

Formula 1: The GOAT

#Chapter 51: Race Weekend | Sunday | A Gamble - Read Formula 1: The GOAT Chapter 51: Race Weekend | Sunday | A Gamble

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"A perfect switchback! He improves his position now to P27, having gained thirteen places in just three laps!" Süleyman's voice was already sounding a bit strained, despite it being just the third lap of the final race. "The fights ahead are helping him, compressing the groups and pushing them back towards him for the picking! And ooooh, he has to brake heavily as the driver in front nearly takes him out in a clumsy attempt at defending! Haaaa, this is going to be a nightmare for Fatih. Everyone is fighting tooth and nail to keep or increase their position, and with the track now dry, it makes it even more difficult for him to make progress."

"I think things are about to change, Süleyman," Zakir interjected, his tone suddenly urgent. "I've just received a message from our trackside reporter. There is light rain already starting to fall a few kilometers away from here, and it is heading directly towards the circuit. It looks like Fatih's prayers have been answered, but it's going to take a few laps before that rain reaches us." He took over for a moment, allowing Süleyman to hydrate before continuing with the commentary.

On the track, Fatih, oblivious to the approaching weather, continued his relentless charge. He was a predator, cutting the distance to those in front of him before catching up and attempting to overtake. He succeeded most of the time, but the driving standards at the back of the pack were a world away from the clean, precise racing at the front. He was forced to be more careful, constantly on the lookout for aggressive defense, reckless maneuvers, and the simple driving mistakes of the backmarkers, any of which could end his race prematurely.

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Tak... tak, tak, tak...

Burak, who was watching the race intently from the pit wall, lifted his head. He had felt a single drop tap the brim of his cap. The moment he looked up, his face was pelted by a dozen more.

"Let's prepare for a pit stop. Change the tires to wets," he said, his voice sharp and commanding as he turned to the other coaches and mechanics of the Fatih Karting Academy. They had more than five karts in the competition, meaning if they were all to come into the pits, they needed to be a well-oiled machine. They immediately started their preparations.

With a high probability of rain forecasted for the race, they had already brought the wet tires from the academy tents to the pitlane in anticipation. Now, all they had to do was put on their clear, waterproof raincoats, place the tires in their designated areas based on which driver they were assigned to, and prepare the pit boards that would be used to call their drivers in.

"So, what's the order? Who are we calling in first?" a mechanic asked, wanting to know which number to prepare for the board.

"We wait for now," Burak said, his eyes scanning the track. "The rain is still only a few drops. We'll call them in based on their position on track and how beneficial a stop would be for them at that moment."

But immediately, before the mechanics could even nod in agreement, Selçuk's coach interjected. "I disagree. We go from those in front to those in the rear. It's only fair to those who qualified better," he argued, clearly trying to get a strategic advantage for his driver, who was the leading driver of the academy at that moment.

"What do you mean, 'unfair'?" Burak countered, not wanting Selçuk's coach to mess with their overall team strategy. "If we pull them in based on the optimal situation for each driver, it will give the entire team a greater advantage. Won't all of them benefit from that?"

Just before Selçuk's coach could rebut with a counterargument, the heavens opened. The few drops suddenly intensified, turning into a heavy, driving rain. As they all turned their heads to the track, they immediately saw the results of the downpour. A few drivers were already sliding off the track, their slick tires offering no grip on the now-treacherous surface.

"Call for Selçuk to pit!" Selçuk's coach shouted, grabbing the pit board and slapping Selçuk's number onto it before rushing to the pit wall to signal his driver. Burak just watched for a second before he took another board, placing Fatih's number, 213, on it, preparing to call him in as well.

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"As expected, the rain has finally come, with nine laps already on the board!" Süleyman announced, his voice filled with excitement. "And it looks like the teams have come up with a plan ahead of time in expectation of it, as drivers are now being called to the pit to change their tires to wets! Huzeyfa, still leading the race, is the first to enter the pits, followed by nearly everyone behind him! This is going to be interesting! Based on how fast the teams can change the tires, positions are going to be gained or lost! And with the rain still increasing, completing the overtakes in the pitlane is going to be a huge advantage, as overtaking on the wet track is now incredibly dangerous!" Karts began to stream into the pitlane, drivers raising their hands to acknowledge the call from their teams.

"I wonder if there is anyone brave enough to remain on slicks in these conditions," Zakir mused. "But it looks like no one wants to take that gamble at all... and Fatih goes and proves me wrong! He shakes his head and continues with the race, denying the call to pit! It seems like he is the only one who is taking the gamble!" Zakir's voice, which had started normally, immediately became excited the moment Fatih was shown on the screen, shaking his head at Burak on the pit wall as he sped past.

"It can either be a call that makes or breaks his entire race!" Süleyman shouted, captivated by the unfolding drama. "And from the look of it, it seems like everyone else disagrees with his decision! At this moment, he is the only one on the track, which immediately catapults him into the lead of the race!"

"Now, it is all dependent on how he is going to drive," Zakir cautioned, reminding everyone of the immense challenge Fatih had just set for himself. "Although he has benefited by staying out, he is going to be constantly losing time to those on wet tires. He can't drive with the same confidence as those on the wets while he is still on slicks, or he risks sliding out of the race entirely. Now, everything is dependent on his talent. This will be his first time driving on a wet track with slick tires, and if he can adapt and keep it on the track for the next eight laps, it will decide if he makes an unbelievable comeback and wins the race, making it the second time he has recovered from last to win. Or, he gets overtaken by everyone and ends up not getting even a single point. But with the massive gap he has gained due to not pitting, it is going to buy him a few laps. He can use that time to decide if he is going to pit and lose only a few positions, or remain in the lead and risk losing time with every passing corner."

Chapter 52: Race Weekend | Sunday | Teetering on the Edge

"A minute and a half minimum, two minutes maximum," Fatih calculated, his mind racing as fast as his kart. That was the window of time it would take for the other teams to complete a pit stop and change to wet tires. It was also the window of time he had to create as much of a gap as possible before they returned to the track with more advantageous tires and began to hunt him down. Once they were on wets, they would be seconds faster than him in each lap, a deficit he could not overcome with skill alone.

He would have preferred to pit, but he knew the moment he did, his chances for a race win would evaporate. Although he had mounted a similar recovery in the first round, the circumstances were vastly different. The Istanbul Park circuit was compact, with a long track forced into a small area, which meant the drivers had to brake drastically in the majority of the corners. This track, however, was different. It was spread out over a large area, with flowing, high-speed corners that didn't require constant heavy braking. This allowed for a much larger build-up of speed over a longer distance, diminishing his primary advantage of carrying a higher cornering speed.

He knew this lap, the one he was on right now, was going to be his make-or-break lap. As he came out of the final corner, a right-hand hairpin that he navigated at a slower-than-usual speed to complete the lap just as all the other drivers entered the pitlane, he

pushed all of his senses and mental bandwidth to the absolute maximum. He focused completely on his [Invictus] ability, which made his senses abnormally sensitive, allowing him to feel the track's grip with an almost supernatural clarity. Adding his [Aquaman] ability to the mix, he slowly started to feel as if a new racing line, a path of maximum grip, was being drawn on the track in front of him. He knew the line was an imaginary one, a mental construct his mind was creating to make the flood of sensory data easier to digest, an inspiration from the racing games of his past life. But he didn't care. He got on the power as aggressively as he could, teetering on the very limit of grip to avoid wheelspin, and started to push.

In his mind, this was no different than a qualifying lap. A qualifying lap where he had to get pole position, no matter what.

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"And Fatih, the lone man on the track, starts his first lap on a fully wet circuit!" Süleyman's voice was filled with a mix of awe and anticipation. "This lap will determine whether his decision to stay out was a strategic masterstroke or a catastrophic blunder! And look at his driving line! He's completely changed it from his usual lines, even from his qualifying line! It's as if he's driving on the opposite areas of the track he had been using in all the previous sessions, if I remember correctly."

"Although taking the opposite of the optimal line in normal conditions might lose you time, doing that in a wet condition gains you time," Zakir said, his voice a calm, analytical counterpoint to Süleyman's excitement.

"How so? Care to elaborate for our viewers?"

"If you look at a track in dry conditions, you will usually see a darker color on the optimal racing line," Zakir began, using as little racing lingo as possible to make the concept accessible to everyone. "Many people would attribute it to being dust-free due to karts constantly passing over it, but it's mostly because that area is filled with rubber from the tires, seeping into the asphalt. This allows for further grip on the track, a phenomenon we in our field call 'track evolution.' But in the rain, the same rubber on the track that gave you additional grip and speed is the same one that will cause you to slip. With water getting in the mix, that grippy area turns into an ice rink, as slippery as polished obsidian glass. So, driving in the areas where the karts *didn't* deposit a large amount of tire rubber during all of the previous sessions means there is less of it, and the abrasive, natural surface of the track is still there, allowing for much more grip. This makes it the more optimal area for driving during a wet condition."

"Then please, take us through his lap," Süleyman said, handing over the commentary to Zakir.

"Thank you, Süleyman. As Fatih reaches the end of the straight, he needs to lift and brake *before* the track intersects with the usual, rubbered-in racing line. Braking on

that line now means you will go sliding. He has to give it a sharp jab of the brake, a brief but surgical application, or he risks being sent into a spin..."

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While Zakir was narrating his lap, Fatih had already tuned out everything else, his entire being focused on his driving. He reached the end of the long straight, going through the start-finish line. Seeing the corner that he could normally take flat-out in the dry, he lifted for a moment, then immediately replaced it with an instantaneous, heavy, but perfectly modulated jab of the brake, just enough to force the rear tires to lock and bite, reducing his speed. As he turned in, he leaned his body forward to load the front tires, helping with the turn-in. He used a snap of the steering wheel, a quick, full-lock input to provoke a hint of understeer, which in turn jacked up the front end, lifting the inside rear wheel for better rotation. As he exited the corner, he shifted his weight rearward to improve his traction, getting back on the power while modulating and feathering the throttle, dancing on the razor's edge where even a few percentage points more throttle would send him into a wheelspin, locking his rear axle and destroying his lap.

Coming out of Turn 1, he immediately moved to the non-racing line side of the track as Turn 2 came at him. He repeated everything he did on the first corner, but this time, he used the kerbs, hooking his inside wheels over them, anchoring the kart and helping it pivot through the corner. He then just connected it with Turn 3, which was now no different than a straight as he pushed through it at the maximum possible throttle.

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"As he comes out of the final corner and gets on the power, barreling through the start-finish line, he puts in a lap time that is only twelve seconds off his dry pace!" Süleyman shouted, his voice cracking with disbelief. "While also creating a one-minute, twenty-eight-second gap, lapping the entire field as they are still in the pits, in the final stages of their tire changes! They are now starting to rejoin the track, a full lap and twenty seconds down! But with better tires, can they cut down that time and catch up to him? The wet tires will cut down the time significantly!" The race was getting more and more interesting with every passing lap.

"I'm curious to see the lap times of the drivers on the wet tires and compare them to the lap time Fatih just drove on his slicks," Zakir said, his own voice now matching the excitement in Süleyman's.

Chapter 53: Race Weekend | Sunday | Unexpected Ending

"Ten seconds! That is the gap between Fatih in the lead and Selçuk, who is relentlessly chasing him down!" Süleyman's voice was a mix of awe and excitement. "Selçuk has been gaining on every lap, both in position and in time! A fast pit stop from his crew gained him more than ten positions, putting him in fifth by the time he exited the pitlane. He then overtook the front five in a single lap, unlapped himself by closing a twenty-

second gap to Fatih, and has been taking out chunks of time ever since! And now, by the eighth lap since the rain started, only ten seconds remain between the two of them, with at least three laps left in this race! This is going to be a fascinating fight to the finish!"

"I have to commend Fatih," Zakir added, his tone filled with professional respect. "His gamble to stay out on slicks is turning out to be a masterstroke, even if he doesn't win the race. He has managed to keep the kart on the track in treacherous conditions when some of those on wet tires couldn't. He's been driving as if he has wets himself. But now that Selçuk is barreling down on him, I can't lie, I too am looking forward to this battle. And the gap has now been cut to seven seconds in just three corners! It seems they both know the final confrontation is coming. They are both pushing to their absolute limits, but the continuously falling rain is favoring Selçuk, who is on the right tires for these conditions."

Both he and the viewers—minus Fatih's anxious family and his coach—were on the edge of their seats, anticipating the battle that would most likely start in the final sector of this very lap. The camera showed Selçuk coming out of a corner, getting on the power far earlier than Fatih could, his wet tires digging into the soaked tarmac and launching him forward.

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Mmh... Mhh... Mhh...

The sound of his own steady breathing was the only thing audible within Fatih's helmet, a metronome for his actions, which were now coming from pure instinct. He was acting before he was thinking, his mind in a state of deep, singular focus, trying to gauge the constantly evolving track, the grip areas shifting with every fresh wave of rain. Everything other than the track in front of him was being discarded by his brain as irrelevant data.

But that intense focus was momentarily shattered. He felt a sharp tap on his rear bumper, a distinct push that sent his kart into a slight, twitching slide before he instinctively corrected it. The jolt immediately made him realize: Selçuk had finally caught him.

With his concentration broken, the sounds of the race rushed back in, and he could clearly hear the angry buzz of the kart right behind him. He knew instantly it was Selçuk's.

'He already caught up to me?' he wondered, a flicker of genuine surprise cutting through his focus.

'What do you mean, "already"? You have been driving for eight laps in the rain,' a voice, tinged with surprise, came unexpectedly from Apollo, before it trailed off, the volume decreasing as if he had caught himself starting a conversation mid-race.

'Eight laps have already gone by?' Fatih said to himself, a wave of disorientation washing over him. He had no clear recollection of driving those eight laps. The last thing he remembered was narrowing his focus on the track, pushing to the absolute maximum... and then the tap that had brought him back to the present.

'Focus on the race first, think about it later,' he commanded himself. He braked earlier than usual for the next corner but deliberately let the kart understeer, pushing both himself and Selçuk, who was on the outside, wider than Selçuk would have wanted. The move disrupted his rival's rhythm and forced a concertina effect, allowing Fatih to get on the power first and preventing Selçuk from using his superior grip to complete an easy overtake.

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"And as they come out of the final hairpin, they are nose-to-tail!" Süleyman shouted. "Fatih takes his usual off-racing line that he's been using since the rain started, leaving the original, rubbered-in racing line for Selçuk! With his wet tires, Selçuk closes the gap and completes the hunt he has been on for more than eight laps! He uses his wet tires to their maximum potential and regains the lead on the main straight! Fatih tucks in behind him as they head into the corner... AND OOOOOOOH! FATIH COMPLETES A PERFECT SWITCHBACK INTO TURN ONE, CATCHING SELÇUK COMPLETELY OFF GUARD! HE'S NOW SQUEEZING HIM TO THE OUTSIDE OF THE TRACK AS THEY TAKE TURN TWO AND THREE! Selçuk keeps up with him, and as they take the wide Turn 4, Selçuk takes the outside line, and with his superior grip, he completes the overtake as Fatih's inside line turns into the outside line for the T5 hairpin! But his outside line now returns to being the inside line once again, and he regains the position! But it doesn't last long! Selçuk blocks his attempt to take the inside line for the next corner and completes the overtake at the start of Turn 7! Does Fatih have a chance to fight back? YESSSSSS! HE COMPLETES ANOTHER SWITCHBACK AS THEY DRAG RACE ON THE SHORT STRAIGHT! Ooh, Fatih has to counter-steer a slide, allowing Selçuk to once again catch up to him into Turn 8! AND HE DIVE-BOMBS INTO THE CORNER, BUT FATIH WAITS IT OUT AND RETAKES HIS POSITION AS SELÇUK GOES WIDE! HE REGAINS HIS LEAD INTO TURN NINE AS THE GAME OF CAT AND MOUSE CONTINUES ONTO THE STRAIGHT! SELÇUK HAS THE ADVANTAGE, ALLOWING HIM TO ONCE AGAIN CLOSE THE DISTANCE, BUT THIS TIME, FATIH IS MORE CAREFUL! HE KEEPS HIS MOVE TO THE LAST POSSIBLE SECOND, ALLOWING HIM TO KEEP HIS POSITION ALL THE WAY THROUGH THE FINAL CORNERS AND INTO THE START OF THE NEXT LAP! AND WE STILL HAVE TWO MORE LAPS OF THIS ON THE BOARD! This is going to be very interesting!"

"But we have a caution! Yellow flag on the straight for a spun driver at the back of the pack!" Zakir announced. "This forces them to slow down and not fight through the

straight, which benefits Fatih heavily! They see the marshals waving a green flag past the caution area, and they are now back to chasing each other! Who will come out in front? But there are a few backmarkers ahead! OH MY GOD! They overtake the lapped kart as if it wasn't even there, one on each side, not wanting it to be an obstacle in their battle for supremacy! Will the more technical Fatih come out on top, or will the aggressive and better-equipped Selçuk win this by the end of the race?!"

The back-and-forth of exchanging positions continued, the track now covered by both the sound of the karts and the roar of the crowd, which was outpacing even the sound of the pouring rain. They cheered on the incredible fight, which kept giving them exciting moment after exciting moment as the two drivers changed positions every two corners, and sometimes multiple times in a single long corner. And before anyone realized it, the final lap had already begun, with only a few corners remaining to the end of the race.

"Coming out of Turn 9, Fatih keeps the lead he had taken back on Turn 7!" Süleyman's voice was raw with tension. "They now barrel towards the second-longest straight, leading to Turn 10! These are the only few remaining chances! Who will be the first to brake?! It seems they are both wondering the same thing, as no one lifts, and the distance keeps shrinking! And it's Selçuk who brakes first! He's attempting a switchback! And it might wor—

OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO! THEY ARE BOTH OUT OF THE RACE! OH MY GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOD! Selçuk took both of them out! He clipped Fatih's rear tire attempting a switchback! They are now sent sliding into the pitlane wall and are out of the race! It seems the impact caused the front tire rubber for Selçuk and the left rear for Fatih to be dislodged from the rims, making it impossible for them to continue! And neither of them looks the very least bit calm about the situation! Fatih is now directly facing Selçuk, not moving after raising his hand to signal that he is fine, his head tracking Selçuk's every move!"

"I would be angry as well," Zakir said, his voice a mix of shock and resignation. "This is the second time that Selçuk has ended his chances in a session, the first being the heats which resulted in him having to participate in the Pre-Finals. And now, after Fatih recovered from having to start from last due to the chassis damage caused by the initial collision from Selçuk, he is now taken out once again, a few corners from finishing in the lead or second. Based on how they were fighting, I'm surprised the crash came this late, to be honest."

"It seems like Selçuk thinks the same as well, as he is rushing towards Fatih!" Süleyman shouted as the screen showed Selçuk trying to get out of his kart, his attempts thwarted by one of the marshals who had rushed to the scene. "This weekend keeps giving us constant drama, but this one tops it all!" Selçuk was moving his legs, trying to cause the marshal holding him to release him so he could go and jump on Fatih, who just remained in his kart, looking at him through his helmet, his posture radiating a cold, controlled anger.

The scene immediately cut to a replay of the crash, which showed the whole sequence: Selçuk braking first, trying to attempt a switchback, before his right front tire hit the left rear of Fatih's kart, flexing it with enough force for both of their tire beads to break, sending them both sliding into the pitlane wall.

"I think this falls fully on Selçuk," Süleyman said. "There was nothing Fatih could do that would have prevented that accident from happening."

"I agree with you, but it looks like Selçuk thinks differently and sees it as Fatih's fault," Zakir replied. "Which I'm hoping is something that will be dispelled once he sees the replay, but I don't think so. The situation between them has already deteriorated, since this is at least the third time where Fatih and Selçuk have collided, and it is always Selçuk on the giving and Fatih on the receiving end of these hits."

"But that is something we have to focus on later, as the race continues!" Süleyman announced, his voice shifting back to the ongoing race. "And having started third, after a very good qualifying lap and a good performance in the heats, his reliable driving has allowed him to keep his position! And as they say, no matter how fast you drive, you need to finish the race for it to matter! And in the third round of the championship, the weekend that was filled with controversy, for the first time in his career, HÜZEYFA TAŞKIN WINS THE RACE, reminding everybody that there are more than three racers on this track! Jackson takes second place, followed by Ayşe Yılmaz, completing the podium!"

Chapter 54: Race Weekend | Sunday | Wrap Up

"He is just a kid. He is just a kid. He is just a kid..."

Fatih repeated the mantra in his head, his knuckles white as he gripped the steering wheel. He stared at Selçuk's kart, which had come to a stop just meters away, the two of them tangled in a mess of broken parts and shattered hopes.

Although his [Invictus] ability granted him extreme mental endurance against pressure, it was not designed to suppress pure, unadulterated anger. The ability's description was clear: it was born from suffering to endure pressure, not to quell rage. And he was feeling it now, a hot, simmering fury. This was the third time they had collided, and each time, it had heavily impacted him and his championship prospects. He had to keep reminding himself that he was an adult in a child's body to stop himself from jumping out of the kart and starting a physical fight.

For Fatih, winning a race came with a cascade of benefits. There were the championship points, the prize money from both the academy and his new sponsor—Selçuk's own father—and the camera his mother had promised him. But most importantly, he had been on the verge of activating another massive SP multiplier, one that would have allowed him to upgrade another one of his core abilities. The loss of

that opportunity was the main source of his anger, so potent that he had to repeat those words over and over again just to calm himself down.

"Oh, what the heck?" he muttered in disbelief as he saw Selçuk jump from his kart and try to charge at him, only to be intercepted by a quick-thinking marshal. The sight caused the anger he was already struggling to control to flare up again. He squeezed the steering wheel, venting his frustration through the inanimate object, lest he do something that would earn him additional penalties when he was not at fault.

"Are you alright?" Burak's voice cut through the commotion. He had finally reached Fatih, his rain overalls dripping, and placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

"I'm fine, but I'm angry," Fatih said, his voice tight as he opened his visor. Burak could see the fury burning in his eyes. "I want to go home."

"Understood," Burak said, not trying to argue. This was the final session of the weekend; there was nothing more to be done. "But first, let's go to the academy tent and get you changed before your family picks you up." He knew Fatih wouldn't be interested in watching someone else celebrate a win that he had been on the verge of clinching just a few corners ago.

Fatih just nodded, closing his visor once again against the still-falling rain. He stood up from the kart, and they both started walking towards the academy tent. He wondered how awkward the situation was going to be, since both drivers involved in the crash were from the same academy and used the same tent.

Thankfully, that confrontation did not happen. Selçuk and his coach were not in the tent when they arrived, and they still hadn't returned by the time Fatih had changed his clothes and was picked up by his family.

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"He looks very tired and angry," Güldane said, looking back from the front seat of the bus to find Fatih seemingly asleep. They had already gathered their belongings on the way to the track that morning, allowing them to head straight to the bus station the moment the race ended.

"I would be too if the same thing happened to me twice," Rümeyza replied, her voice laced with frustration. "Even I am angry." She was not at all satisfied with how things were going and was already contemplating whether she needed to have the academy formally intervene. The collisions were becoming more frequent and more severe.

While they discussed the situation, Fatih was not asleep. He was looking at a screen that was giving him the details of his race weekend and his mission status.

[RACE WEEKEND DEBRIEF COMPLETE]

[SEASONAL MISSION: THE FIRST CROWN (WEEKEND 3)]

STATUS: COMPLETE

Milestone 1 (Participation): **+10 SP**

Milestone 2 (Pole Position): **+10 SP**

Milestone 3 (Fastest Lap): **+5 SP**

Milestone 4 (Race Finish - 0 pts): **+0 SP**

Milestone 5 (Driver of the Weekend): **NOT ACHIEVED**

Additional Rewards (Per-Action):

Overtake: **49** overtakes = **+49 SP**

Brilliant Overtake: **8** overtakes = **+40 SP**

Defense: **10** successful defenses = **+10 SP**

Brilliant Defense: **2** successful defenses = **+10 SP**

Perfect Weekend Bonus: **NOT ACHIEVED**

["THE FIRST CROWN" SUBTOTAL: +134 SP]

[RECOVERY MISSION]

STATUS: FAILED

PUNISHMENT ACTIVATED: [INVICTUS] will be downgraded (Ultimate → Genius) for the next championship round.

[FINAL CALCULATION]

Base Weekend Earnings: **134 SP**

Recovery Drive Multiplier: **Not Activated**

TOTAL SP GAINED: +134 SP

[Current System Points: 723 → 857 SP]

'What has passed has passed, so there is no need to keep lamenting on it,' Fatih thought, his mind already processing the consequences. 'But it looks like I have lost the championship lead and fallen to P3. Jackson is now back in the lead. It seems playing the long and consistent game turned out well for him.'

"Consistency is what is most important," Apollo's voice echoed in his mind. "That is something you need to learn and strive for."

"What do you mean by that?" Fatih shot back, defending himself. "I'm pretty sure I have done nothing to warrant that comment. I'm on the receiving end of these incidents, at least that's what I think."

"You need to keep in mind the type of person you are racing against and their driving style," Apollo replied with the calmness of a teacher. "Being 'in the right' might be good, but it doesn't mean much when you are taken out of the race."

"But wouldn't pulling back just because he is aggressive make him realize that he can make those moves and be sure that I will yield the position to him to avoid crashing?" Fatih argued, his mind immediately jumping to a historical parallel. "Isn't that what happened between Lewis and Verstappen in the 2021 season, before Lewis decided to stand his ground? I'm of the belief that you have to make an example on the first try, so that neither they nor any other driver has the gall to even think of trying to attempt that on you, since it will be a guaranteed DNF for both of you."

"Although that is true, you have to keep in mind that this is a six-race championship," Apollo countered, reminding him of the bigger picture. "You going pointless on even one weekend means that your closest contenders will be earning points, just as Jackson is now in the lead by eleven points. If he continues finishing in the top three until the final race, he will still be a potential champion, even if you continue crashing out with Selçuk. Your way of thinking is not wrong, but at the moment, you are not in a position to do that, as the championship is very short. I will teach you how to still fight with aggressive drivers while keeping your position and minimizing the chances of you, or both of you, being taken out of the race."

"Thank you for that," Fatih said, appreciating the offer of new knowledge. "Also, I have a question. What was that that happened when I didn't even realize I had driven eight laps? You even sounded surprised by it."

"Ooh, that," Apollo said, a chuckle in his voice. "That is something many racers never experience in their entire lives, no matter how hard they try. So, you can imagine how surprised I was when I realized you had experienced it in your first year of driving, and in karts, nonetheless."

"It has many names," Apollo explained, his tone shifting to one of reverence. "Some call it a 'flow state,' 'in the zone,' 'tunnel vision,' 'Driving Zen,' or the '7000 RPM moment.' It's a state where all unnecessary information is discarded, and all of your inputs on the

car are unconscious, done by pure instinct. The car feels like an extension of your body, a state of total peak performance where you become one with the machine, where it feels like the car is driving itself through you." He caught himself, realizing he was going on a long, rambling session about the feeling, as if he were one of those racing drivers himself.

"It is a high that, once you experience it, you will keep chasing for the rest of your life," he added, looking at Fatih with a mixture of awe and concern for how early he had experienced it.

"Mh..." Fatih said, trying to remember the feeling. Slowly but surely, it came back to him. He remembered his inputs, and to say they felt near-perfect would be an understatement. He remembered churning out laps that were far faster than what should have been possible for slicks in the wet, all while keeping his kart on the track as the rain continued to fall, instinctively avoiding any hint of aquaplaning.

"Don't try to recreate it," Apollo warned, his voice serious. "It is something that happens naturally and cannot be controlled. You must not try to chase it, or you will ruin yourself like an addict. Let it come to you naturally, and when it does, enjoy it."

"I will keep that in mind," Fatih said, nodding to himself.

Chapter 55: The Reckoning

BRGHHHHHHH...

A piercing screech of tires was the only warning before Fatih's kart was sent sliding off the track, coming to an abrupt and violent stop as it crashed into the tire barriers.

"Arghh," he groaned, the brunt of the impact radiating through his side. He felt a sharp, bruising pain in his ribs, but the sensation lasted only for a moment before the System's pain dampeners kicked in and it disappeared.

"Since you are practicing with your ability downgraded, you have to start slowly and build familiarity," Apollo's voice was calm and instructive as his form materialized next to the dented kart. "If you start by trying to push to the absolute limit on your first lap, you will be taken out. The sensitivity you are feeling at the moment has a lag, a clear downgrade from the high-speed, instantaneous feedback you are used to." He waved his hand, and both of them disappeared from the crash site, the dented barrier repairing itself moments later as they reappeared in the pit lane.

The pain itself was more of a phantom sensation, a feature of the Simulation designed to ensure he drove with the same seriousness he would in the real world. It was a deterrent against treating the simulation like a mere game, where he might try to recreate impossible moves with no consequences, only to suffer a catastrophic accident in reality. Although this feature could be turned off, Fatih had never even considered

doing so. He knew how detrimental the removal of fear and real-world consequences would be to his mentality.

"Understood," Fatih said, rubbing his ribs. Though the pain had vanished completely, the memory of it still lingered, making him involuntarily try to massage the area.

"Now, start again, but push at only seventy-five percent," Apollo instructed. "Increase your pace in increments of five percent only after you are completely comfortable at the current level. We will begin practicing how to drive against aggressive drivers once you are used to driving with your ability nerfed."

Fatih obliged without a word. He once again took to his favorite track, La Conca, to begin his practice, his [Invictus] ability downgraded, a handicap he now had to master.

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"Yes... mhm... yeah, yeah... understood... I wanted to address it as well... Sure, I will see you on the weekend." Rümeyza lowered the phone from her ear and placed it back on the table.

"What is the academy saying?" Güldane asked, cracking another sunflower seed between her teeth and tossing the shell into a bowl that was already full.

"They are calling for a meeting to discuss the situation with both sets of parents," Rümeyza explained. "They want to try and solve it and prevent things from escalating that far again."

"Ah, so they are finally taking action," Güldane said, a hint of dissatisfaction in her tone at how long it had taken.

"They destroyed three different kart chassis last weekend," Rümeyza said dryly. "I think they want to reduce their financial losses, since they are the ones shouldering the cost of the karts and repairs." As a lawyer, she knew that the one thing that could spur a slow-to-act institution into motion was damage to either its finances or its reputation.

"But why is it phrased as if both sides are at fault, and not Selçuk alone?" Güldane asked, her voice sharp as she hit the table, causing a few sunflower seed shells to catapult in Rümeyza's direction. "You don't think they are trying to push the narrative that both sides are at fault, are you?"

"I hope not," Rümeyza said, collecting the stray shells and tossing them back into the bowl. "But considering the other parent is the primary sponsor for this year's academy karts, I can't rule out the possibility. I will reserve my judgment until the meeting, lest I go in with a hostile attitude and end up causing more trouble due to a misunderstanding."

As for Fatih, the very reason his mother was being called for a meeting, he was none the wiser. He was currently driving his home kart in the park, playing with his friends, having already pushed the incidents to the back of his mind, content to just enjoy his life.

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That Saturday, Fatih was happy to be going to the academy with his mother. His good mood soured slightly, however, when instead of being allowed to go to the changing rooms to prepare for his practice, they were escorted to a meeting room. The look on his mother's face made it clear that this was something she had known about ahead of time; only he was in the dark.

As the door to the meeting room was opened by a secretary, it was clear that they were the last to arrive. At the head of the long, polished table sat Mehmet, the academy director, his face a mask of neutrality. To his right sat Selçuk, his father Aslan, and his coach, Adam. Selçuk didn't even raise his head to look at them, staring intently at a scratch on the table, refusing to make eye contact. Aslan, the academy's primary sponsor, leaned back in his chair, his arms crossed, his expression a cold mix of disappointment and impatience. Adam shifted uncomfortably, constantly adjusting his chair and fiddling with a water bottle.

On Mehmet's left, there were three chairs, with only one occupied by Fatih's coach, Burak. The remaining two were for them, and they took their seats immediately after greeting everyone.

Fatih, after taking his seat and folding his small hands in his lap, quickly assessed the expressions of everyone in the room. From the tense atmosphere alone, he could deduce that the conversation that had taken place before they arrived was not in any way pleasant. The room was still filled with a feeling of uncomfortable tension that even the air conditioning couldn't dissipate.

Once everyone was seated, Mehmet cleared his throat. "Thank you all for taking time out of your busy days to attend this meeting," he began, his gaze sweeping from one side of the table to the other. "The purpose of this meeting is to review the incidents from the last racing weekend, understand their causes, and establish a clear path forward to ensure the safety of our drivers and the integrity of this academy. After all, we are here to teach these children, not to have them injure or endanger each other. Please be clear, this is not a trial, but a necessary discussion."

"Burak, perhaps you can begin by giving us a short summary of the situation, so that we are all on the same level of understanding," he said, handing the baton to Burak, who looked as though he would rather be anywhere else.

Burak nodded and began his summary. But instead of just focusing on the last weekend, he started from the very first incident between Fatih and Selçuk. One by one,

he showed the footage of each incident on a large screen, explaining the context, until he arrived at the final-lap crash that had taken both of them out of the race.

"From this, we can conclude that Selçuk, though talented, is very aggressive, to the point that it is dangerous for other drivers," Burak said, finishing his summary. "He needs to either reduce that aggressiveness or learn to channel it in a way that doesn't risk his or others' safety."

However, before he could even take a sip of water, Adam, Selçuk's coach, who had been silent until now, leaned forward. "With all due respect, Burak, to frame it that way is misleading. Nearly all of those incidents were not intentional. They were either misjudgments or unavoidable racing incidents. To use them to paint Selçuk as a dangerous driver is unfair."

"Unfair? How, to be exact?" Rûmeysa interjected, her voice remaining neutral, but her sharp gaze making her displeasure clear. "Just on the last racing weekend, he crashed into Fatih during the heats, a crash heavy enough to require a change in chassis. His dive bomb during the Final race then took both of them out. If it hadn't been for the pit lane road, it would have sent them into the tire barriers and could have seriously injured Fatih. So, what part of that makes him not a danger to himself and others?"

Selçuk, who had been staring at the table, lowered his head even further, anticipating his father siding with Fatih and berating him. Inside, he was praying, regretting not asking his mother to bring him to the academy. The happiness he had felt when his father had been the one to take him had all but vanished. Knowing how his father admired Fatih, he was sure he was going to side with him, ten out of ten times.

Aslan, who had been silent throughout all of this, turned to look at his son, whose head was bowed in shame. He then shifted his gaze towards Rûmeysa before he spoke, his voice cold and hard. "Aggression is part of racing, is it not? My son was fighting for the win. That's what I pay this academy to teach him to do. To fight."

His words caused a momentary halt to all sound in the room. Fatih looked at Aslan, his eyebrows raised in surprise. Rûmeysa had a look of stunned disbelief on her face. And Selçuk... Selçuk had lifted his head so fast he nearly snapped his neck, his eyes wide as he stared at his father. The look of gloom and doom on his face slowly shifted, transforming into one of near-euphoric shock.

Chapter 56: The Unmasking

Fatih, as a person who had spent his previous life sick and often bedridden, had rarely seen people's true colors. He had only ever experienced their benevolent, best sides, as the only ones who visited him were his close friends. As a result, he was now having a difficult time reconciling the sudden, jarring shift in Aslan's attitude.

Though he had seen the way people could behave, how cruel they could be to others, it was always from the other side of a screen, through social media or in movies. Like someone who reads cheating subreddits, he had always believed that he would most likely never experience such raw, unfiltered ugliness firsthand. But in this new life, he wasn't locked in a confined space. He was blessed, and perhaps cursed, to be experiencing the full spectrum of human nature he had missed in his previous life.

In his mind, he had considered Aslan a rational and passionate man when it came to racing. He had gone as far as to sponsor Fatih even when his own son was in the same competition, and he hadn't made any problems when Fatih had won against him. But his answer now, and the cold, dismissive way he said it, reminded Fatih of the rabid fanbases from his past life. He had seen the best, or rather worst, version of it in the 2021 Formula 1 season, where both Max Verstappen's and Lewis Hamilton's fans would vehemently defend their own driver's aggressive moves while simultaneously arguing for a ban, penalty, or disqualification when the other driver did something similar.

Rümeysa was the first to recover from her surprise, and her response was immediate and sharp.

"Arguing that it is just 'hard racing' is counterintuitive, considering he had just received a race ban from the stewards for his driving conduct," she said, her voice calm but laced with steel. As a lawyer, she always preferred to deal in objective facts, and this time was no different. Using emotion would only push the other side to do the same. "As the governing body, they are the ones who know better what is hard racing and what is dangerous driving, and I think their decision already answered that question."

"Ah, if you are talking about the one-race ban, I have already dealt with that," Aslan said, a calm, knowing smile spreading across his face. "It has been reduced to a warning. So, I think I managed to persuade them that it was, in fact, just hard racing. If that is your argument, then I believe they are on my side this time."

As if it were normal, he dropped another bombshell of information. From the look of it, only he knew about it, as even Mehmet, the academy director, had a look of stunned surprise on his face.

"When did that happen?" Mehmet interjected, his voice tight. "We have not yet been notified of any change."

"At the moment, the investigation is officially still ongoing," Aslan said, subtly flaunting his connections. "But I was informed that this will be the decision. They should inform you on Monday, I think, since that is the start of the work week." He said all of this while looking directly at Rümeysa, making it clear that he was demonstrating the difference in their influence.

"What do you mean by that?" Rümeyisa's voice, which she had been trying so hard to keep calm, began to tremble with barely suppressed rage. She was gritting her teeth so hard her jaw ached. "Are you saying you used your connections to change a decision they had already made? Is that how you teach your son to compete?"

"I didn't say that," Aslan countered smoothly, not a flicker of guilt on his face. "I said I appealed the ruling and was informed that this is the expected outcome. I provided context on the situation. It was the last lap of the race, and he was on the verge of winning if he executed a good overtake. Mistakes are understandable for him to make, since he is just a child. It seems my explanation changed their line of thinking."

The room fell into a heavy, suffocating silence. Rümeyisa's attempt to use objective facts had been completely dismantled by a display of raw, corrupting influence. The calm she had been fighting to maintain finally fractured.

"Understandable?" she repeated, her voice now laced with a cold fury that caused a few people in the room to flinch. "Your son has hit my son more than three times. The last two incidents forced him to retire. The first one required him to change his chassis due to the damage it received, and the second one took both of them out of the race after he had worked so hard to recover to the lead from last, hitting him with enough force to dislodge the rubber from the rims. And your response is that it's 'understandable' because he wanted to win? What you call 'providing context,' I call witness tampering and undue influence. What you call 'hard racing,' the rest of us call a pattern of dangerous and reckless behavior. And it seems you are the one enabling him." She looked him up and down, her expression making it clear that she thought his behavior was exactly what one would expect from a man like him.

In reaction to her words, Aslan's smile vanished. In its place, a hard, dismissive glare. "Motorsport is a tough business," he said, his voice dripping with condescension. "If your son can't handle the pressure, if he isn't capable of handling hard, close-quarters racing, then perhaps he isn't cut out for it. I'm investing in winners, in fighters. Not in those who crumble when the racing gets a little hard." He sent a subtle threat, trying to show Rümeyisa, who had just insulted him, the difference in power between the two of them. He was the sponsor; he had the upper hand.

"Haa..." Rümeyisa released a flabbergasted gasp. "Crumble? My son started from last and was leading the race by the final lap before *your* son took him out. The only thing that crumbled was his kart after your son's actions. From that information alone, it should be perfectly clear who is the one crumbling under pressure."

Her voice turned ice-cold. "It also seems you consider the sponsorship you are providing to be a tool that gives you power, something that can force us to not respond to anything your son does. Now I regret not appealing his five-second penalty from the first race. It seems it has given you the idea that we are subservient to you, that you can make us move according to your whims. It seems our partnership isn't cut out to be. Therefore, I am activating Article 25 of the sponsorship agreement. As for the reason, it

is your using of undue influence to tamper with outcomes that are harmful to the sponsored driver, together with a clear conflict of interest." She immediately started the process to terminate the agreement.

"It seems you think your son is the only one that matters," Aslan said, doubling down. The look on his face showed that he had not expected Rûmeysa to go through with it; he had expected her to back down. But his pride would not allow him to retract his words. He turned his head to Mehmet, who looked like he was about to intervene now that the situation was spiraling out of control. "Since she has deemed my actions a conflict of interest, I also need to act in a way to remove it. As the sponsor of the academy's karts for this championship, I demand that Fatih not be provided with my karts for the remainder of the competition. If you give him one of my sponsored karts, I will take it as you not heeding my words, and I will terminate my contract with the academy as well."

He turned to look at Rûmeysa with a subtle, triumphant smile, as if to say, 'See? This is the level of power I have compared to you. If you continue acting so mighty and don't back down, I will just remove the very thing that allowed your son to have a competitive kart to win in the first place.'

With such a clear threat hanging in the air, Mehmet's face tightened. "Let's first calm down and try to look at these things objectively," he began, trying to de-escalate the situation. "Though they are here training, we need to make sure their bad behaviors don't stick into their future career....."

"And what do you propose to do about it, Mehmet?" Aslan interrupted, his voice sharp. "Punish my son? Let me be perfectly clear. If this academy takes any official action against my son, a suspension, a penalty that is not exactly the one TOSFED gives him, or anything that formally sides with Fatih over this, I will consider it a hostile act. I will pull my sponsorship from this academy immediately. We will see how you fund your 'champions' after that."

He stood up, pushing his chair back with a sharp, scraping sound. "My son will not be punished. He will learn to be tougher. And your son will learn to handle it. That is the end of this discussion." He gestured to Selçuk, who, after a moment of stunned silence, scrambled to his feet. The boy looked from his father's triumphant, cold expression to Fatih's unreadable one, a storm of confusion, and a dawning, terrible sense of empowerment started to appear on his face, followed by a crooked smile. His father hadn't just defended him; he had given him a license. He had declared him untouchable.

Chapter 57: The Politics of Power

"What will you be doing?" Rûmeysa asked Mehmet directly, her gaze unwavering as she sought to understand his decision. Would he cave to Aslan's threats and do

nothing, or would he show a backbone and take a stand, even if it harmed their business?

"Sir, you need to keep in mind that his kart sponsorship is what is allowing us to support all of our scholarship drivers with competitive karts," Adam, Selçuk's coach, interjected, his voice a nervous reminder of the stakes. "Otherwise, we would have to reduce the number of scholarship drivers on our roster or have them use mismatched, older karts based on performance, which would be unfair to them."

"But if we do that, it will be sending a clear signal that we can be controlled by money," Burak countered, his voice firm as he advocated for the academy to take a strong stance. "It would destroy any other reputation we might have had. That one decision will remain, tainting any potential future successes we have. We need to punish Selçuk to set a precedent that we treat all of our drivers fairly, no matter who is backing them."

Rümeysa didn't add anything more. She just remained silent, her eyes fixed on the academy director, waiting for his response.

"Since this is a very important matter, I need to consult with the owners before we make any final decision," Mehmet said, his voice carefully neutral as he brought the tense meeting to a close. "I will deliver all of your arguments and will inform you of the decision that is made. But for today, let's end the meeting here."

Nearly all of the attendees left the room dissatisfied. There was no conclusive solution to any of the problems that had brought them there in the first place. Rümeysa got up and left the room, with Fatih and Burak following close behind. Fatih still had a practice session waiting for him.

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"And that is how the meeting ended," Mehmet said later that day, speaking on the phone with the owner of the Fatih Karting Academy. He had provided a full, unvarnished summary of how things had transpired.

"What are the potential solutions we have on our hands, based on how the meeting went?" the man on the other side of the phone asked, his voice calm and detached.

"There are three potential solutions here," Mehmet began, laying out the options. "One: we accept Aslan's demands and do not punish Selçuk. This will ensure we retain our sponsorship with him, but with that decision, we will most likely lose Fatih and gain a reputation for being controlled by money.

The second option: we do not accept Aslan's demands and side with Fatih by punishing Selçuk for his driving behavior. If Aslan keeps his promise, that would mean we lose the sponsorship and have to fork out the expenses from our own pockets to provide competitive karts to all of our scholarship drivers. But, we will have the total trust of

Fatih, who, depending on how his career continues, will carry our academy's name as he rises in prominence.

And the last option is the diplomatic one: we try to satisfy both sides. We put Selçuk on probation with a promise of severe punishment should he do something like that again, while at the same time, we provide Fatih a kart from our own pockets, keeping up with Aslan's demand that Fatih not drive his sponsored karts. This would mean all other scholarship drivers will still have competitive karts at Aslan's expense. But this approach has many risks. We could lose either, or even both of them, if it doesn't work. And even if they agree to these conditions, it is no different than a slow death of our relationships with both parties."

"Do you really think Fatih's family will quit if we go with the first option?" the owner asked after a moment of silence.

"That is the worst-case scenario, but it is a very real possibility," Mehmet answered. "They would take it as a message that we are succumbing to Aslan's demands, which would completely destroy their confidence in us."

"But doing that would mean they can't continue with the championship, correct?" the owner's voice was still neutral, but the question was pointed. "The registration of both the driver and the kart are under the academy's banner. It should be impossible for him to continue this season if he leaves."

"Yes," Mehmet confirmed. "The moment he does that, we would be required to withdraw his number 213 entry, effectively making him miss the remainder of the championship season."

"What do you think about this?" the owner suggested, his voice taking on a sly, strategic tone. "We choose option one and do not punish Selçuk. At the same time, we promise to fund Fatih's kart from our own pockets."

We then remind his mother that they would have to withdraw from the competition if they unenroll Fatih, and that they would have to pay back the scholarship money spent on him for unilaterally terminating his enrollment. That should keep them here for at least the remainder of the season, during which time we can try to mend the destroyed relationship.

After all, no matter how talented he is, it is his first year. He has the opportunity to win his first championship in his first year. If he withdraws now, he will have to wait a whole year until the next season starts, and by then, he will have been forgotten. The 'out of sight, out of mind' nature of motorsport will take its course." He was trying to have his cake and eat it too.

"Then why not just go with the third option completely?" Mehmet asked, pinching the bridge of his nose, frustrated by the owner's greed. "Or the second one, if you truly want to keep Fatih?"

"I want to keep Fatih due to his potential, but that is all there is to him right now: potential," the owner said, trying to make Mehmet see his point of view. "We don't know how he is going to fare in the future. It would be foolish to make a decision with an uncertain conclusion that would destroy the certain positive thing we have at the moment." The stories of prodigies who showed immense talent before withering in the future were all too common in their field.

"But many are saying Fatih is different," Mehmet counter-argued.

"Do you think the same?"

"Yes, I do," Mehmet answered without missing a beat. "Based on what I have seen so far."

"And do you think, with our academy's current financial situation, we can afford to end the sponsorship and field competitive karts for all of our scholarship drivers, in all of the categories?" the academy owner asked, reminding Mehmet of the harsh reality. The academy didn't just deal with children at the Bambino level. They had many talented drivers in all categories of karting, all of whom were also being provided sponsored karts by Aslan. If they sided with Fatih, a child in his first year of karting, it would mean losing all of that sponsorship support and having to use their own money to provide competitive karts until they could find another sponsor willing to spend as much as Aslan did, a very rare thing in the Turkish motorsport scene.

"..." Mehmet didn't say anything. He knew as well as the owner that the possibility of siding with Fatih was minimal. The potential damage was far too large compared to the potential he had in the future.

"I trust your instincts, Mehmet, but you have to take into consideration our situation here," the owner continued, his voice now taking on a more manipulative tone. "The only true option we have on our hands is to convince his mother. Make her see the bright side of things if she turns a blind eye for now. She could be in a much higher negotiating position with other academies once her son has a championship belt or a top-three championship finish on his record. In the meantime, we can try to mend our fractured relationship.

Make sure to emphasize that if she leaves now, she risks having her and her son painted as 'difficult people to work with.' In the world of motorsport, such rumors are essentially a career killer for a young driver who has yet to prove himself.

People don't like reading the news; they don't even try to find the truth of the story. They form conclusions from just the headlines or the rumors alone. This would reduce the

chances of other academies providing him with a scholarship, meaning she would have to shoulder the expenses of his career on her own until he proved himself again. And make sure to make it clear how expensive that is going to be."

The owner's voice shifted momentarily to an amused one. "As a parent, with the best outcome for her child in mind, she will know what the best option is and make the decision that is good for her son. No talented driver is bigger than the team, and what we need is a talented team player, not a selfish, self-absorbed one." He then added, as if confident that Rümeyza would choose to remain, "I will also try to talk to Aslan and see if I can smooth things over on his side for when she agrees to stay with the academy."

"Understood," Mehmet said, his voice filled with resignation. He realized that he was now being forced to become one of those hated people in motorsport, the ones who threaten to destroy a talented driver's career to serve their own interests. But as an employee, what other choice did he have?

When the phone call ended, he leaned back in his chair, his face looking up at the ceiling. He took a moment to think about how the situation had escalated this far, and what things they could have done to prevent it from reaching this point, a point where he was on the verge of losing the most talented driver he had ever seen.

Chapter 58: Between a Rock and a Hard Place

"Haaaaa..." Mehmet released a long, disappointed sigh as he placed the phone back in its cradle.

It had only been half an hour since he had ended his previous, difficult conversation with the academy owner. He had been in the midst of strategizing how to best relay the news to Fatih's mother in a way that would minimize the potential fallout. But before he could even decide when to contact her, he had received another call from the owner, his voice now laced with a fresh layer of frustration.

"It seems he realizes that he has the upper hand in this situation and now wants more concessions from our side regarding Fatih," the academy owner had said, his tone dripping with displeasure.

"What additional things did Aslan want?" Mehmet had asked, bracing himself for the demands.

"When he realized that we were trying to keep Fatih by offering to pay for his karts from our own pockets, he said he would allow us to keep Fatih, but in return, he wants us to terminate the scholarship agreement we have with him," the owner had explained, his voice rising in anger as he recounted the conversation.

"It looks like he wants to fully crush Fatih," Mehmet had mused, pinching the bridge of his nose as he realized the situation was moving from bad to worse. "He wants them to come back to him, begging. Or, he wants to clear a major obstacle for his son now that the situation has come to this. Ending Fatih's scholarship will mean that if his mother wants to keep competing for this championship, she will have to be the one paying for the kart and all the services, which will be an enormous financial burden. That is, if she can even stomach remaining in the academy after this. What has gotten into him? He looked like someone who was very passionate about motorsport, even going so far as to sponsor his son's main competitor."

"....." His words were met with silence from the owner which was no different than acknowledgement to his statement and answer to his questions.

"So, did you agree to his demands?" Mehmet had asked, praying that the academy owner had denied them.

"Me calling him in the first place was no different than a surrender," the owner had replied, his voice now flat and resigned. "And although I wanted to keep Fatih at all costs, there is no need to do that now that Aslan has shown his true colors, wanting to smother a talented driver. So, inform his parents. Tell them that we unfortunately have to end the scholarship due to 'financial reasons.' And if she decides to remain, which is nearly impossible, she will have to pay for all of the services that her son will be benefiting from, both in training and during the competition, including the rental of the kart, or if she buys a new one for her son herself." He had already made the decision; this call was just to inform Mehmet. "We can cancel the scholarship without any problems, right?"

"Yes, we can do that from our side without having to pay anything," Mehmet had said, resigning himself to the unfairness of it all.

"If you turn a blind eye this time, this too will pass," the academy owner had said, his voice a hollow attempt at reassurance. "We can then see if we can make amends with him later. But for now, we need to take into consideration the other drivers on our hands who have already shown promise." It felt as if he was trying to justify the decision to himself, to feel less shitty about the situation.

"Yes, sir," Mehmet had replied, knowing that it was a white lie. The chances of them mending their relationship with Fatih's family were lower than Fatih's chances of reaching Formula 1, which, in itself, was near zero, as there had never been a Turkish driver in Formula 1 since the start of the competition.

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Monday evening.

"Fatih, Mom wants to talk to you about something important," Rümeysa said, entering his room. She found him sitting in front of the computer, watching a video related to racing.

Hearing his mother, he pressed pause and got out of the chair, moving to the bed where she was already sitting. He became silent, waiting to hear what she wanted to talk to him about, though he could already guess what it was most likely going to be.

Rümeysa took a moment, a deep breath, before she began to speak. "The academy has called and informed us of their decision. They will not be punishing Selçuk, because it is something they say they have no jurisdiction over. They will abide by the decision made by TOSFED, which has just been announced to be a warning. He will only be punished if he does something like that again."

She paused, letting the weight of the words sink in. "It means that Selçuk will continue driving like he did, and the academy will not do anything about it. What do you want to do? If you don't want to continue, I can withdraw you from the academy, and we can pay for you to race somewhere else, but that will have to wait until next year due to the regulations. However, if you want to continue with the championship, we will need to remain in the academy until the end of the season before we leave."

She gave him a simplified summary, trying to use simple words and sentence structures to make sure he understood at least a portion of the situation. She didn't tell him about the full extent of the academy's betrayal, that they were now completely siding with Selçuk, or that if they were to remain, she would be the one shouldering all of the monetary requirements.

The moment she had received the call, her first instinct had been to immediately unenroll Fatih from the academy. But the academy director had made sure to remind her that doing so would mean Fatih would have to be withdrawn from the championship, and would have to wait until next year's season. It would mean all of her son's hard work and effort would be thrown out the window, and might even risk him starting to hate the sport that he loved so dearly.

Fatih, though not having the full picture, immediately understood the implications of what she had said. With the academy siding with Selçuk, it meant he would be in a disadvantageous position for the rest of the championship.

"Will the academy still continue to provide a scholarship to me?" he asked, his voice still that of a child, but the question itself sharp and direct, cutting through any pretense of childhood innocence.

Rümeysa looked surprised at the question, but she answered honestly. "No," she said, rubbing her son's back. "They have also informed me that they have terminated the contract, under the reason that they don't have enough funding. So, if you continue this season, I will have to cover the costs. But you don't have to worry about that."

"I want to continue competing this season," he said, a look of fierce conviction on his face that made Rümeyşa wonder what had gone through his mind for him to make such a decision so quickly.

What she didn't know was that Fatih was already thinking ahead. He knew that if they were to wait until next season, she would have to fund the full season on her own. But if they continued now, then only the second half of the season would fall upon her, halving the costs. And should he win, they could use that as leverage when they moved to a new academy. Although they could do that now by withdrawing, it would both reduce their leverage and remove the chances of him earning additional SP, which would slow his speed of upgrading his abilities.

But the main reason was the screen that was now hovering in front of him that he had already pressed **[ACCEPT]**

as it was a too good of a deal to miss.

[Urgent Mission!!]

[A MOUNTAIN TO CARVE]

Though very early in your career, your journey to becoming the greatest of all time has been met with an obstacle, as an individual is trying to derail your career. But the mark of a great driver isn't determined by the politics of motorsport, but by what he does on the track. And although you have shown promise as a very young driver, you have yet to leave enough of a mark to shield you from the politics, but also to provide you with additional leverage for your future opportunities and to reduce the chances of you facing a similar problem.

OBJECTIVE: Continue and go on to win the championship despite the obstacles in your way.

REWARDS: Doubling of all the System Points you have by that point.

PUNISHMENT: A permanent downgrade of a random ability.

[ACCEPT] [DENY]

"So, you want to continue?" Rümeyşa asked, her voice soft. "If it is because you are worried about not winning and me not buying you the camera I promised, you don't have to worry about that. I will buy it for you no matter what."

"No," Fatih said, looking at his mother with a look that showed he fully believed what he was about to say. "I want to continue because I want to win. I know I can win the championship."

"If that is what you want, then you don't have to worry about anything else," she said, her voice filled with a fierce, protective love. "Just focus on the competition, okay?" She caressed his cheek before Fatih moved to hug her.

"Thank you, Mom," he said, knowing that his decision was going to be expensive, but he promised himself that he would repay all of the sacrifices his mother was going to make for him.

"It's alright," Rümeysa said, holding him tight. "Mom will do anything for you." She was not happy about the situation at all. And despite choosing the lesser of two evils the one where she didn't have to go and beg Aslan, while also making it possible for her son to continue doing what he loved, it still left a bitter taste in her mouth. The experience was slowly triggering her protective instincts, slowly changing her way of making decisions when it came to Fatih. From the look of it, she would be very averse to trusting others with things related to her son in the future.

Chapter 59: The Price of Independence

"Can we sue them?" Fatih asked, his voice small but firm, as he broke the hug with his mother.

Rümeysa looked down at her son, a flicker of surprise in her eyes. "We can," she began, her lawyer's mind immediately assessing the situation, "but our chances of winning are very slim. The clause they used to terminate the scholarship agreement is notoriously difficult to prove against in court. The legal battle would be long, arduous, and expensive, and the compensation we might receive at the end of it all would likely be less than the legal fees. It also risks them sabotaging you during the season, causing you to have bad performances that they could then use as additional evidence for their case. And even if we were to catch them doing it, by the time the case is over, they would have already derailed your first season, meaning it would have been a better choice to just quit now and wait for the next one."

She paused, a small, wry smile touching her lips. "But, thanks to them being the ones who terminated the agreement, it means that they have waived their right to any financial restitution for the expenses they incurred during the scholarship period." She then caught herself, realizing she had used very difficult words for her son to understand.

But to her surprise, Fatih looked at her as if he had understood every word. Her suspicion was proven to be true when he asked his follow-up question, his voice sharp and direct. "What about my sponsorship with Aslan? Are we the ones who have to repay the amount he has already spent?"

Hiding her surprise at his targeted questions, and at the dawning realization that her son was far smarter than she had ever suspected, she answered, "We are fine on that part. The agreement stated that if *we* were the ones to terminate it before a certain amount

was spent by the sponsor, then we would not have to repay the spent amount, but in return, we would not be able to have a new sponsor until the next season." She deliberately used more complicated lingo this time, testing to see if he would understand that way of speaking as well.

"Understood," Fatih said, his gaze unwavering. "I will do my best to not waste your support." He knew that his behavior during this conversation was effectively shattering the childish pretense he had maintained for so long, but he went ahead with it. The situation was too complicated, and if he wanted to understand it fully, he needed to be serious. It seemed to have worked, but there was no going back now. To revert to his childish act would only raise more flags.

"You don't have to worry about that and put pressure on yourself," Rûmeysa said, hugging him again, a pang of guilt in her chest. She wondered if her being away at work for so long was the reason he had been forced to mature so early.

After a long, comforting hug, she broke it off and got up, walking to the door. She paused, turning back to Fatih. "Oh, and we are going to visit some schools starting Wednesday."

"Isn't it early?" Fatih asked in surprise.

"Just because school starts in September doesn't mean everything is done then," she explained. "Applications start from this month all the way to September, and the earlier we do it, the easier the process will be for us." She waved at him and left the room.

The moment his mother left, Fatih immediately entered a state of deep contemplation, taking his time to absorb and digest the situation in its entirety. He replayed the events in his mind, from the disastrous meeting to his mother now having to shoulder all the costs of his remaining championship season.

"Money is really the only true ally for anyone who wants to be in motorsport for long," he said to himself, the harsh reality of the situation crystallizing in his mind. All of these problems, all of this political maneuvering, was because the one they were attempting to discipline had a father with money.

Motorsport was a fertile ground for those with money to get what they wanted. It was a field that burned through cash faster than the fuel they used during a race. If you had money, you could have what you wanted with very little talent, so long as the money kept flowing. Even Formula 1, the so-called peak of motorsport, was not immune. In every era, there was at least one rich kid taking a seat that a more talented driver could have had, simply because their family provided the funding or brought in the sponsors.

As a result of this experience, a seed was planted in his mind: the absolute necessity of having his own money, of having the financial security to never be in this position again,

where he either had to compromise and accept a bad situation, or take a hard stance and be forced to wait on the sidelines for a whole season.

"Shouldn't it be easy for you to make money with your memories?" Apollo asked, materializing in front of him, his form taking a seat in the chair in front of the computer.

"Since I wasn't very interested in things related to finance, my information regarding it is limited to things that went so viral they breached the finance bubble and reached me," Fatih answered, trying to recall any other major incidents. "I only remember a few major events: GameStop, Nvidia's rise, Tesla, the COVID crash and rebound, Bitcoin's increasing value, India's leverage weakness, and the rest of the cryptocurrency bubble. But other than that, I know nothing. And among those, other than Bitcoin's constant rise and fall, all the rest are things that start happening in 2020 or later."

"But aren't those things enough to make you a billionaire, if you know how to make money?" Apollo asked, tilting his head with a look that said, 'Shouldn't that be enough for your endeavor? What more do you want?'

"That is just the theoretical gain I can earn," Fatih explained, his mind already working through the problem. "And that is only if I know how to extract the maximum return from them in the first place. I will need to study finance first and come up with a plan that will squeeze all of these opportunities dry, because once they are gone, there is no way for me to make that kind of windfall money ever again. Also, that money is just a potential earning; it's not in my hand at the moment."

Only the Bitcoin I'm mining might provide some liquidity during this period, but the market is still at a nearly nonexistent level of small. I'm better off trying to accumulate more of them now, to allow for withdrawals when I need cash, but also to leave behind a large holding for when I have the opportunity to exploit my memories for other ventures with higher returns." He knew from the movies he had watched, where words like 'options' and 'puts' were used, that simply buying shares was the way for him to benefit the least from these situations. There were most likely other avenues that would allow for 10,000% returns, if not more.

"How about gambling?" Apollo asked.

"That is a viable way to make money, but at the moment, I don't see a way to convince Mom to trust me to gamble," Fatih replied. "Whose parents would want their son to enter the world of gambling at such a young age, anyway? Though I can prove that my predictions are more than just predictions and are near-certainties, I'm better off doing it on my own when I have my own money, rather than having to put her in that situation."

Though he didn't know it, a seed of self-reliance and a reduced trust in others had already been planted, something that would influence his future in motorsport. It was also the start of his mind subconsciously thinking about creating something that would turn the motorsport world upside down in the future.

And with that seed, there was also a change in his attitude. Although he had already been about fighting for everything, now an additional reason, with similar importance to the SP, was added. He was going to do everything in his power to make sure his mother's investment in him was not going to be a waste.

As if his subconscious thoughts spilled into his conscious actions, he immediately got onto the bed and logged into the Simulation. Apollo promptly followed him as they continued their ongoing practice of how to fight aggressive drivers. But now, Fatih had the knowledge that Selçuk's aggressive driving was going to be cranked up to eleven, now that he had realized his father was going to be backing him no matter what he did, so long as he showed a "fighting spirit."

The days started going by fast. Wednesday arrived, and he started visiting different schools with his mother, preparing for his first school year in September, by which time the championship would already be over.

Despite his scholarship getting terminated, he continued going to the academy for practice. His trainer still remained Burak, who had promised him that he would continue being his teacher after expressing his displeasure with the situation. This was done in conjunction with his mother buying him a completely new kart, which was handed over to Burak for storage at the academy. It would be used for the remaining days of the competition, allowing for ease of transportation and services through the academy, for which Rûmeysa now paid, just like the other students who were not on scholarships but were still competing under the academy's umbrella.

And it wasn't long before the next championship round arrived.

Chapter 60: Race Weekend | Saturday | A Statement in White

July 4th, İzmir

"Hello and a very warm welcome to the fourth round of the TOSFED Mini Kart Şampiyonası!" Süleyman's voice, filled with its characteristic energy, boomed across the sun-drenched Pınarbaşı Karting Track. "We are live from beautiful İzmir for what promises to be a pivotal weekend. We have officially crossed the halfway point of this incredible season, and the championship picture has been turned completely on its head. This is one of the most technical circuits on the calendar, a formidable combination of complex, flowing corners and a long, power-hungry straight, a track that truly separates the good from the great."

The familiar roar of two-stroke engines began to fill the air as the pit lane exit light turned green, signaling the start of Group A's first free practice session.

"You are absolutely right, Süleyman," Zakir's calm, analytical voice took over. "And the drama from the last round in İzmit has left us with a new, yet familiar, championship leader. Jackson Michael, through sheer consistency, has retaken the top spot he held

last season. The previous leader, Fatih Yıldırım, was unfortunately taken out of the final race in a collision with his academy teammate, Selçuk Aslan, an incident that saw both of them score zero points and opened the door for their rivals."

"A collision for which Selçuk received only a warning from the stewards, a decision that has been the talk of the paddock all month," Süleyman added, a note of incredulity in his voice. "I'm still stunned he wasn't given a race ban, which is the typical punishment for such a repeated offense. I don't know what arguments were made in that appeal, but I need those lawyers on my side."

"If it were a one-off incident, I might have understood," Zakir began, his tone measured, "but for it to happen twice in a single weekend, with the same driver on the receiving end..." He trailed off, his attention suddenly captured by the main broadcast screen. A kart, stark and unfamiliar, was rolling onto the circuit. "Well, it seems we may have a visual answer as to the potential cause of that lenient penalty."

The camera zoomed in. The kart was a brand-new chassis, but it was pure, unadorned white. There were no sponsor logos, no academy branding, nothing but the mandatory number stickers, #213, gleaming in the sun. The driver's race suit was the same, a simple white design one he wore for the first time as well, devoid of the prominent "Adam's Karts" branding that had covered it in the last round.

"And that is Fatih Yıldırım," Zakir stated, his voice carefully neutral. But it was very clear that there had been a significant change in his sponsorship situation. For those who understand the politics of the paddock, his new unbranded kart and his reversion to a sponsor-less racing suit made it very easy to deduce that things are not well behind the scenes. As his new gear strongly suggested that Selçuk's father, the sponsor in question, was most likely involved in the reduction of his son's penalty.

"This adds an entirely new layer of intrigue to an already dramatic championship round," Süleyman concluded, a hint of amusement in his tone.

As the commentators focused on the unfolding practice, Fatih began his work. He completed a single, methodical reconnaissance lap, his senses, now slightly dulled by the '[Invictus (Genius)]' downgrade, working overtime to internalize the track's layout and grip levels. He could feel the difference; the instantaneous, almost precognitive feedback was gone, replaced by a high-speed but distinctly mortal perception. There was a lag, a fraction of a second between the kart's action and his mind's full comprehension, a gap he knew he had to respect.

Then, he pushed.

The timing screen lit up.

[P1 - #213 Fatih YILDIRIM - GROUP A - Lap Time: 01:48.003]

He didn't lift. He immediately began his next lap, weaving through the slower traffic with a cold, calculated precision.

[P1 - #213 Fatih YILDIRIM - GROUP A - Lap Time: 01:45.982]

Nearly two seconds carved off his previous time. He was already adapting, finding the limits of the track with his nerfed ability.

[P1 - #213 Fatih YILDIRIM - GROUP A - Lap Time: 01:44.821]

Another full second vanished.

[P1 - #213 Fatih YILDIRIM - GROUP A - Lap Time: 01:43.461]

He broke the 1:44 barrier, his time now a full four seconds clear of the provisional P2. But instead of continuing his charge, he lifted his foot from the accelerator, raised his hand, and steered his kart towards the pit lane entry. The camera followed him as he came to a smooth stop in his pit box. Burak, caught completely off guard by his student's premature return, hurried over, a look of confusion on his face.

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"Is there a problem with the kart's setup?" Burak asked, his voice laced with concern as he knelt beside the kart.

Fatih opened his visor, his expression calm and unreadable. "No," he shook his head. "The setup is good. I can drive on it." He made a move to unbuckle his harness. "I'm just done with practice."

Burak gently placed a hand on his shoulder, stopping him. "What do you mean? Fatih, there are still twelve minutes left in the session. Why are you withdrawing?"

"I have already memorized the track," Fatih stated, his voice matter-of-fact. "Any more driving would needlessly wear out my tires. They are better used in qualifying and the races." He went ahead with unbuckling himself, the finality in his tone leaving no room for argument.

What he didn't say, the thought that echoed in his mind, was far more complex. *'In the past, I could drive for the sheer joy of it, because the academy covered the cost. Now, every lap is an expense. Every millimeter of rubber scrubbed from these tires is money my mother has to spend. I will only use what is absolutely necessary to win. The joy drives are a luxury we can no longer afford.'

Burak stared for a moment, stunned by the cold, pragmatic logic. If any other six-year-old had said that, he would have dismissed it as childish boasting. But this was Fatih. Burak, who had witnessed his talent firsthand, knew that what he said was not a bluff; it

was a calculated assessment. By the time he processed the answer, Fatih was already climbing out of the kart.

As he watched Fatih walk towards the grandstands to join his family, Burak could only shake his head, a mixture of amusement and a profound sense of sadness filling him. He grabbed the kart stand, retrieved the pristine white kart, and began the lonely walk back to the academy tent, the weight of his student's newfound burden settling heavily on his own shoulders.

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"And it appears Fatih Yıldırım is not planning to continue with this free practice session," Süleyman observed, the broadcast showing Fatih taking off his helmet in the grandstands. "But I can't say I see a problem with that. He is currently ahead of the second-place driver by more than four seconds. Even if that gap is reduced by the end of the session, to pull out such a time in just a handful of laps is a clear statement. There's no need to risk a crash." He subtly emphasized the last word, an indirect jab at the events of the previous weekend.

With Fatih out, the session continued. The other drivers chipped away at his time, but by the end of Group A's practice, the gap to P2 was still over two seconds. It wasn't until Group C's session, with the benefit of a fully rubbered-in track, that Jackson and Selçuk came close, but neither could match his time.

When the second and final free practice session began, Fatih didn't even put on his helmet, remaining in the grandstands. It was only then, at the very end of FP2, that Jackson finally managed to beat his time by a mere two-tenths of a second.

Finally, the main qualifying round arrived. As Group A's session started, Fatih remained in the pitlane, watching the clock. He only joined the track when ten minutes remained, a clear strategy to use the peak of track evolution for a single, decisive run.

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"And after a long wait, Fatih is done with his warm-up lap and is about to begin his one and only qualifying run! Zakir, please, take us through it!" Süleyman exclaimed as the camera locked onto the white #213 kart coming through the final corner.

"Thank you, Süleyman," Zakir began, his voice focused. "He starts his flying lap, pushing to the limit as he barrels down the main straight. He moves to the left side of the track before throwing the kart right, taking the fast Turn 1 flat-out. He enters a short straight before a heavy braking zone for the tight T2 left-hander. His braking is perfect, carrying as much speed as possible before making an S-line through T3, going wide to set up for T4.

He threads the needle through the mid-straight chicane, taking it flat-out and gaining speed before the fast, sweeping Turn 6. He does the same for Turn 7 before the next heavy braking zone into the tight, technical Turn 8 hairpin. He trail-brakes deep into the corner, rotating the kart perfectly. He goes wide on the left for Turn 9, getting on the power early and threading the kart through the bend of Turn 10 as if it were a straight. Another heavy braking zone for Turn 11, he goes wide on exit to immediately set up for the T12 chicane.

Now for the final complex. He takes the T13 left-hand hairpin as if it's a double-apex corner, a unique line that seems to be faster as he's already on the power, rocketing towards the final Turn 14 hairpin. He gets on the power early again, flooring it all the way to the start-finish line! AND HE RETURNS TO HIS RIGHTFUL POLE POSITION ON HIS FIRST ATTEMPT! HE'S A FULL SECOND CLEAR OF THE PROVISIONAL P2! BUT HE HASN'T STOPPED! IT SEEMS HE'S GOING FOR ANOTHER LAP WITHOUT WASTING A MOMENT!"

Zakir's voice was filled with a cathartic excitement, a release of the frustration he felt over the potential collusion between a parent and TOSFED. But now, it didn't seem to matter. The disadvantaged had come out on top, refusing to back down.