this man was approaching them instead of being with his own son. "His driving is quite an impressive advertisement for my company's chassis."

"Ah, so you are the one who sponsored the karts. It's a pleasure to meet you," Rûmeysa said, recalling her earlier research into the cost of new racing karts.

"Seeing your son's talent," Aslan said, getting straight to the point, "I came to discuss the possibility of sponsoring him directly. In return, he would, of course, advertise my company. I'm quite interested in supporting talented individuals, and if it benefits my business simultaneously, it's an avenue I'm keen to explore." He watched for their reaction, gauging whether his proposal would be met positively.

"Ah, that is... quite a surprising proposal," Rûmeysa responded, her demeanor shifting instantly from proud mother to sharp lawyer. "I hadn't considered anything like this before..."

Meanwhile, Selçuk stood a short distance away, daggers in his eyes as he watched his father engage Fatih's family. His father, who rarely showed him such focused attention, was now smiling and conversing animatedly about Fatih. A knot of an unfamiliar, bitter emotion tightened in Selçuk's chest. It was clear his father's interest in Fatih stemmed directly from the younger boy's undeniable talent. With only fifteen minutes before his own second heat race, Selçuk should have been preparing. Instead, he was rooted to the spot, observing.

'All I have to do is prove I'm better than him,' Selçuk resolved fiercely. He turned abruptly and strode towards the academy's garage. The better he performed, the greater his chance of disproving his father's burgeoning interest in Fatih, and perhaps, reclaiming that coveted attention for himself.

## **Chapter 24 - Race Weekend | Sunday III | Messy Start**

"With Fatih not participating in this final heat qualifier, the expected contenders had their chance to shine. Jackson ultimately wins, followed very closely by Selçuk, easily securing their P2 and P3 grid positions respectively for this evening's Final race!" the first commentator announced with enthusiasm as Jackson and Selçuk crossed the timing line, still battling fiercely.

"They were fighting for P1 from the very first lap of this heat," Zakir took over, providing an overview. "And Selçuk made sure Jackson had no peace of mind throughout the entire race."

"Yes, Selçuk was noticeably more aggressive this time," the main commentator agreed. "He was even bumping Jackson's rear at times, trying to force an error or create an

outbraking opportunity. But Jackson, perhaps expecting such pressure, kept his composure admirably and led them to the finish."

"This kind of close-quarters racing is the norm in karting, especially in this age group," Zakir elaborated. "Fatih seems to be the anomaly, consistently able to create a significant gap, seemingly unfazed by pressure from behind. If anything, he uses it as fuel. For the drivers who finished in the bottom thirty of the combined heat points, their journey isn't over. With the final heat qualifier now complete, they'll participate in the Pre-Final race at 14:00, in about two hours. The top ten from that race will earn their spot in the main Final at 16:00."

"And it looks like the official starting grid for the Final is ready!" the main commentator declared as the list appeared on the massive screen. "As expected, Fatih, with a perfect score from his heats – zero points – secures pole position! He's followed by Jackson with one point for P2, and Selçuk with three points in P3. Huzeyfa takes P4 with five points, the same as Emre Kaya in P5. Huzeyfa gets the higher grid slot due to his superior initial qualifying lap time, which is our tie-breaker rule..." He continued reading down the list.

(The list would be will be in this paragraph comment)

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In the grandstands, Aslan was seen clapping enthusiastically as his son, Selçuk, crossed the line in P2 for the heat. It was a stark contrast to his earlier demeanor when he'd been pushing Selçuk to consider sports other than motorsport, deeming his talent insufficient.

"Can't you act that way when he's actually here?" Fatma, his wife, asked, turning to him after she finished her own applause. "And what real difference does P2 or P3 in a heat make to suddenly change your attitude towards his karting?"

"This time, no significant gap was opened by the leader, and Selçuk exerted pressure until the very end," Aslan explained, his brief smile vanishing as he saw his son jogging towards them, beaming. "It means that in a longer race, like the Final, he'd have a genuine chance to overtake and win if the leader makes a mistake or leaves an opening. In the previous sessions where Fatih was involved, Selçuk was consistently seconds behind. That, I cannot accept when they are in equal machinery."

"If you actually told him that, don't you think it would encourage him to work harder, instead of you constantly trying to make him quit?" Fatma countered, then noticed her husband's expression sour again as his gaze shifted. She followed his line of sight.

"Haaaaa," Fatma scoffed, raising an eyebrow at his predictable behavior but said no more, turning instead to congratulate Selçuk on his strong finish.

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"What do you think?" Rûmeysa asked her mother, Gûldane, as they had lunch with Fatih and his coach, Burak. They were discussing Aslan's sponsorship proposal.

"From what he said, there didn't seem to be anything nefarious or underhanded," Gûldane mused, "though I'm no expert in these matters. We should certainly hear Burak's opinion before making any decisions." Their bond with Burak had strengthened over the race weekend; he'd spent considerable time with them, explaining technicalities and sharing conversations, allowing them to learn more about each other.

"If there are no hidden conditions, and based purely on what he offered, I think you should consider it," Burak said after a moment's thought. "However, you'll need to discuss it thoroughly with the academy. Many aspects of his offer overlap with Fatih's obligations as a scholarship student. If you, or Aslan, can reach an agreement with the academy, then there's no harm in accepting. It would alleviate a significant financial burden and allow Fatih to continue pursuing his passion without you worrying about funding."

Burak knew the academy's agreement was crucial. If they refused, Rûmeysa could theoretically unenroll Fatih and use Aslan's sponsorship at another academy. However, any academy aware of Fatih's performance this weekend would likely offer a full scholarship, perhaps even pay him to race for them. He was confident the current academy would readily agree. He wouldn't suggest leaving yet, though. Not only did he wish to continue coaching Fatih, but withdrawing mid-season would end Fatih's current championship participation, as he was registered under the academy's name. Any reputation he was building would vanish if he exited after just one round.

After lunch, they returned to the grandstands for the Pre-Final race. It was an engaging spectacle, with the backmarkers fighting fiercely for the top ten spots that would grant them entry into the Final. The racing was close, peppered with slides and numerous overtakes, keeping the crowd entertained until the very end.

"And Mustafa has a slide as he gets on the power too early! But it doesn't matter! His slide inadvertently blocks his nearest challenger, and in the drag race to the finish line, he comes out on top! Mustafa wins the Pre-Final, securing himself P31 on the grid for the Final race!" the main commentator's excited voice boomed through the speakers.

"And now, we are only an hour away from the main event!" Zakir announced. "And look at those skies! It seems the weather isn't clearing as expected. Heavy clouds are approaching the track rapidly. I think we're in for heavy rain either before or during the race!" As he spoke, attendees looked upwards, noticing the darkening sky as ominous clouds began to obscure the sun.

"This is going to make the Final incredibly interesting!" the main commentator declared, a clear note of glee in his voice. "It might be the first time this weekend they'll be racing

in active rainfall, not just on a track still wet from earlier. The constantly changing water levels will mean the grip on track will be in constant flux, rewarding drivers with superior technical ability and punishing those who lack it. With forty karts on track simultaneously, it's going to be a nerve-wracking experience for the drivers and their parents, but a thrilling spectacle for us neutral viewers!"

It seemed a bet on the weather would have paid off. With only twenty minutes remaining before the race start, the dark clouds unleashed a torrential downpour, as if attempting to flood the circuit.

"Let's go! Time for final preparations!" Burak appeared, holding a large umbrella, having just completed his final checks on Fatih's kart.

"Good luck, sweetie, and be careful," Rûmeysa said, placing Fatih's juice bottle on the table.

"Go and crush them for me!" Güldane urged, offering him a fist bump.

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"The rain is expected to continue into the race, so put this on," Burak instructed, handing Fatih a clear, waterproof overall to wear on top of his racing suit. It would prevent the suit from absorbing water and becoming uncomfortably heavy.

Once Fatih was kitted out, they began wheeling the kart towards the grid. Only ten minutes remained. Being P1, they were among the first allowed onto the track, followed closely by Selçuk and Jackson with their respective coaches. Selçuk, starting directly behind Fatih in P3, had an intense look of determination; if one could see beneath his visor, it would be clear he intended to win and prove his superiority to his father.

Grid attendants with umbrellas greeted them as they reached their starting slots. They had six minutes to make final adjustments before all non-drivers had to clear the track. With only the race remaining, his final obstacle to a potential grand slam weekend, Fatih sat in his kart, a thrill of anticipation coursing through him.

Time flew by. Soon, only two minutes remained. Coaches and assistants retreated, engines were running. A grid official received a green flag and began waving it, signaling the start of the formation lap. Karts began to roll past her.

"We're on the final corners of the formation lap!" the main commentator's voice crackled. "We can see Fatih weaving aggressively, trying to get as much temperature into those tires as possible. More temperature means more grip, crucial on this soaking track. With thirty-nine karts behind him, he'll be clearing the water for those immediately following, but that's one of the burdens of pole position in the wet."

"From this angle, it looks like he's sitting in a veritable puddle of water compared to Jackson's side of the grid!" Zakir observed as the camera focused on Fatih's P1 slot.

"It's often the better position in dry conditions, but in the wet, it can be the worst place to be on the front row," the main commentator explained. "He'll need perfect throttle input to avoid wheelspin and losing precious ground at the start."

"And the final driver is taking his position... one of our grid officials is waving the green flag... the starting lights begin to illuminate!" Zakir built the tension, handing over to the main commentator for the race start.

**"LIGHTS OUT AND AWAY WE GO! Fatih, needing that sensitive throttle input to avoid wheelspin, gets a slightly slower start compared to Jackson, who has what looks like a perfect launch! They drag race towards the first corner! Fatih still maintains the lead as he moves right to cover Jackson, trying to negate his rival's better start... they're meters from the braking point... Fatih outbrakes him! AND OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOH! SELÇUK DIVES DOWN THE INSIDE, ATTEMPTING TO EXPLOIT FATIH'S DEFENSIVE MOVE ON JACKSON! THERE IS CONTACT BETWEEN SELÇUK AND FATIH! FATIH IS SENT SPINNING INTO THE WALL! SELÇUK SNATCHES THE LEAD OF THE RACE, FOLLOWED BY JACKSON, HUZEYFA, EMRE, AYŞE, BORA! FATIH'S POSITION TUMBLES TO LAST! HE HAS TO WAIT UNTIL THE ENTIRE FIELD PASSES BEFORE HE CAN SAFELY REJOIN THE TRACK! OH MY GOD! THIS WAS NOT SOMETHING ANYONE IMAGINED! THE PRE-RACE FAVORITE IS NOW DEAD LAST!"** The main commentator was practically shouting, words tumbling out like a machine gun, the sheer excitement and shock of the first-corner incident evident in every syllable.

## **Chapter 25 - Race Weekend | Sunday IV | IN THE ZONE**

"Hayyyyyyyyyy!" The anguished cry of "No!" echoed from Burak, Rümeyşa, and Güldane in unison as they shot up from their seats in the grandstand. Fatih's kart was spinning, a victim of the first-corner chaos. A collective gasp, a symphony of "Aaaaaaaaaaaaah!" rippled through the crowd – a mix of sympathy from neutral onlookers and a sudden, sharp intake of breath from those who now saw the race thrown wide open. The initial shock quickly gave way to intense curiosity: how would Fatih react?

"As he waits to rejoin safely, Fatih looks eerily still," the main commentator observed, his voice returning to Fatih's plight after quickly running through the new top ten order. "I'm not sure if he's just incredibly calm or has simply given up. It's a terrible shame; he's now completely out of contention for the win."

"It's more likely he's furious," Zakir countered, his tone tinged with genuine disappointment rather than any relish at Fatih's misfortune. "It's nearly impossible to expect a driver, especially one so young, to remain calm in a situation like this. As someone hailed as a genius, I'm sure this is his first time experiencing such a setback,



made even worse by the immense weight of expectation. I truly hope this doesn't result in a prodigy like him developing a hatred for karting."

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VWOOM... VWOOOM... VWOOOM...

The sound of karts whizzing past was a dull roar to Fatih. He remained preternaturally calm, his breathing even, as he waited for the entire field to stream by before he could safely rejoin. His focus wasn't on the departing pack, but on the System prompts that had flared into existence the moment he'd realized Selçuk wasn't braking. He'd seen Selçuk barreling towards him, still on power, with almost zero grip on the rain-pelted track. Evasion was impossible. His only option had been to angle his kart to minimize damage and avoid being collected by the karts following behind.

**[ZONE HAS BEEN TRIGGERED]**

**[Invictus (Ultimate)] → [Invictus (Limit Break)]**

**[Sponge Brain (Good)] → [Sponge Brain (Excellent)]**

**[Sponge Body (Good)] → [Sponge Body (Excellent)]**

**[Catlex (Good)] → [Catlex (Excellent)]**

**[Aquaman (Good)] → [Aquaman (Excellent)]**

His perception of the world warped. For a fleeting moment, time seemed to stretch, allowing him to absorb every minute detail of a passing kart, even as his senses simultaneously processed a flood of information from his entire surroundings without conscious effort.

But that wasn't all. A new situational mission had also appeared:

**[Recovery Drive Mission (Situational Mission)]**

An accident has taken you out of contention, but accidents are a part of racing. The greats don't complain; they make the best of any situation, no matter how dire.

**Objective:** Recover to the highest possible position.

**Reward:** A **5X SP** multiplier for **P1**, **3X** for **P2**, and **2X** for **P3** on all System Points earned this weekend. A **10X SP** multiplier applied to points earned during this race, should you recover to point-earning positions but not podium positions.

**Punishment for failure:[Zone (Good)]** will be impossible to trigger for three championship weekends.

Just as the last kart was about to pass, Fatih finished reading. He mentally slammed **[ACCEPT]**. The reward was incredibly enticing, and the punishment, while severe, was for an ability he was already used to living without. This was the first time **[Zone]** had ever triggered since he'd acquired it, making him wonder if it had been a defective purchase. It seemed, however, that **[Zone]** had a flair for dramatic entrances, activating at the most pivotal moment.

The instant the final kart cleared his path, Fatih floored the accelerator, wrenching his kart back in the right direction. By then, the leaders, with Selçuk at the helm, were already navigating **T3**.

The surge of power, the heightened senses – the difference with all his abilities upgraded was immediate and profound. With **Invictus (Limit Break)** active, it felt as if he could feel the track through his very hands, discerning every patch of grip and every treacherous slick spot, rather than just through the seat of his pants. To any onlookers, his immediate, aggressive pace on the still-raining track might have seemed like reckless abandon born from the accident.

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"It seems we were mistaken! He rejoins the track and is driving as if his life depends on it!" the main commentator shouted, his voice cracking with renewed excitement. "He's cut down the gap by more than three seconds in just two corners! **OH MY GOD, HE IS DRIVING LIKE A MAN POSSESSED!** He deftly avoids a driver who spun off track right in front of him, moving him up to P39! Thirty-eight more positions to reclaim his rightful **P1!**

"

"His driving is bordering on reckless, yet he's somehow keeping it pointed in the right direction without a hint of caution!" Zakir took over, his voice a mix of awe and concern. "But how long can he maintain this pace without making a critical mistake? He's bidding to recover to at least point-scoring positions, which are still a daunting twenty-three places away!"

As Fatih approached **T4**, the lowest point of a straight with a mid-elevation change and thus the most waterlogged, the commentators held their breath. "Unlike others who are tiptoeing through, he enters it at near flat-out speed, considering the conditions!" the main commentator roared. "He's gone completely off the optimal racing line and found grip where others haven't! He accelerates hard onto the next straight, unafraid of the elevation change, lifting only slightly! He's cut another two seconds to the pack! OOOOH! There's a small pile-up of three karts in **T5**, but Fatih skates around it as if on ice, skillfully navigating the first of the double hairpins! He enters the narrowest part of

the track, **T6**, but it's no worry for him! He maintains delicate throttle control through **T7**, still on full power as he exits onto the straight! He sees the group ahead nearing **T8**, still struggling for grip, but he's closing rapidly! He's up to **P36**! The gap to the main pack is down to a meager three seconds as he approaches **T8**! He attacks it as if he designed the track himself, perfectly positioning his kart for the second double hairpin complex (**T9-T10**)! And as has been the case all weekend, he executes it flawlessly! On the short underpass straight, he's finally caught the tail end of the main pack! He slows patiently for **T11**, then **T12**, knowing these narrow sections are too risky for overtaking with so many karts bunched up. By the end of the very first lap, he has already undone so much of the damage, overtaking four karts and closing a ten-second gap created by the accident, rejoining the pack in just eleven corners! What a driver! What a recovery drive this is shaping up to be!" The main commentator had barely paused for breath, his voice radiating pure, unadulterated excitement.

Zakir took over, allowing his colleague a much-needed moment. "He is astonishingly calm. If this single lap is any indication, we might be on the verge of witnessing one of the all-time great recovery drives from this young genius."

"As if he can hear your words, he out-drags three more karts on the main straight!" the main commentator burst back in. "He's benefiting from their caution as they rediscover the track, which has gotten even wetter than the previous lap! He has incredible courage, going into **T2** side-by-side with another kart... and he comes out ahead! That's four more positions gained between two corners, bringing him up to **P32**! And he's not stopping there! He does the same into **T3**! His opponent spins the wheels, over-applying power trying to stay ahead, and Fatih sails past! He's up to **P31**! Now he has a bit of clear air to chase down the next pack as he enters **T4**. He repeats his earlier mastery of this section, then uses the run towards the first of the double hairpins (**T5-T6**) to close in, biding his time through the narrow complex."

Zakir added, "He's driving with a maturity and racecraft far beyond his age and experience. He knows precisely where to hunt and where to stalk his prey, applying pressure, forcing mistakes. One might almost say he's bullying these older drivers, making it look deceptively easy. Meanwhile, Selçuk, the instigator of all this drama, still leads in **P1**, with Jackson close behind in **P2**. They're slowly starting to build a small gap to the karts behind them."

"The composure of both Fatih and Selçuk is remarkable, albeit for different reasons," the main commentator mused. "Selçuk is performing well under the pressure of leading, despite a potential penalty looming over him for the first-corner incident. And Fatih is carving through the field as if they're standing still! The accident, while unfortunate, has transformed what might have been a dominant, perhaps even processional, win for Fatih into a breathtaking masterclass in recovery driving! He now goes around the outside into **T8**, outbraking his opponent, getting on the power earlier, cleaner, and emerges ahead with minimal wheelspin! He's chasing the driver in front, who glances back nervously! Fatih feints to the inside on the short straight before **T9**, then darts to the outside, tricking his next opponent into defending the wrong line and brushing the

wall! Fatih slips through before **T9**, already targeting his next victim, who's struggling through the second of the double hairpins (**T9-T10**)! He takes full advantage, diving down the inside, forcing his rival wide, and emerges ahead onto the underpass straight! He's up to **P28**!"

"He takes the final two corners flawlessly and completes his second lap, having gained more than twelve positions! There are still over sixteen minutes plus one lap remaining in this twenty-minute-plus-one-lap Final! If he maintains this incredible performance and doesn't put a foot wrong, he might just have a chance to recover to the point-scoring positions by the end of this race!"

## **Chapter 26 - Race Weekend | Sunday V | A MAN ON THE HUNT**

"Does he have glue on his tires or something? For a second consecutive lap, he executes another three-car overtake on the first straight in Lap 3, moving him up to P25! He's relentlessly cutting down the distance to the next pack!" The main commentator's voice vibrated with disbelief. Fatih, with his exceptional understanding of gripology and the track, was achieving the best traction possible in the current downpour, allowing him unparalleled speed and effortless overtakes. These maneuvers would have been significantly harder on a dry track, where the only differentiators would be minute engine power differences and superior corner entries and exits, heavily relying on slipstream.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say this was an exhibition drive, considering how slow others appear on the straights compared to Fatih," Zakir chimed in. "But you can only truly assess grip conditions by looking at the average speed of all drivers on the same straight. And from the data, they're all maintaining similar speeds. Fatih is the stark outlier – he seems to have the best grip of anyone out there! OOOOH! As you can see, anyone trying to imitate him simply goes off the track! And as always, Fatih is there to capitalize on the situation! He gains one more spot into T2, bringing him now up to P24! And there are still ten corners of this lap remaining for him to work his magic!" Zakir, who had taken over to explain Fatih's seemingly reckless bravery, was proven right the instant a kart ahead spun. The driver had attempted to cover Fatih, who was stalking him, but braked on a slippery patch, inducing a slide that sent him into the barriers, allowing Fatih to gain the position effortlessly.

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The architect of this electrifying display, the one responsible for the frenzy in both the grandstands and the commentary booth, was currently experiencing something akin to pure euphoria.

Thanks to Invictus now being at Limit Break, Fatih was driving with a borderline supernatural sense. If he were to describe the depth of sensation coursing through his body, he might say he was feeling the fuel mixture process and even the ignition taking place – that's how acutely sensitive his current body was. It was like moving from

differentiating things in single percentage digits to discerning nuances in decimal percentages.

'So this is the ability I would still have if I hadn't downgraded it to buy Simulation,' he mused. He still drove at the absolute limit, yet because he was currently closing the distance to the next pack, he had enough mental capacity to entertain such thoughts without compromising his drive.

'But even at its current level, it's still overkill compared to Simulation and Mentor,' he reflected as he took a wide entrance to the T5 hairpin, effortlessly overtaking the next driver, who, like the previous one, clipped the wall. Fatih moved to P23. He then entered the T6 hairpin before being met by an even narrower short straight, a result of the shunt the earlier driver had sustained. It posed no problem, and he threaded his kart through, entering the second main straight.

He tucked in behind the kart ahead, benefiting from the slipstream, his superior grip-finding ability rapidly closing the distance. Before long, he abandoned the tow; he now had enough speed and grip to complete the overtake. He darted out, passing the two karts that had been slipstreaming each other.

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"Is he really a five-year-old kid?!" someone in the grandstand exclaimed to his friend.

"The commentators said the information came from the officials, so it must be true," his friend replied, equally astonished. "But even I'm having trouble believing it. He's driving like an adult in a child's body!" Both he, his friend, and many others in the grandstand erupted in applause as Fatih completed a triple overtake into T8, propelling him to P20.

Even parents whose own children were racing clapped, impressed by Fatih's sheer skill and the confidence he exuded.

"Do they keep the recordings for later viewing, or do we have to request a race replay?" the first fan asked, pointing to the massive screen that had been showing Fatih's kart for nearly seventy percent of the race since the incident.

"I don't know," his friend replied. "I don't think they're broadcasting it live anywhere, but I imagine if you request it, they'll provide you with the recording."

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"In just five laps, he's climbed twenty positions, overtaking half the grid! HAHAAHAHAHAH! And there are still about seven to eight laps before we enter the final lap, based on the current lap times!" the main commentator announced, his voice carrying a hint of utter disbelief at what he was witnessing.

Zakir immediately took over, adding to the staggering statistics: "And check this out! Of the five laps completed, Fatih has set the fastest lap in four of them! Despite constantly having to overtake and fight through traffic, he's still at least two seconds faster per lap than the front-running pack of Selçuk and Jackson, even though they have clear air!"

"For the umpteenth time, he's caught the next pack in just a few corners!" the main commentator bellowed, his voice growing hoarse. "This one's the largest yet, an eight-car train, with four drivers currently in point-scoring positions and the other four desperately trying to get there. The fight here is absolutely fierce! But does it matter for Fatih? NO!"

He immediately feints to the right the moment the driver in front of him glances back, before ducking behind him again! AND AS THE DRIVER IN FRONT MOVES TO DEFEND THE LINE HE THINKS FATIH IS GOING FOR, HE FINDS NO ONE THERE! IT WAS JUST A BLUFF! Fatih remains on the grippy side of the track, moves into position, and now they're side-by-side in a drag race! But they're not alone! There are other variables, drivers still ahead of them! OH, THE PACK IS BEING COMPRESSED BY THE LEADER, WHO'S BEING CAUTIOUS! DOES THIS HINDER FATIH? NOOOO! He moves further right, turning it into three karts side-by-side as they barrel towards the corner! Is Fatih brave this time? YESSS!

While others brake early, he keeps his foot down, moves inward to the gap opened by their earlier braking, takes the apex, forcing the driver ahead wide, and completes a QUADRUPLE OVERTAKE IN A SINGLE MOVE! IN A SINGLE CORNER! He's overtaken four cars and is now just one position away from the points! And there are still four people in this pack, Fatih exerting immense pressure as they take Turn 3 and enter the short straight! The driver in front buckles under the pressure, attempting to create a gap between himself and Fatih, gets on the power too early, and causes wheelspin! Fatih doesn't allow him to recover from the mistake and goes to the left side of the track, completing the overtake! HE IS FINALLY BACK INTO THE POINTS! There are still three people remaining ahead of him in the pack, but does that matter for Fatih? NO, IT DOESN'T!

As they take Turn 4 and enter the wettest part of the track due to the upcoming rise in elevation, the three drivers ahead reduce their throttle to avoid going out of control. BUT FATIH MAINTAINS IT! He moves to the left side of the straight! The driver in front responds and moves to cover him, but does Fatih let it hinder him? NO! He remains behind the driver, knowing he's going to lift when they reach the peak of the elevation and the track starts falling! The driver in front also knows this but also knows they are now heading into the narrowest part of the track, and if he can just manage to enter the first double hairpin (T5-T6) safely, he might be able to keep his position for a few more corners! BUT WILL FATIH ALLOW HIM TO DO THAT? NOOOO!

Fatih moves to the side, benefiting from the driver in front slowing down, and now they're side-by-side as they go down through the falling elevation, drag racing as Fatih slowly pushes the driver closer and closer to the left wall of the track, putting the driver



in a situation of either braving it out or pulling back! And he does exactly that! Fatih now moves ahead, uses the left part of the track to do a switch-back but doesn't hug the chicanes and goes wide, benefiting from the higher exit speed to complete an overtake over the leader of the pack as he takes the second hairpin of the first double hairpins of T5 and T6 and comes out of the double hairpins in the lead of the pack! IN FIVE CORNERS HE OVERTOOK EIGHT CARS! I CAN'T BELIEVE WHAT I'M SEEING! HE IS NOW UP TO P12!

Having overtaken twenty-eight karts in five and a half laps, and he's still chasing and cutting down his time to the next pack, he should be with them within just a few corners!" The main commentator had been shouting so much that his voice was hoarse, but he seemed not to care, pushing forward, narrating the exhilarating spectacle unfolding before them.

Zakir, the co-commentator, immediately took over to lessen his burden and allow him a moment of respite, knowing Fatih was still a few seconds away from the next pack, meaning there would be no immediate action involving him.

"He is yet to be satisfied with what he has done so far," Zakir said. "He's still relentlessly chasing those ahead. For a moment, he turns his head, looking at the race leader, who is now only twelve positions ahead of him, before returning his focus to the track. He is still a man on a mission – a man on the hunt."

## **Chapter 27 - Race Weekend | Sunday VI | A MAN ON THE HUNT II**

{The upload schedule will return to the previous one starting today}

"As he completes his sixth lap and starts his seventh, he is finally on the cusp of the top ten!" the main commentator announced, his voice now hoarse but still passionate. "He executed ten overtakes on that last lap alone to bring him to P11! What more can I say about this drive that hasn't already been said? We're now watching the young Fatih chase down Zeynep Çelik, who started P8. She is one of the two female competitors in this championship, and both have shown outstanding capability by qualifying in the top ten. A top-ten finish would be a dream result for her, but Fatih has other ideas! He's already caught her on the straight, cutting the distance even further through T2 and T3! As they enter the short straight leading to the elevation change – the wettest part of the track – Fatih, who has proven to be a master of these conditions, pushes hard! Zeynep lifts cautiously, and Fatih bumps her kart, just enough to break her focus for a split second! That's all he needs! He moves side-by-side as the track rises! Who will be braver? Without question, it is Fatih! Zeynep releases the throttle at the peak of the elevation, but Fatih maintains a higher speed as the track drops away, emerging ahead as he enters the first of the double hairpins! He's now in P10, chasing the group of four ahead: Deniz, Bora, Can, and the second female driver, Ayşe. They've been racing as a pack since the start, exchanging positions and conserving energy for the final laps. But Fatih, a man on a mission, has no time to accommodate their plans. Many, myself included, believed he would lead this race from start to finish, but racing, like any sport

with multiple participants, has no absolutes. Upsets are always possible. Yet Fatih, who suffered the most unexpected upset at the very start, looks intent on rewriting that narrative. He's already caught them by the short underpass straight, and like an experienced hunter, he tucks in behind them, applying immense pressure." The main commentator, having strained his voice, finally took a moment to drink, allowing Zakir to take over as the five-kart train started Lap 7.

"How will he approach this? Will he remain behind them, applying pressure to force mistakes, or will he maintain his aggressive driving style at the risk of nullifying all his recovery efforts... Oh, okay, that's surprising. Why are they not defending?" Zakir broke from his own commentary, genuinely perplexed by what he was seeing. The group of four was hugging the right side of the track, leaving the entire left side open for Fatih.

"Are they opening the way to let him pass? Are they afraid to fight him, or is this some kind of trap?" the main commentator asked, having thrown his water bottle aside, captivated by the on-track drama.

"I don't think they currently have the capacity to orchestrate a trap," Zakir reasoned. "They're kids, aged six to eight. And if this is a taught strategy, why use it now and not in any of the previous instances? It seems Ayşe, leading their pack, made the move first, and the rest simply followed her lead."

"So they're just letting him pass?" the main commentator repeated.

"I think they're being extremely cautious, aware of the lack of grip on the left side, but also keeping in mind the upcoming heavy braking zone at the end of this long straight. We should have our answer now!" As Zakir finished, the main commentator took over, his voice rising again as the karts neared T2.

"And Fatih, having assessed the situation, makes his move! He takes the open left side, keeps his foot on the power longer, and passes Deniz and Bora by forcing them to brake heavier, sending them slightly wide! Fatih keeps it on track, albeit with a lower cornering speed, but it doesn't matter! On the short straight, he catches up to Can and Ayşe as they exit T3! He tucks into Can's slipstream! Into T4, HE DOES THE OPPOSITE OF HIS LAST MOVE! He remains on the outside while Can covers the inside and hits the apex! BUT FATIH, CARRYING MORE SPEED ON THE WIDER LINE, COMPLETES THE OVERTAKE! He closes the door on the inside at the corner exit, forcing Can to check up and allowing Fatih to secure the position! Now he focuses on Ayşe! Will he repeat his foolproof plan on this straight with the rising elevation? YES, HE DOES! During the falling elevation, he completes the overtake! HE'S UP TO P6! He's taken the first of the double hairpins, and now only four karts are between him and Selçuk! With the time remaining, it's possible for him to accomplish his goal! He's now chasing the next group: Emre, Huzeyfa, and Faris! If he overtakes them, only the top two will remain! But they are already over ten seconds ahead of this pack! And from the look of the lap times, only two and a half laps remain for him to achieve that! He has to not only catch this group but overtake them within this lap or the next to have enough

time to hunt down the two leaders and have any chance of victory before the race is over!" The main commentator seemed to have forgotten his sore throat entirely, his voice returning to its previous strength, coarse but powerful, as if conveying the sheer spectacle on track was more important than any physical discomfort.

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Burak, Rümeysa, and Güldane were currently speechless, watching the race unfold. They had been this way for the last two laps, finding it difficult to believe what they were seeing. For Fatih's mother and grandmother, it felt like a dream. They were witnessing their talented child, their grandchild, prove himself a genius in something he loved, outclassing everyone his age. They almost hoped they would awaken soon, lest they place even more weight and expectation on him in the real world.

Every parent believes their child is a one-of-a-kind genius, but nearly all know this is just wishful thinking. For Rümeysa and Güldane, who weren't deeply knowledgeable about motorsport, it was now obvious that what they were seeing their son and grandchild do was something only a true genius could accomplish. They were struggling to process the dizzying reality that their wishful thinking had turned out to be true.

A completely different line of thought was consuming Burak. 'I have to make sure we do everything in our power to keep him,' was his singular focus.

The initial surprise had slowly numbed, at least externally, but he was still constantly being impressed by his young student, who was driving as if a seasoned professional had possessed his body. Though he'd had similar thoughts since the free practice sessions, he was now fully prepared to resign if the academy director didn't do his absolute best to retain Fatih. He was certain that every karting academy in Istanbul, if not the whole of Turkey, would be trying to poach Fatih after his performance today. While signing a young talent can be a gamble, as they might not develop as expected, Fatih was different. What he was showing was not the mark of someone who would decline easily. Even if he didn't improve at all for the next five years, his current ability would still place him ahead of his peers in that age group.

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"AND HE LEAVES THAT GROUP BEHIND AS WELL, HAVING SPENT ONLY HALF A LAP WITH THEM! HE STARTS THE CHASE FOR JACKSON AND SELÇUK!" the main commentator roared. "THE TIMER HAS FINALLY HIT ZERO, MARKING THE LAP AFTER THIS AS THE FINAL LAP OF THE RACE! BUT FATIH IS STILL TEN SECONDS BEHIND THEM! CAN HE DO THE IMPOSSIBLE IN THE ONE AND A HALF LAPS REMAINING?!"

He shouted at the top of his lungs as Fatih finished overtaking the group of three and began his desperate, final pursuit. Time was not on Fatih's side. The situation was both thrilling and nerve-wracking for the commentators, the viewers, and the family, who

watched Fatih drive as if he hadn't given up at all, still pushing relentlessly despite the seemingly insurmountable odds.

## **Chapter 28 - FATIH, the Conqueror of Istanbul**

"The standing water on the track is reaching a dangerous level! Officials are inspecting the track now; it seems they're considering ending the race early before it becomes too hazardous for the drivers, many of whom are sliding more and more frequently!" the main commentator announced as TOSFED officials in high-visibility vests could be seen at various points, assessing the conditions without entering the circuit itself.

"I'm sure the top two would love for that to happen right now, but I really hope they let this race continue! It's far too interesting to end prematurely!" Zakir responded, but before he could even finish his thought, he saw the officials retreat. "And it seems they're withdrawing! They're going to let the race go to the end! One and a quarter laps remain!"

The main commentator immediately took over. "And Fatih, having already shaved three seconds off the lead in the quarter-lap since clearing that last group, is now powering through the second double hairpin! He gains an additional two seconds in that complex alone, reducing the gap to just five seconds! He brings the two leaders into his view as they all exit T12! Rediscovering the track every single lap is incredibly intensive, demanding immense concentration, but Fatih makes it look easy! He reduces the gap by another second as he practically swims while they struggle for grip!

They start the final lap, and the official waves the last lap board! That must be the worst news imaginable for the top two, who now have Fatih just four seconds behind them and closing fast! They take T1 and enter the longest straight, doing their absolute best to maximize speed while being careful to avoid any wheelspin that would lose them precious time! But Fatih, the man driving as if possessed, continues to devour the gap! He gains another half-second on the straight! As the leading pair brakes for T2 and T3, Fatih has already closed the gap by another eight-tenths! He carries more speed into T2 than the two in front, maintains it through the corner, and accelerates the moment he hits the apex, his throttle input absolutely perfect! He shaves another half-second in those two corners alone! He is now less than three seconds behind Jackson!

He continues the chase, gaining another tenth on the short straight, then another two-tenths into T4! He enters the straight with the rising and falling elevation – the section where he has been utterly dominant! And he doesn't disappoint! He maintains a significantly higher average speed than the leaders, shaving a full second off the gap and bringing them into touching distance! They are now separated by less than half a second! But unlike his previous moves, he remains calm, not attempting a daring overtake at the start of the double hairpin, choosing instead to apply pressure! It's immediately proven to be the right decision! The two leaders, Jackson and Selçuk, cover the inside lines as they enter the first of the double hairpins, T5 and T6, cooperating to prevent him from passing through the narrowest section of the track

where overtaking is virtually impossible! Fatih closes the gap to zero, slightly bumping Jackson's rear as they exit T6, a clear message as they head onto the next straight!"

Zakir took over as the main commentator took a desperate breath. "This straight and the following double hairpin are the only areas left where he can complete a successful overtake! If he fails here, there's nothing he can do in the final two corners! I'm sure he knows that, hence the immense pressure he's now exerting on Jackson, who is forced to do the same to Selçuk ahead!" But just as he was about to continue his analysis, he was interrupted by the main commentator, whose voice exploded with excitement.

"AND FATIH FEINTS TO THE INSIDE! JACKSON MOVES TO THE MIDDLE OF THE TRACK TO COVER, LEAVING A TINY GAP! BUT FATIH, AS IF HE PLANNED THIS ALL ALONG, EXECUTES A PERFECT SWITCHBACK TO THE OUTSIDE! JACKSON TRIES TO DEFEND, BUT THIS TOO SEEMS TO BE PART OF FATIH'S CALCULATION! He forced Jackson to change direction more aggressively than he wanted, causing him to lose grip for a split second and slide wide! FATIH HAS COMPLETED A DOUBLE FEINT, A DOUBLE SWITCHBACK! HE MOVES SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH JACKSON AS THEY DRAG RACE TO TURN 8! WHO IS BRAVER? AND LIKE EVERY TIME BEFORE, IT IS FATIH! HE BRAKES LATER, PURPOSEFULLY GOES WIDE, SHUTTING THE DOOR AND FORCING JACKSON TO EITHER BACK OFF OR CRASH THEM BOTH OUT OF THE RACE! A DARING MOVE WITH A PERFECT RETURN! FATIH IS IN P2, CHASING SELÇUK!

The leader is now looking back as they enter the short straight before the final double hairpin! These are the final chances for Fatih to overtake and for Selçuk to defend! And Selçuk seems intent on doing exactly that! He slows more than usual in the middle of the track, backing Fatih up and allowing Jackson to close the gap, inducing the concertina effect! BUT FATIH HAS OTHER PLANS! HE DOESN'T EVEN TOUCH THE BRAKE, using Selçuk's defensive braking to slow his own kart! He continues into the corner, taking a very late apex, the opposite of Selçuk's middle apex, while Jackson takes an early apex! All three drivers are on three different racing lines! WHO IS RIGHT? IT LOOKS LIKE FATIH IS! He attempts to use his superior exit speed on the outside, but Selçuk deliberately goes wide to block the line as they exit T10! If he successfully holds this, he will win the race— BUT FATIH HAS OTHER IDEAS! THAT TOO WAS ANOTHER BAIT! HE TUCKS TO THE INSIDE OF T10, BARELY BRAKES, AND INDUCES A DELIBERATE, CONTROLLED SLIDE! IT WORKS! HE ROTATES THE KART PERFECTLY AND IS NOW SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH SELÇUK, HOLDING THE INSIDE LINE FOR THE EXIT OF T10! THEY ENTER THE UNDERPASS STRAIGHT, DRAG RACING, NEITHER GIVING AN INCH! SELÇUK GLANCES AT FATIH, BUT FATIH'S EYES ARE LOCKED FORWARD! WHO WILL LIFT FIRST INTO T11? THIS MIRRORS THE FIRST LAP, BUT THE STAKES ARE INFINITELY HIGHER!

The track width here barely accommodates two karts and requires cooperation, which is why no overtakes have happened here all race! BUT THEY ARE BOTH INTENT ON BEING THE ONE TO ENTER THAT STRAIGHT AHEAD! THEY BOTH BRAKE INCREDIBLY LATE! SELÇUK, WHOSE WIDE LINE FROM T10 HAS NOW BECOME



THE INSIDE LINE FOR T11, HAS A LOCKUP! HE CAN'T MAKE THE CORNER! HE'S GOING TO TAKE FATİH WITH HIM! BUT FATİH BRAKES PERFECTLY! HE PERFORMS A SWITCHBACK AS THEY SWAP LINES, FATİH MOVING TO THE INSIDE, SELÇUK FORCED TO THE OUTSIDE! THEY ENTER THE CORNER AT THE SAME TIME, BOTH AGGRESSIVE, BUT GIVING EACH OTHER JUST ENOUGH SPACE! THEY DRAG RACE ONCE AGAIN TO THE FINAL CORNER, T12! FATİH BRAKES LATER, KEEPS THE INSIDE LINE, AVOIDS A LOCKUP UNLIKE SELÇUK, AND COMES OUT AHEAD! HE'S BACK IN THE LEAD OF THE RACE ON THE FINAL CORNER! HE REMAINS CALM AND GETS ON THE POWER! SELÇUK GETS AGGRESSIVE, TRYING TO CHASE HIM TO THE FINISH LINE, BUT FATİH'S PERFECT EXIT KEEPS HIM AHEAD! AND FATİH YILDIRIM, THE FIVE-YEAR-OLD, THE ONE WITH THE NAME MEANING 'THE CONQUEROR' OR 'VICTOR,' COMES HOME VICTORIOUS! THE ONE WITH THE NAMESAKE OF THE CONQUEROR OF CONSTANTINOPLE HAS CONQUERED THE ISTANBUL PARK KARTING TRACK! HE WINS THE FIRST RACE OF THE 2009 MINI CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON!

OOOOOOOOOOH MYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOD! I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS! HE HAS ACHIEVED THE IMPOSSIBLE, THE IMPROBABLE, WHAT WAS CONSIDERED UNACHIEVABLE! IN HIS FIRST RACE, NO LESS! THIS IS A MARK OF THE GREATS! A PERFECT START FOR WHAT MIGHT TURN OUT TO BE THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME! YOU MIGHT SAY IT'S AN EXAGGERATION, BUT REMEMBER, THIS IS THE FIRST OFFICIAL RACE OF HIS CAREER! HE WAS SENT TO THE BACK OF THE TRACK BY THE MISTAKE OF ANOTHER, BUT THE FIVE-YEAR-OLD, ON HIS FIRST-EVER RACE, DIDN'T GIVE UP! HE FOUGHT HIS WAY BACK TO HIS RIGHTFUL POSITION, HIS DESERVED POSITION, AND WINS THE ISTANBUL PARK RACE!"

The commentator didn't even know what he was saying anymore, his mouth having taken over, spitting words of pure, unadulterated shock and awe. No one stopped him, not even Zakir, who seemed to believe every single word.

"As you can see, the crowd is on its feet, clapping for him," Zakir finally managed to say, his voice much calmer but filled with reverence. "For the performance he has shown them, for the drive he has given them. It was not the drive of a rookie, but the drive of a very talented monster. Or rather, I should say, the drive of a champion. A drive that will be referenced in his future career as the first sign of his greatness."

"You think he's already clenched the championship?" the main commentator asked, his voice raspy.

"Yes, I believe so," Zakir replied confidently. "He has shown the signs all weekend. Had it not been for the accident, this would have been a grand slam weekend where he led every session. But I think the accident was for the better. It answered the questions many would have had about his racecraft, or if he was only good when leading from the front. I don't see anyone causing him an upset after this. His perfect, mistake-free drive on a soaking wet track, while everyone else was affected, was masterful. He drove as if



he created these conditions himself and had hidden the grippiest parts of the track for his own personal use. This race answered every question: How is his racecraft? How is his overtaking? Is he strategic? How is his driving in the wet? Can he handle force majeure situations? Can he handle pressure? Can he handle things not going as planned?"

The main commentator took over, answering the rhetorical questions. "And I'm sure everyone present will answer 'yes' to all the yes-or-no questions and 'perfect' to the rest! He showed no mistakes at all! Ooooh, I'm being told the replay of the first-corner accident is ready. Let's watch it again!" The massive screen switched from showing Fatih on his cool-down lap, one hand raised in celebration, to a slow-motion replay of the race start. The perfectly edited sequence, showing multiple angles, explained why it had taken so long to prepare; Fatih's relentless recovery drive had left no window to play it earlier.

"Looks like I need to add another thing about him," Zakir said as he watched the replay. "He is incredibly aware of his surroundings."

"Why do you say that?" the main commentator asked.

"Look at Fatih's kart carefully," Zakir instructed. "His steering, throttle, and braking inputs a few moments before the impact. He used all of those things to turn the kart and reduce the potential damage as much as possible, to keep his race alive." The director, hearing this, replayed the accident again, this time zoomed in on Fatih.

The viewers could now clearly see it. In slow motion, they saw Fatih's head turn, followed by an immediate lift of the throttle, his other foot hitting the brake as he shifted his body weight to force the rear-left of the kart to rise, ensuring the tire would receive the brunt of the impact. The chassis would bear only the remainder of the force, already reduced by the deforming tire. But it didn't stop there. As the hit was taking place, Fatih was already counter-steering, not only to control the direction of his slide but to ensure that when he hit the tire wall, the entire left side of the kart would do so at once, distributing the force uniformly and keeping him out of the path of the oncoming karts.

"Holy sh—" the main commentator had to stop himself from finishing the curse, but the sentiment was echoed in the minds of everyone watching. "Is he really a five-year-old rookie in his first race, or are we being trolled? Because it doesn't make sense any other way for him to be able to do that at that age!" He found himself asking the question aloud. What they were seeing was not something a five-year-old should be able to do — not only to make a decision in a split second but to devise and perfectly implement a complex course of action to minimize damage and prevent a larger pile-up.

"The greats are often incomprehensible," Zakir said, a wry smile in his voice. "For them, what we see as difficult and impossible might just be a Tuesday." He paused for a moment before adding, in a sarcastic tone, "Maybe we can ask him what was on his mind during the interviews. They're setting up the podium now."

"Oh, right! You have to go ask the top three questions!" the main commentator said. "What wouldn't I give to be the one asking those questions! Looks like you're the lucky one, so ask them for us!" Zakir nodded, leaving the commentary booth and heading towards the pitlane, where the podium was being prepared on the main straight.

## **Chapter 29: Race Weekend | Sunday VIII | Wrap Up**

Having completed his celebration lap, Fatih finally returned to a bustling pit lane. More than thirty karts were already there, undergoing the mandatory post-race inspections and weigh-ins. The process of checking if both the driver and the kart were over the minimum weight set by the organizers would take a very long time for the whole field. That, however, was not Fatih's concern. As the winner, he, along with the other two podium finishers, was directed to the front of the queue for an express weigh-in.

He found Selçuk just stepping off the scale, helmet in hand. Fatih, still wearing his own helmet with the visor cracked open, met his rival's gaze. Selçuk stared at Fatih for a few seconds, then dropped his head, a clear look of shame on his face for his actions during the race. He didn't say a word, simply taking the official weigh-in slip handed to him and walking away with his coach. The official then called for Fatih.

"I can't even be angry at him," Fatih said quietly to Apollo as he stepped onto the scale. "His actions ended up benefiting me."

"Rivalries are what push people to become their best," Apollo replied, his translucent form floating effortlessly through the busy officials, visible only to Fatih. "The rivalry between Lauda and Hunt is a prime example. The System is using this dynamic to create similar effects, but only with individuals it deems talented enough to be worthy competitors at your current level."

"Will the System trigger rivalry missions even if I'm the one causing trouble?" Fatih asked, his mind already calculating. Depending on the answer, he could potentially farm SP by cultivating an infamous or arrogant reputation.

"No," Apollo stated firmly. "I don't know the exact criteria for triggering those missions, as I am limited to providing tasks related to your training. However, I am confident that if you go around creating problems just to trigger missions, the System will not generate them. You would be the instigator, not the one being challenged. It will only create missions when it discovers someone genuinely stronger than you, or, as is the case now, when someone it deems talented challenges you, even if they have yet to reach your level."

Apollo's explanation concluded just as Fatih reached the interview area, a large backdrop filled with the names and logos of sponsors. Selçuk was already being interviewed by Zakir.

"I made a mistake, and I will be more careful in the future," Selçuk said, his voice subdued, answering a question about the five-second penalty he'd received for the Lap 1, Turn 1 incident. The penalty had officially demoted him to P3, behind Jackson.

"Thank you, and good luck in the next round," Zakir said, then welcomed Jackson, who was now officially P2. The look on Jackson's face, however, showed none of the happiness one might expect from a post-race promotion.

"How difficult was it racing on a wet track while it was still raining?" Zakir asked after congratulating him.

"I tried my best... but it was difficult," Jackson answered in broken Turkish. Despite the language barrier, his deep dissatisfaction with the outcome was palpable, the raw emotion of a seven-year-old who hadn't gotten what he'd worked so hard for.

"As the defending champion, how do you feel about finishing P2, and how was it racing against Fatih this weekend?" Zakir asked, patting the boy's shoulder sympathetically before continuing his work.

"Not good. I wanted to win," Jackson answered bluntly, not sugarcoating his feelings. "Not happy about Fatih. But I promise to win the next round."

After a few more questions, Zakir bid him farewell and welcomed Fatih to the interview board.

"Congratulations on winning your first-ever race," Zakir said, extending his hand for a firm handshake.

"Thank you very much."

"How difficult was it for you to recover after finding yourself at the back of a forty-kart pack on Lap 1?" Zakir asked, getting straight to the most interesting part.

"It wasn't difficult," Fatih answered calmly, trying to filter his words to sound like a child, but failing slightly. "The only thing that came to my mind was that I had to overtake thirty-nine karts to win. So, I knew I had to be calm and do my best, which I did." The maturity of his answer surprised Zakir and the viewers watching from the grandstand.

"You answered very well, surprisingly so. Are you really only five years old?" Zakir asked with a chuckle.

"Yes, I'm five."

"I believe you. When we saw the replay of the incident, we saw how you reacted to minimize the damage to your kart. Can you walk us through what was going through your mind?"

"I saw Selçuk coming and realized he wasn't going to be able to stop in time," Fatih explained simply. "So, I just followed my instincts, and they worked out."

"Instincts,' you say?" Zakir repeated the word, almost wanting to cry. He had expected a detailed, technical breakdown, but Fatih had shattered that expectation by attributing it all to instinct. He quickly reminded himself he was interviewing a five-year-old, not a seasoned professional, and continued. "Were you using those same instincts during the race? You set five of the top ten fastest laps today, putting you in a different league than everyone else."

"Yes," Fatih answered, nodding his head.

"Selçuk received a five-second penalty for the incident. Do you think that's enough, or should he have been punished more?"

"It doesn't matter, since I won the race," Fatih stated plainly, stopping there. He continued the answer in his mind, 'I wish they'd do this at every race. Thanks to him, I got the 5X multiplier for winning. Why would I complain about his penalty when my gains were a direct result of it?' Only he and Apollo, who was now laughing heartily, could hear.

"You don't care because you won. What a way to see things," Zakir mused. "I'd love to ask you more, but unfortunately, we're out of time and need to get you to the podium. Congratulations on your debut, your win, and good luck in your future career." He gestured towards the podium area.

"Thank you," Fatih said, heading towards the podium as the audience applauded. One by one, Selçuk, Jackson, and finally Fatih were called to the stage. The Turkish national anthem played, followed by the head of the TOSFED Mini Championship division handing them their medals and trophies, their finishing positions engraved upon them. The largest trophy, of course, was given to Fatih. He was also awarded the "Driver of the Weekend" trophy and the "Fastest Lap of the Race" trophy. He couldn't carry them all at once, requiring Burak to come up and help him with the larger ones as he celebrated, waving to his mother and grandmother, who were clapping proudly in the grandstands.

After the ceremony, Burak took Fatih back to the academy's tent. He changed his clothes and took off the sponsored racing gear, which, other than his personal helmet, would be returned to the academy for cleaning before the next race. Once he was done, he ran to his mother, who was waiting for him outside the tent, hugging her and his grandmother tightly. Burak had a small chat with them before they bade him farewell and headed to the parking lot. They started their journey home at exactly 17:00, the awards, interviews, and celebrations having taken nearly half an hour to complete.

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"He's really tired," Rümeyza said, glancing at the rearview mirror to find Fatih with his eyes closed, seemingly asleep. Despite losing an entire weekend she could have used to rest, a smile never left her face. She was far too happy to even consider it a burden.

"Yes, he should be tired mentally, after finding himself in that situation," Güldane added, remembering the pit in her stomach when Fatih had fallen to last. She couldn't imagine how he must have felt and wouldn't have been surprised if he had quit in anger. But he had kept his calm and fought his way back to victory.

While they thought Fatih was sleeping, he was doing the exact opposite. Even if he wanted to sleep, he couldn't; he was buzzing with excitement. He was finally looking at his winnings from the race weekend, the rewards the System had granted him the moment the race ended. He'd had to postpone checking them until now, and the anticipation was electric.

### **Chapter 30: The Spoils of Victory**

#### **[RACE WEEKEND DEBRIEF COMPLETE]**

#### **[SEASONAL MISSION: THE FIRST CROWN (WEEKEND 1)]**

**STATUS: COMPLETE**

Milestone 1 (Participation): +10 SP

Milestone 2 (Pole Position): +10 SP

Milestone 3 (Fastest Lap): +5 SP

Milestone 4 (Race Finish - 25 pts): +25 SP

Milestone 5 (Driver of the Weekend): +5 SP

Additional Rewards (Per-Action):

Overtake: 39 overtakes = +39 SP

Brilliant Overtake: 5 overtakes = +25 SP

Defense: 1 successful defense = +1 SP

Perfect Weekend Bonus: +50 SP

**["THE FIRST CROWN" SUBTOTAL: +170 SP]**

#### **[URGENT MISSION: vs. SELÇUK]**

STATUS: **COMPLETE**

REWARD: +15 SP

**[CHALLENGE MISSION: vs. JACKSON]**

STATUS: **COMPLETE**

REWARD: +30 SP

**[RECOVERY DRIVE MISSION]**

STATUS: **COMPLETE** (P1 FINISH)

REWARD ACTIVATED: 5X MULTIPLIER

**[FINAL CALCULATION]**

Base Weekend Earnings: **215 SP**

Recovery Drive Multiplier: **x5**

TOTAL SP GAINED: **+1,075 SP**

[Current System Points: **1,386** → **2,461 SP**]

Fatih, who was looking at the system's breakdown of his points, had a difficult time restraining the smile from spreading across his face, which would surely reveal to his mother and grandmother that he was not, in fact, asleep.

'I should really send Selçuk a gift basket or something,' he thought with a private, cold amusement. The final SP tally had skyrocketed from an expected 215 to over a thousand, all thanks to the situational mission triggered by the crash. The incident had erased any lingering negative feelings he might have had, even subconsciously.

"Are you going to upgrade anything, or are you planning on accumulating more points?" Apollo asked, his form seated calmly next to Fatih in the car.

"There's no benefit in waiting. Having experienced what these abilities feel like one level higher during the **[Zone]** activation, returning to their base level feels like going from a 1080p display back down to 720p," Fatih explained. "When 720p was all I knew, it was fine. But now, having experienced the upgrade, all I can notice is the difference." He mentally pulled up the System Shop and opened his abilities tab.

[Invictus (Ultimate)] → **10,000 SP** [Invictus (Limit Break)]



[Sponge Brain (Good)] → **2,600 SP** [Sponge Brain (Excellent)]

[Sponge Body (Good)] → **2,600 SP** [Sponge Body (Excellent)]

[Catlex (Good)] → **1,800 SP** [Catlex (Excellent)]

[Zone (Good)] → **2,000 SP** [Zone (Excellent)]

[Aquaman (Good)] → **1,500 SP** [Aquaman (Excellent)]

He took a deep breath. Even after earning over a thousand SP in a single weekend and diligently completing his daily missions for nearly a year, he still couldn't afford to upgrade his top-tier learning abilities.

"What do you think?" he asked Apollo. "Should I wait until the next race weekend to earn the remaining SP for a Sponge ability, or should I spend it on Catlex now?"

"While the Sponge abilities are powerful, their current versions are more than sufficient for your age," Apollo replied without hesitation, as if he'd already considered the question. "I suggest you upgrade Catlex to Excellent. Its effects on your reflexes and decision-making are immediate and universally applicable in racing, unlike the other two, whose full effects will become more pronounced as you continue to grow and train."

"Makes sense. Let's do as you suggest," Fatih agreed, mentally confirming the purchase. The number 1,800 vanished from his SP pool, making him squint as the total dropped.

**[CATLEX has been UPGRADED (Good → Excellent).]**

**[System Points: 2,461 → 661 SP]**

The effect was subtle, yet still perceptible thanks to his Invictus ability. He opened his eyes. The trees passing by the car window at high speed seemed to resolve with greater clarity than before. He had enough time to not only distinguish them but also to process and think about potential reactions if needed.

The sensation lasted only a fleeting moment before it disappeared. His Sponge Brain ability immediately digested the new information, and his mind recalibrated, seamlessly integrating the heightened perception until it felt like the new norm.

He closed his eyes again, hoping to benefit from the "teleportation" of being carried to his bed when he felt the car go over the familiar bumps that indicated they were close to home.

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"Aaaaah, La Conca, I missed you!" Fatih said, standing arms outstretched in a T-pose within the Simulation. He had logged in the moment he'd finished dinner and his other nightly routines. His ploy to be carried to bed had failed spectacularly; his mother had woken him up, complaining that he was getting too big and heavy for her to carry him anymore, even as he'd pretended to groggily awaken from a deep sleep.

"Stop wasting time. We need to begin your new training," Apollo materialized, interrupting Fatih's moment of reminiscence, despite him having been on this very track just last night, testing his Aquaman ability.

"Now that the rain mission is over, what's next?" he asked excitedly, curious about the next step and any potential missions.

"Nothing special," Apollo stated, though his tone suggested otherwise. "Just the art of tire management. You will learn to deal with every compound, every situation: tire degradation, marbles, graining, blistering, losing grip. Everything you will face in a single-seater." As he spoke, different compounds of tires materialized behind him, from hard slicks to full wets.

"I don't remember experiencing tire degradation of that level in karting," Fatih said, wondering if it was something he'd encounter in higher categories.

"No, not to this extent," Apollo confirmed. "This is to give you a foundational understanding of tire dynamics. The more comprehensive your knowledge, the greater your advantage at every competitive level. While there are no pit stops in karting, there is still some level of tire degradation. The performance difference isn't huge, but learning to manage it will still give you an edge. Like all fundamentals, it is best to start early. Now, get in the kart and start experiencing the different compounds."

"What are you doing?" Apollo asked, noticing Fatih was just standing there, waiting.

"Waiting for a mission prompt to appear so I can accept before we start," Fatih answered, remembering the lucrative Aquaman mission.

"I will only assign a mission once I deem you have mastered the basics," Apollo stated firmly. "Even if I gave you one now, you would not be able to accomplish it without the foundational knowledge. So, get in the kart and follow me." Apollo boarded his own kart and headed onto the track. Fatih's next lesson, a deep dive into the world of motorsport tires, was about to begin.