

Chaos' Heir 131

Chapter 131 - Nature

Professor Supyan's explanation surprised the recruits. Humans didn't go past the element when they studied the mana. Instead, the Niqols considered features that the Global Army didn't even bother to mention in its lessons. Khan wasn't even sure whether his species believed them to affect the behavior of that energy.

Some of the recruits were skeptical about the whole matter. Humans knew that the Niqols had a deeper understanding of mana, but there was a limit to how much those features could affect the actual functioning of that energy.

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The Global Army had achieved wonders without bothering to consider those features. The teleports, the synthetic mana, and the synthetic cores were only some of the many incredible creations accomplished with that energy. The Niqols appeared unable to match those feats with their spiritual methods, which made some humans underestimate the test.

None of the skeptical recruits dared to show their real feelings toward the matter. Captain Erbair had chosen only boys and girls that could blend perfectly with the Nitis' environment, and that required a lack of biases. It didn't matter if they had different ideas on the matter. They had to make sure that none of them appeared on their faces.

All the recruits did a perfect job at keeping stern faces, and only Khan allowed himself to show the genuine curiosity that was spreading inside his mind. He felt really interested in the matters connected to the mana, especially after Liiza continued to surprise him with her keen perception.

'I wonder if the features of my mana will reveal something about Liiza,' Khan thought as a faint worry fused with his curiosity, but he quickly suppressed those ideas.

The test sounded too serious to involve emotions that had appeared less than a month ago. His thoughts quickly moved to the Second Impact and the life in the Slums since those aspects of his life had been far more influential to his current character.

Khan didn't hesitate to unbutton his military uniform after he cleared his mind from useless thoughts, and the other recruits imitated him after noticing his actions.

The girls lowered their gazes when they saw the boys turning toward them, and the latter also revealed some hesitation at the thought of ending up completely naked there. Only Khan didn't seem to care about the matter. He could even ignore the girls around him as his attention remained on the test.

Of course, Khan still glanced at his naked companions before moving his eyes back to the lake, but his action carried no lust. Most girls there had attractive curves and figures that their training had improved, but he couldn't think about them in a sexual way. His curiosity toward the test was quite intense, and his urges belonged only to Liiza.

The recruits showed different reactions to his uncaring behavior. Both girls and boys from the other camps had ended up focusing on him due to the evident azure scar on his chest, so missing his

reaction was impossible. Gabriela and Veronica didn't fail to look at him either, even if they had different reasons for that.

Gabriela had seen Khan many times in the camp, but she had never had the chance to inspect him properly, especially when it came to his azure scar. His well-defined muscles and firm posture matched the rumors that accompanied his name. Khan definitely resembled the driven warrior described in the many reports.

Instead, Veronica felt almost happy about Khan's seemingly uncaring reaction. Her eyes carried a bit of disappointment, but she appreciated how he was different from the other boys in the group.

The exchange of awkward, intense, and lecherous glances ended when Professor Supyan cleared his throat and claimed the recruits' attention. The reaction of the humans didn't surprise him since he knew how different their species was when it came to self-restraint and decency, but he still pointed at the tall boy in the lead to start the test.

"I'm Bradford, Professor Supyan," The tall boy bowed before stepping forward and entering the lake without showing any hesitation.

The glow of the azure symbols on the walls seemed to converge on the boy and highlight his features after he arrived in a spot of the lake where the water reached his knees. Bradford was almost two meters tall and quite muscular. He had short black hair, dark eyes, and hair covered most of his chest. A faint beard even grew from under his chin and cheeks.

The ripples spreading from his position gained strange shades as they expanded throughout the lake, and they soon created something similar to a vague hologram on the transparent surface.

The image of a bear-like creature wearing a crown and sitting on a throne slowly became clear. That peculiar picture even grew bigger as Brandon's mana continued to affect the waters.

"You can go out," Professor Supyan explained after nodding toward the peculiar ethereal image.

"Is it possible to know the meaning behind this image, Professor Supyan?" Brandon asked after performing another polite bow.

"Your mana carries arrogance, strength, and duty," Professor Supyan replied without bothering to look at the boy.

Brandon didn't know how to react to those words, but he didn't dare to remain inside the lake any longer. He reunited with his companions and picked his clothes from the ground before getting dressed.

"Next," Professor Supyan ordered. "Be faster."

The girl who had been behind Brandon in the line quickly entered the waters after performing a bow and introducing herself. Her name was Helen, she also had dark eyes, and her long blonde hair carried silver shades. Her short figure was quite sensual due to her curves. Her physique seemed to resemble Liiza due to the harmony that it radiated.

The waters reflected dark-purple lights that gave birth to the image of a flower that had many sharp thorns on its pedicel. The picture even radiated a heavy aura that tried to darken its surroundings.

"Noble, dangerous," Professor Supyan announced without looking at the girl. "Next!"

The next girl that entered the lake introduced herself as Kelly. She had short brown hair and green eyes, and she was relatively tall compared to the rest of the group. She had more muscles than curves, but most boys on the scene focused on her back anyway since she didn't have hair covering her features.

Kelly's mana created a lion-like animal surrounded by an intimidating aura. The image generated confidence and determination in the recruits that inspected it. Even Khan couldn't help but feel surprised by how intense that influence was.

"Leader, honor," Professor Supyan quickly exclaimed before hurrying the recruits to continue.

The last boy in the other group had an average height. His name was Rodney, his short hair was dark, his eyes brown, no beard appeared on his face, and the same went for his chest. His body had some muscles, but they couldn't compare to Khan and Brandon's. Still, they gave a certain firmness to his figure.

Rodney's mana made the lake generate a fox-like creature that had six tails. Professor Supyan's gaze flickered when he looked at that image, but he dismissed the boy after giving voice to the words "sly" and "unpredictable".

The time for the recruits from Khan's training camp finally arrived, and Gabriela didn't hesitate to step forward. The girl was as tall as Veronica, she had long black hair and green eyes, and a sensual vibe surrounded her well-developed curves.

Her mana generated a strange figure with the head of a dog and a cat's body. Even Professor Supyan appeared slightly confused by that image, but he eventually voiced the words "loyal", "careful", and "plain".

Veronica entered the lake right after Gabriela left the waters. Her mana created a tree that glowed with a warm yellow light capable of relaxing everyone on the scene. Its crown made of large yellow leaves continue to expand as the girl remained inside the lake.

"Love," Professor Supyan limited himself to say before sending Veronica away, and George didn't hesitate to take her place.

The shades of the lake immediately darkened once George's mana started to affect the waters. A scarlet glow covered the entire transparent surface as a sharp blade slowly came out of it until it floated right in front of the boy.

Red trails of a dense liquid fell from the blade and flowed into the lake. George couldn't help but stare at the weapon while wearing a cold expression. His expression revealed some hesitation, but an unshakable determination also filled his eyes as his hand rose to reach the handle floating in front of him.

"Don't lose yourself in the illusion," Professor Supyan reminded, and his words managed to startle George awake. "Your mana is too murky to describe it with a few words. We'll talk more once we reach [The Pure Trees]."

George couldn't help but bow and exit the lake. He appeared in a daze, but his eyes suddenly moved toward Khan. George knew that his friend probably had far murkier mana.

Khan didn't hide his faint worry. Istrone's crisis had made George generate a gruesome image, so he guessed that his mana would be even worse. Still, he didn't really care as long as the picture didn't involve Liiza.

"[I'm Khan, Guru]," Khan announced in a perfect Niqols' accent before bowing and entering the lake.

Brandon's expression twisted into a grimace when he heard those words. He didn't think that Khan would be a show-off, but his chance to do the same had already passed, so he could only feel annoyed now.

Professor Supyan didn't show any reaction at Khan's exclamation, but a frow appeared on his face when he saw that the entire lake lit up to reveal an azure glow.

Khan's eyes widened as the azure light gave birth to images that he knew far too well. The familiar crater appeared right in front of him, and a tall alien figure slowly came out of it. A Nak materialized right in the middle of the lake and forced everyone on the scene to raise their guard.

The appearance of the monster from the nightmares didn't make Khan freeze in fear. The Nak had stopped being scary when he was little more than seven, and it had become a mere silent curse after almost twelve years.

However, something was different at that time. Khan didn't have the chance to modify his nightmares, but he was able to move there. The desperation accumulated in almost twelve years of helpless dreams filled his insides as his mana flowed toward his legs and fueled the techniques that he had committed to memory by now.

A loud noise suddenly spread throughout the underground hall, and the walls of the structure echoed it until they transformed it into a deafening sound. The recruits had to cover their ears for a few seconds before they could stare at the scene again, and their eyes widened at the sight of Khan's leg piercing the Nak's head.

Chapter 132 - Competent

The noise that accompanied Khan's kick announced something that he had struggled to confirm on Nitis. His technique had felt different, smooth in ways that his previous executions couldn't achieve. His mana and body had moved without requiring thoughts or strategies, and the power expressed by the blow marked his arrival in the superior proficiency level.

It had taken Khan almost eight months of relentless training, constant struggles, traumatic experiences, and unshakable resolve to achieve what most soldiers would see as a turning point for their battle prowess. The Lightning-demon style had finally fused with his instincts and habits to make him reach the competent proficiency level and unlock a path that went beyond the correct execution of his techniques.

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Martial arts could develop new effects and abilities as the synchrony among mana, muscles, and moves surpassed a certain level. Those techniques had the chance to evolve once a soldier successfully absorbed them into his core. Khan could go past perfect executions now, but his situation didn't allow him to appreciate his achievement.

Professor Supyan had just voiced a vague warning about the dangerousness of the illusions during George's test, and Khan had taken his words seriously. Yet, his sudden attack didn't come from his failure in separating the fake pictures from the real world. His kick was a simple expression of the feelings that he had bottled up for almost twelve years.

Khan's attack pierced the Nak's head, and the upper part of the picture dispersed into a few faint lights before the glow coming out of the lake rebuilt that figure.

The Nak wasn't real, and its appearance came from the nature of Khan's mana. He couldn't destroy it simply because nothing was standing in front of him. That opponent came from inside him.

Khan didn't lose himself in his feeling. His mind had never been clearer. He experienced the same reassuring coldness that had filled his mind after the crash on Istrone, but that mental state felt far more intense now.

His mind had instinctively recognized his sworn enemy and had made the entirety of his focus flow on the creature. Khan's vision was clear, his breath was steady, and he could study every feeling captured by his senses in instants. He was in a perfect battle state, and he didn't hesitate to use it to unleash his full power on the alien that had cursed his nights for so long.

The attack didn't stop the Nak from playing the images that had afflicted Khan's mind for years, but he didn't limit himself to a single technique either. His body spun and created seamless circular ripples that expanded from his foothold as he performed a roundhouse kick that aimed for the alien's head again.

Still, a shadow suddenly moved in Khan's peripheral vision until it appeared in the trajectory of his attack. Professor Supyan had shot forward to stop the kick and prevent the boy from falling into the illusions even more. His hand rose to block the incoming leg and capture it in his grasp, but his glowing eyes widened when he saw that Khan's foot stopped before reaching his palm.

Professor Supyan almost couldn't believe his eyes when Khan retracted his leg and jumped backward to reach the shore in a single leap before performing a polite bow. The alien understood that the young human had always been in control of himself. His attack had been the consequence of a cold decision generated by a calm mind.

The image behind Professor Supyan started to vanish after Khan left the waters, but the latter didn't stop inspecting it. Khan kept his eyes on the Nak as its figure grew dimmer and the lake stopped releasing its azure glow.

Professor Supyan didn't miss that action. He turned to glance at the disappearing Nak before moving his eyes back on Khan. His gaze fell on the azure scar at that point, but his face didn't betray anything. It remained expressionless as complicated thoughts ran through his mind.

Khan and Professor Supyan ended up exchanging a long glance after the Nak completely disappeared. The Niqols could see the coldness in the boy's expression slowly relaxing without ever leaving him completely free of those feelings. It was clear that they were part of Khan.

A tinge of sadness seeped past Professor Supyan's poker face when he connected that coldness to Khan's young age. The Niqols didn't have any bias toward humans, so he experienced the sadness of Khan's situation as if he were a simple boy from his species. His gaze inevitably fell on the ground as his empathy became unbearable.

'I know the answer to my old doubt,' Khan thought as he studied the alien Professor. 'I'm glad that fear didn't freeze my movements.'

Khan had wondered about what would happen once he met a Nak, but the experience in the underground lake had given him a satisfying answer. He would fight without showing any hesitation nor fear.

The strange mental state that Khan had experienced during the sudden event had left him slightly surprised, but he didn't mind that. Actually, he felt glad that his mind could reach such high levels of concentration on its own without requiring the mental barrier or other techniques.

"We'll also have a talk once we reach [The Pure Trees]," Professor Supyan announced once he felt able to bring his eyes back on Khan.

Khan limited himself to bow again, and Professor Supyan inspected that action without revealing any emotion before nodding at the two envoys.

The two Niqols bowed and whispered a few orders that made all the recruits get in line again after everyone went back into their uniforms. Khan remained immersed in his thoughts while he wore his clothes and took his position at the back of the line, but George didn't forget about him.

"We are really moody," George whispered as a faint chuckle accompanied his voice. "No wonder we can't get laid."

"Talk for yourself," Khan smirked as George's efforts to lift his morale warmed his mind a bit. "I choose not to."

"As if anyone would even believe it," George scoffed as the group climbed the staircase back to the surface. "Maybe your tastes have moved closer toward a certain white and dark-blue species after your first day on Nitis."

"Don't even joke about that," Khan sighed. "They will send me back to Earth in an instant if they even suspect that I like Miss Liiza enough to flirt with her."

"Look at the bright side," George continued to joke while keeping his voice down. "You can improve your abilities as an ambassador in the academy."

George had turned and winked at him when he said those last words. His hidden roguish meanings were evident, and Khan couldn't help but shake his head at that sight. Still, a faint laugh accompanied his action since his friend's jokes had dispersed his overflowing coldness.

"What are you even whispering about?" Veronica asked once the group returned to the surface.

"Men's stuff," George exclaimed without any shame, and Veronica giggled when she saw Khan shaking his head behind him.

"That's from the Second Impact, right?" Brandon suddenly asked as the whole group turned toward Khan.

The two envoys wanted to hurry back to the Aduns, but they understood that the humans wanted to talk a bit among themselves. The Niqols would usually never allow such delays, but they felt that the recruits deserved a short break, especially after witnessing Khan's test.

Moreover, the group had flown for almost half a day already. It didn't hurt to give the Aduns a short break before moving to the last part of their trip.

"They aren't good memories," Khan replied while showing a complicated smile.

"No wonder," Kelly exclaimed while crossing her arms in front of her chest. "Though, you should take pride in your achievements. Reaching the competent proficiency level so early proves your hard work."

Khan's eyes widened at that remark. He had yet to accept his new state, but it seemed that all the other recruits had already understood what had happened.

Khan's first instinct was to dismiss those words with fake polite excuses, but he noticed that habit in time to stop it. He decided not to say any words and broaden his smile to accept that compliment.

The fact that Khan didn't deny nor add anything to Kelly's words filled his gesture with a mature vibe. He acted as if those achievements were only a regular part of his life.

"Look," Brandon cleared his throat while diverting his gaze, "I'm sorry for earlier. It's just, this mission is really important, right? You are already so famous on Nitis. I didn't want to fall behind."

"I thought you were arrogant," Khan laughed while reminding Brandon about Professor Supyan's evaluation.

"It doesn't mean that I have to be a dick," Brandon also laughed before going back to a severe expression. "There are only eight of us in this mission. Our focus should be on working together for the greater good of humanity, so I hope that everything is okay between us."

"No problem at all," Khan answered in a warm voice. "Everyone wants the spotlight. I believe this mission will give all of us the chance to get it."

"Especially with the crisis around the corner," Rodney added. "Be sure not connect too much with the alien. We don't want them to know about our strategy."

Khan couldn't help but feel slightly angry about Rodney's cold words since they seemed to target his relationship. Still, nothing appeared on his face as the group glanced at the two envoys from the corner of their eyes to make sure that they weren't listening to their conversation.

"Are you ready to leave?" The male Niqols asked, and the recruits didn't hesitate to give positive answers.

The group quickly hopped back on their Aduns before setting off to complete their trip. The eagles had loyally waited near that secret area, so it didn't take much for the travel to resume.

Khan noticed how the secret trapdoor had closed by the time the group returned in the sky. He didn't see Professor Supyan leave the underground area before the passage disappeared, and the lake didn't seem to have tunnels either.

Of course, Khan didn't believe that the Niqols had remained underground. It was very likely that the lake had secret passages similar to the trapdoor connected to the staircase, but that would mean that [The Pure Trees] was closer than he imagined.

His guess turned out to be correct. The group only had to fly for two more hours before reaching a thick forest surrounded by seven mountains. The envoys didn't hesitate to dive at that sight and land in a small area devoid of trees.

The group didn't feel sure if they had arrived until the envoys jumped off their Aduns and gave specific instructions. "The academy is at the center of the valley. You can say goodbye to your Aduns for now. We'll complete the last part of the trip on foot."

Chapter 133 - Proposal

Khan had done his best to memorize the areas crossed during the flight. Calculations happened in his mind as he tried to understand how far away he was from the human camp and the marsh.

It turned out that the many hours spent flying had been mostly pointless. The two envoys had invested longer in deceiving eventual pursuers rather than in the actual travel.

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Khan believed that the valley at the center of the seven mountains was at mere five or six hours from the camp. The place was farther away from the human settlement than the flat area in the mountain chain and the marsh, but it wasn't unreachable, especially with an Aduns.

A vague map even appeared in Khan's mind. The Global Army didn't have access to detailed maps of Nitis, and the telescope outside the planet's orbit couldn't get a clear idea of the surface either. Khan didn't even have clearance for those pictures, so he had to rely on his personal experience to understand the general layout of the area.

Khan had traveled a lot in the past four weeks. Snow had allowed him to fly above many lands as soon as he landed on Nitis. He had even spent most of his time outside the camp. His time with Liiza, the hunts, and the other travels had granted him a vague but general understanding of the areas around the base, especially those near the mountain chain.

The marsh, the valley, and the mountain chain were in the same general direction, so coming up with a simple map with a few checkpoints ended up being relatively easy for Khan. He could even add a vague number that marked their actual distance from his new home.

The flat area in the mountain chain was pretty close, at less than thirty minutes from the camp. Khan used to take almost an hour to go back to his home only because snow wanted to have fun along the way. Still, it became the farthest location from his new position. He even guessed that it would take his Aduns a bit more than six hours to go back there.

The marsh was a bit more than two hours from the camp but closer to the valley compared to the mountain chain. Khan believed that Snow could reach it in less than three hours if it didn't have fun for too long during the flight.

His situation didn't sound so bad after completing that map. He could reach the marsh and Liiza rather quickly, so his happiness was safe. The only issue was his lack of knowledge of the academy's customs and regulations. Khan didn't know how free he would be after the official enrollment, but he believed the Niqols wouldn't restrain him too much.

The Aduns quickly flew away after exchanging affectionate or playful goodbyes with their riders. The two envoys didn't hesitate to lead the recruits across the forest at that point, and the group mostly remained silent since everyone did their best to study the area.

The recruits knew that magic oaths would prevent them from spreading information about [The Pure Trees], but none believed those restraints to last forever. They wanted to have something to say to the Global Army when those limits fell and granted them complete freedom over their knowledge again.

Khan relied on his sensitivity to mana and eyes to learn as much as possible from the area. The insides of the forest didn't feature paths or footmarks that hinted at the presence of Niqols. Still, the peculiarities in the energy flowing through the trees, ground, and air revealed invisible details.

Nitis wasn't like Istrone. The energy contained in the ground and plants of the Kred's planet made Khan's sensitivity to mana inaccurate and unreliable. Instead, the Niqols' planet didn't have those hindrances, so he could gain a decent understanding of its secrets during the march toward the center of the forest.

Some trees contained far more mana than the others. Some areas seemed utterly devoid of energy instead. It was clear that someone had tampered with the ground and plants, but Khan could only guess the nature of that process. Those spots should have defenses and similar mechanisms due to their strategic position, but he didn't dare to jump to conclusions.

The presence of defenses didn't surprise Khan. The Niqols appeared devoid of internal conflicts, but their fauna was quite dangerous, especially since monsters appeared on their own even before the approaching of the sunlight.

The forest didn't seem to contain Tainted animals, but that was only a tiny area in the middle of seven mountains. Khan could guess that the nearby regions would feature the usual distribution of threats that filled the rest of Nitis.

The group moved quickly and steadily. Memorizing the path wasn't an issue since the envoys were moving toward the center of the forest, and finding the beginning of the academy turned out to be easy too.

A patch of white crowns suddenly expanded in the group's vision once they reached the central parts of the forest. The large leaves abandoned their black shades to make room for white and grey colors that radiated the same glow as the Niqols' eyes.

That sight obviously left the humans surprised. The scene wasn't only stunning due to the unusual illumination. Khan and the others didn't understand how they couldn't see that white patch from the sky.

All the recruits didn't hesitate to inspect the top of the crowns hidden at many meters above them, but they couldn't notice dark shades among those glowing leaves. Lucky for them, the envoys took care of clearing their doubts.

"A barrier covers the entire valley," The female Niqols explained. "You wouldn't notice anything from the sky even if the whole forest were on fire."

The news left everyone astonished, especially Khan. He had made sure not to miss details connected to the distribution of mana, but he didn't even come close to sensing the barrier.

Khan tried to focus on the areas above the crowns, but his sensitivity to mana continued to betray him. He couldn't sense anything different from the normal air, and that forced him to reevaluate his previous inspections.

The presence of the barrier proved that the Niqols could deploy defenses that used mana and didn't trigger his senses. Khan had initially thought that the peculiar areas on his path were traps with specific functions, but they felt as decoys meant to hide the real protections now.

'I'm still so ignorant,' Khan sighed in his mind at that realization.

His knowledge had never stopped expanding, but the world kept getting bigger. It didn't matter how much Khan learnt. There was always something else that he didn't initially see or even consider.

The vastness of the fields that involved mana was disheartening but also exciting. Khan had lost his naive curiosity toward the immensity of the universe after everything he had gone through. Still, a more mature version of that sensation reappeared inside him inside the forest.

The trees grew clearer as the group marched forward. Their trunks became whiter and started to radiate the same faint glow as the leaves, but more empty areas also started to appear.

That trend peaked when a large empty area that featured multiple buildings made of mud and black ground unfolded in the group's vision. The structures appeared quite poor-looking. They were short and scarce, but they all had the iconic azure symbols on their surface.

There seemed to be faint paths on that dark plain illuminated by the white glow around it. A few benches and marks on the ground created rudimentary gathering points. Other spots had large holes with stages and cauldrons.

There didn't seem to be anyone inside the area, but everything changed after the group crossed the last white tree in sight. Khan and the others felt as if they went through a dense invisible membrane before a series of dark figures materialized in their vision.

Many young Niqols appeared inside the empty spot in the forest. They mostly sat on the ground and created circles in different areas while older aliens stood at their center. Multiple lessons were happening at the same time, but all of them had stopped by the time the recruits entered the area.

All the Niqols in the area stared at the humans. None of them was surprised by their arrival since their superiors had spread the news concerning that event, but it still felt strange to see those recruits walking inside such a secretive area.

Khan didn't suppress his curiosity at all. The other recruits lowered their heads or tried to keep stern faces to express the importance of the mission. Instead, Khan's eyes darted through the environment and tried to memorize every detail of the academy.

The place basically was the exact opposite of a human camp. The Niqols seemed to prefer holding their lessons outdoors and without the help of specific devices.

Khan couldn't help but notice how mystical auras that carried different vibes surrounded every group sitting on the ground. Some of them felt peaceful, others were intense, and a few even filled his nostrils with the faint scent of blood.

The almost complete absence of technology didn't manage to make them appear as a barbaric species. The young Niqols all wore casual clothes, but the professors donned elegant white robes that demarked their status and divided them from their students.

Moreover, the peculiar auras that enveloped every group gave them the appearance of sages who had a deep understanding of the world. Khan found it hard to describe how he felt in front of that scene, but he inevitably fell in a daze.

The same happened to the other recruits. Even those who firmly believed humans to be superior couldn't help but admire the differences in their training methods. They almost felt that their camps lacked something after studying that scene.

The two envoys didn't let the recruits stop to study the academy. They would have time to familiarize themselves with the few structures and functions of the place in the following days, so the Niqols found no reason to stop moving now that their task was almost over.

Khan soon sensed a familiar gaze falling on the side of his face. His mana informed him that his girlfriend was looking at him, but he limited himself to glance in that direction from the corner of his eyes.

Khan found Liiza sitting on a thick branch of one of the few trees that grew inside the area past the invisible membrane. She was alone as she read an old book with a dim azure symbol at the center of its black cover.

That short glance didn't allow Khan to see much, but he still felt part of his tiredness vanishing from his mind. The couple didn't get the chance to spend the previous night together, so their meeting inevitably gave birth to intense sensations inside them. Still, they both suppressed everything and avoided leaving clues about their relationship.

The envoys led the recruits across the entire empty area until they reached one of the short buildings. The structure featured a thick wooden door covered in a pungent smell that became almost unbearable once it opened to reveal its insides.

A small dim area appeared in front of the group, and the Niqols didn't hesitate to bring everyone inside. An old female alien who wore a sweaty white robe and sat between two fuming cauldrons that reached her shoulders.

"Hair," The old woman said while picking wooden cups and filling them with the dense bubbling dark liquid contained in the cauldrons.

The Niqols showed their palms to the recruits, and they exchanged a glance before pulling one of their hairs and handing them to the aliens. The old woman then used them to complete those strange drinks and handed them back to the recruits, making sure to match the hair with the owners.

Khan couldn't help but notice the differences with Zalpa's method. He felt sure that the old shaman would have asked for his blood again to complete the potion.

The recruits obviously hesitated, but Khan gave them some confidence by gulping the potion in one sip. The liquid scorched his insides and fused with his throat, but it didn't cause any damage. Still, a spot on the side of his neck started to itch, and Khan noticed that an azure glow illuminated his hand when he raised it to scratch the area.

Khan quickly picked his phone and used it as a mirror to inspect the area. An azure symbol had appeared on his neck, but that mark disappeared in a few seconds without leaving any trace. He could sense only when he made mana flow through that spot.

The other recruits imitated Khan after confirming that nothing too strange had happened to him. Azure symbols also appeared on the side of their necks, but no after-effects unfolded.

"I used the white leaves and roots of the trees around the area to create this potion," The old Niqols explained in a raspy voice. "You will be able to talk about [The Pure Trees] only with those that carry the same mark. Don't worry. It's easy to understand who doesn't have it."

Khan and the others could only nod before the envoys brought them outside the building again and began to lead them toward their habitations. Yet, a peculiar scene unfolded before they could leave that central area of the academy and force them to turn toward the tree where Liiza was sitting.

"[Liiza]!" A tall and good-looking Niqols shouted while kneeling in front of the white tree.

The alien kept his arms stretched toward the girl a few meters above him. He held beautiful multicolored flowers in his hands, and his face expressed pure devotion.

"[Please, accept this small gift]," The Niqols pleaded. "[I only ask for a chance. Close your eyes in front of our political obligations and follow your heart]!"

The multicolored flowers appeared quite rare in Nitis dark environment. Even humans could understand that those plants were quite expensive. However, Liiza didn't seem to care about them. She only showed an annoyed expression at the boy before answering with a clear "[no]".

Her answer caused a series of faint laughs to spread among the Niqols on the scene. Some of them even shouted words meant to encourage the boy to try again in the following days. They appeared used to that scene, and Khan couldn't help but feel annoyance spreading inside him at that sight. Something told him that he had found Ilman.

Chapter 134 - Tour

'She didn't tell me that he was so into her,' Khan commented in his mind as his annoyance increased.

Khan didn't understand the entire speech, but the few words that he could translate in his mind had allowed him to get its general meaning. The Niqols was clearly trying to date his girlfriend, and he couldn't do anything about the situation.

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The Niqols remained on his knees, and his expression didn't even flicker after Liiza's firm refusal. His face remained solemn as if he were in the middle of a deadly battle.

"[You will acknowledge me one day]," Ilman exclaimed before straightening his position and leaving the flowers at the base of the tree. "[I won't give up on us until then]."

Ilman's romantic words made some of the female Niqols gasp. Some even stood up to approach him with consoling words, but he ignored them until they started to offend Liiza.

"[You should imagine yourselves in her position before speaking so poorly of her]," Ilman defended. "[Her mother wanted to sell her away for the Niqols' greater good when she was nothing more than a kid. Her anger is completely justified in my eyes]."

"[Give up on her then]!" One of the female girls complained before blushing and playing with her hair. "[You can go out with me. I'll make you happy]."

"[You can't tempt my love]," Ilman promptly refused her. "[I can't betray my feelings]!"

The girls took a step back after that remark. They appeared disappointed, but their blush didn't disappear. It seemed that they liked how dramatic and driven Ilman was about the matter.

Khan failed to understand most of that interaction again. He only got some of Ilman's words since he spoke simple lines, and that fueled Khan's irritation even more.

'I need to learn the Niqols' language as soon as possible,' Khan decided as his expression grew colder when he saw that Ilman had started to walk in his direction.

"You must be the new students!" Ilman exclaimed while wearing a broad smile. "I hope that your stay in [The Pure Trees] will bring species even closer together."

Ilman's manners were perfect. His smile didn't show any flaw and highlighted his innate beauty. His human accent was excellent, and a gentle aura seemed to cover his whole figure.

'Don't tell me that he is a good guy,' Khan cursed in his mind. 'World, can you give me something easy to hate this time around?'

"I'm Ilman," The Niqols continued. "My tribe has benefitted immensely from the cooperation with the humans. Allow me to express my gratitude."

Ilman performed a polite bow, and the recruits didn't hesitate to imitate him. Only Khan hesitated for an instant, but he forced himself to bend forward while joining his hands when he sensed Liiza's intense gaze on him.

"Allow me to escort you to your habitations," Ilman proposed. "I wouldn't mind giving you a tour of the camp if you aren't too tired from the long travel."

It was only late afternoon, and Khan's group had basically spent the entirety of the travel on their Aduns. They were full of energy, and Ilman's offer was tempting.

"It would be an honor to have you as our guide," Kelly quickly replied.

Brandon found himself with his mouth open and words stuck in his throat. Kelly had been faster than him in giving a polite answer. The boy could only curse in his mind and prepare himself for the next chance to show off.

The other recruits shared the same mood. Their stay in the academy was a critical political mission, so those who managed to establish a good relationship with the Niqols would gain more value inside the Global Army. Also, they had to do their best not to remain inside Khan's shadow. Luckily for them, the latter didn't seem interested in exchanging polite words with Ilman.

Khan's eyes never left Ilman. He would have normally done his best to get closer with the Niqols, especially since he appeared as a famous and respected figure inside the camp. However, his feelings made him unable to think about the matter politically. He could only stare at the alien and curse silently whenever his beauty became impossible to ignore.

'Taller than me, good-looking, rich,' Khan commented in his mind, 'He even belongs to the right species, and his feelings are intense.'

Khan found himself unable to win against Ilman in any aspect. He clearly was a worse pick, but feeling Liiza's constant stare helped him remain in control of his pretense.

"Let's not waste your precious time then," Ilman laughed and walked toward the two envoys to lead the group back to their habitations.

Khan got the chance to sneak a peek at Liiza while the group turned to follow the three Niqols. Her eyes widened in a glare when she saw his action, but both of them quickly returned to their pretense before anyone could see them.

The three Niqols led the recruits away from that central square and among the trees. It seemed that the membrane covered a large area at the center of the forest, so they could remain inside it while they moved toward the structure meant to accommodate the humans.

It turned out that the academy didn't have many buildings. The few structures inside the forest all had specific purposes that required a closed environment or unique tools. Moreover, Ilman explained how the trees created a special aura that covered the entire academy and helped with the training.

The Niqols didn't want to risk ruining the aura by adding too many buildings. Yet, that didn't prevent them from expanding the academy. They only had to stretch it downward instead of upward.

The habitations were in a large underground hall connected to the surface with a large and steep staircase. Azure symbols and smooth walls created a cozy and warm environment that featured eight beds and four separate bathrooms.

The Niqols had brought the temperature to human standards, and the menus were in their language too. The only awkward aspect of the area was that the beds were all in the same room since the aliens didn't see any issue with girls and boys living together.

The recruits didn't voice any complaint, and some of them didn't really care about that. Others even looked forward to sleeping together, especially the boys since they would have more chances to be with the girls.

All their belongings were next to the beds. Khan could find his knives quickly, and a tinge of concern filled him when he thought about leaving them in the open in front of the other recruits. The two null-grade weapons didn't matter too much, but he wanted to hide the first-grade blade from the others.

That concern vanished when he noticed that the Global Army had sent lockers calibrated to their genetic signature. Khan could keep his knives there without worrying about the other recruits.

The Global Army had sent some uniforms, but the Niqols had also left white robes on the clean ground next to them. It seemed that the alien wanted to give them a choice to wear what they preferred.

The tour continued afterward. The academy didn't expand too much inside the forest since the Niqols preferred to use the underground world to enlarge it, but that approach didn't stop them from using specific areas that carried unique features.

The academy had a small lake filled with transparent waters that spread a peaceful vibe throughout its shores. Risky lessons that required complete control over mana happened there due to the obvious benefits connected to that aura.

Another unique area was under the surface. The roots of many trees came out of the ceiling and created an environment almost devoid of mana. It was easier to focus and check certain improvements and features of the mana there. Many medical lessons happened there since the lack of interferences made diagnoses quicker.

The academy had similar structures spread inside the area inside the barrier. Overall, the site was far smaller than Ylaco's training camp, but it successfully held almost one hundred Niqols.

Ilman acted as the perfect envoy during the tour. He never failed to give complete explanations of each area, and he added details even when the other two Niqols tried to stop him.

The boy never revealed classified information, but he always had the chance to hold something back to make things harder for the humans. However, Ilman wanted the humans to experience the entirety of their stay inside the academy. He didn't care about giving advantages to his species.

Kelly and Brandon basically fought each other for Ilman's attention. The other recruits also managed to say gentle words or polite remarks from time to time. Only Khan remained completely silent during the entire tour. He didn't fail to memorize everything and study the various interactions, but he couldn't force himself to speak with the alien.

"That's it for the tour," Ilman announced while wearing a broad smile after bringing the group back to the central empty area. "I'm often away during the day since the second year only has specific lessons, but you can find me around this time since I have a high chance of finding Liiza in these hours."

"I wish you the best of luck with her," Brandon promptly exclaimed. "Don't hesitate to contact us if you ever need help with her or other matters."

Ilman appeared quite easygoing. His dramatic behavior made it hard for the group to notice his real character, but they slowly uncovered it during the tour. The Niqols appeared honest and joust. He was the type of person that would always choose to do the right thing.

Khan hoped to find something worth hating, but Ilman kept disappointing him. The Niqols' character was so flawless that it almost felt unreal.

Needless to say, that only worsened Khan's mood, and George eventually noticed that. Khan wasn't the type to miss so many chances to establish a relationship with a seemingly important figure in the camp. Something seemed off with him, so George decided to help him after Brandon's remark.

"You can talk with Khan about girls," George laughed while patting Khan's shoulder. "He has a real talent with them. I bet he can help you with Miss Liiza."

Chapter 135 - Party

George didn't only want to help Khan with his words. He knew that the mission in [The Pure Trees] was for the greater good of humanity, but he couldn't forget that he belonged to the fourth class.

Brandon and Kelly were basically monopolizing the situation, which didn't put the classes coming from the other training camp under a good light. Still, George, Veronica, and Gabriela were relatively plain compared to the flashy Brandon and the stern Kelly. Only Khan could claim Ilman's attention and make a good impression.

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Khan slowly turned toward George. The boy was showing one of his best smiles while patting his shoulder, and his expression carried pure confidence. Everyone would believe his words, especially since he was the first to trust them.

"Khan," Ilman repeated while diverting his gaze to look through his memories.

"Of course!" Ilman exclaimed as his eyes lit up. "You are the first human to ride an Aduns. You are lucky that Liiza was in charge of helping your group. The other Niqols would have never given you the chance to tame one of them."

Khan felt incredibly lucky. A simple call redirected to the special phones handed to the Niqols had given him the chance to meet Liiza. That simple encounter had provided him with an Aduns, a girlfriend, and peace. Nitis had granted him happiness that he didn't believe to be possible. His mind contained only gratitude, but Ilman smiling face was trying to tamper with that feeling.

"Miss Liiza has saved my position on Nitis," Khan announced while performing a polite bow. "I'm forever in her debt."

"I can understand that," Ilman laughed. "I can already sense that we'll get along. Maybe our mana is compatible."

'World, I hate you,' Khan thought while his mouth moved to voice different words. "I feel the same. I hope I can be of help."

"Oh?" Ilman gasped to reveal a surprised expression. "Are you familiar with our way of experiencing feelings?"

"Only vaguely," Khan gave another polite answer. "I find your customs captivating, so I tried to broaden my view, but I'm afraid I can't quite match the depths of your perception."

"Wonderful!" Ilman shouted as his surprise transformed into pure joy. "This is how it should have been from the beginning! Humans trying to feel like Niqols! Thank you, Khan. Your words have rekindled my hopes. I now believe with even more intensity that our species can be great allies!"

Khan felt speechless in front of that dramatic answer, but he wasn't the only one on the scene to experience those feelings. George directly opened his mouth in surprise, and the other recruits also remained stunned. The same went for the two Niqols who were still with Ilman. They didn't think that their companion's reaction would be so extreme over such a simple matter.

"I hope you can help me improve there if it's not too much to ask," Khan managed to say after suppressing his surprise.

"No problem at all," Ilman exclaimed. "I'm sure the professors will already point you in the right direction, but I will definitely help when I can. I can't wait to work with all of you."

Ilman performed a bow, and the recruits quickly imitated him. The alien left at that point, and the two envoys took care of the last doubts that remained in the experts' minds.

"Are you planning to leave every night even after coming here?" George asked as the envoys left and the recruits started to return to their habitations.

George and the other recruits didn't miss how Khan's questions to the envoys had involved the various restrictions of the academy. The answers had left him pleasantly surprised since every student basically had complete freedom as long as their actions didn't damage the structures or ruin the peace that filled the insides of the membrane.

Fights were strictly forbidden, but that only inside the valley due to the many defenses in place. Those restrictions would vanish once the students reached the mountains.

Even the lessons weren't mandatory, but that obviously didn't apply to the recruits. The Global Army would send them back to Earth if they tried to skip them. Deciding not to attend them could appear as a lack of respect on the human side toward the chance to learn about the Niqols' ways.

"Better than hearing your snores every night," Khan laughed.

"I don't snore," George snorted.

"You have made remaining awake on Istrone really easy for me," Khan mocked.

"I'll take it as a yes then," George sighed while ignoring his comment. "I honestly don't get it. We have so many good training areas here. The mountains are nice, but I don't think they can beat this."

George waved his hand to highlight the peaceful scenery under the thick crowns. Everything was dark in the areas without azure symbols, but that didn't remove the magical feeling that the scene could generate. The aura that permeated everything inside the membrane also enhanced those vibes and made the recruits desire to protect that place.

"It's indeed good," Brandon commented, "But I still prefer our clean streets and tall buildings. I can't get used to these bathrooms either."

"I agree on the bathrooms," Kelly added.

"They aren't so bad," Khan commented. "I had it far worse in the Slums."

"I don't even want to think about that," Helen uttered while wearing a disgusted expression. "How did you even, you know, clean yourself?"

"Do you really want to hear the answer?" Khan asked.

"No," Helen shook her head. "I want to continue respecting you."

"I'm sure that won't be too hard," Veronica smirked as her eyes fell on Khan.

Khan ignored that gesture, and the two Niqols waiting next to the passage that led toward the underground habitations made it easy for him to mask his actions. He couldn't help but smile when he recognized the two aliens that had appeared on his path.

"Doku, Azni!" Khan shouted happily, surprising the four recruits that came from the other training camp. "I didn't think you studied here."

"Only the best Niqols have the chance to be in [The Pure Trees]," Azni sighed. "You should know that we belong here."

"We have been busy during the day," Doku continued. "I wouldn't have minded handling the tour otherwise."

"Ilman took care of that," Khan shortly explained before turning toward Azni. "How is your back?"

"I have a small scar because of you," Azni complained while crossing her arms in front of her chest. "I've decided to forgive you only recently."

"How magnanimous of you," Khan laughed before focusing on Doku. "So, what do you have in mind?"

"We thought that our poor human friends would feel completely lost here," Doku explained. "Luckily for them, two good Niqols are willing to help."

Brandon and the other recruits from the other training camp couldn't believe how at ease Khan, Doku, and Azni appeared. They almost looked like old friends.

Even George and Veronica struggled to understand how Khan could have such a good relationship with the two Niqols. They knew that he had managed to make a deal with Doku for the booze, but they didn't expect the aliens to treat him as a friend.

Khan quickly introduced his companions, and the two groups exchanged a series of bows. The two Niqols then followed the recruits inside their habitations, and they didn't show any hesitation to sit on Khan's bed before explaining the reason behind their visit.

"The professors don't let us have parties inside the actual academy ground," Doku explained, "But we often gather near one of the mountains and spend the night there. We have already planned something for tonight, so you must come."

"Doku is the best at this stuff," Azni continued. "Don't even try to come up with excuses. We know that you don't get tired easily."

George and the others could only stare at the scene with their mouths open. Khan, Azni, and Doku were sitting on the former's bed without minding that the lack of space was forcing them to be quite close. Their backs were on the wall behind them, and Khan and Azni's shoulders even touched often.

"Do you want us to get drunk the night before our first lessons?" Khan laughed. "That's not ideal."

"You survived an entire tour with Ilman," Azni commented. "You'll be fine."

"Azni is one of the few girls who can escape Ilman's charm," Doku quickly explained.

"What charm?" Azni scoffed. "He's always so intense for no reason, and he is completely devoted to Liiza. Only an idiot would keep hitting on her after hundreds of rejections."

"Hundreds?" Khan repeated.

"He is quite devoted to the task," Doku laughed. "Well, he expresses the true Niqols' way. I don't think I've seen anyone so intense."

"Luckily he never comes to the parties," Azni revealed. "He doesn't care since Liiza never comes either."

"I thought she would have friends here," Khan said after making sure that his words didn't reveal that he had learnt about her situation. "Is she always alone?"

"That's quite hard to explain," Doku replied.

"Not really hard," Azni corrected. "Just quite complicated. Things got worse with time and led to the current situation. Some of us don't hate her. Ignoring her it's more of a habit that's hard to break since she doesn't try to get friends."

That answer added details to Khan's knowledge. He had only heard Liiza's side of the story before, but he gained a complete view of the matter after Azni's explanation.

Liiza's decision to break up with Ilman had turned her into an outcast, and her personality had developed from that state. Her peers had grown and had eventually forgotten about their disappointment, but Liiza had become unapproachable in those years.

Of course, that only applied to part of the Niqols. Many still believed that Liiza had betrayed her species and weren't willing to forgive her.

"Let's not waste time talking about those two," Doku exclaimed. "The party will begin soon. I bet that someone has already started drinking. We must hurry."

"We should get clean and change before," Khan responded. "I smell like my Aduns."

"Why would you clean yourself before the party?" Doku asked as honest confusion appeared on his face. "You'll get dirty again there anyway."

"This isn't a formal event," Azni explained while revealing an understanding smile. "The others would only think that you are strange if you changed for the event."

"Oh, it's a human thing," Doku uttered while standing up. "Right, I forgot about it."

"Let's go," Azni giggled while keeping her glowing eyes on Khan.

The girl eventually stood up and wore her usual cold expression when she glanced at the other recruits staring at the scene. She didn't seem good with strangers, so Doku took care of pressing them.

"I believe you won't miss the chance to join a core event of the academy," Doku teased, and the recruits felt forced to leave their beds and gather around him.

Doku understood their situation clearly. The recruits were there to improve the relationship with the Niqols, so attending common social events was necessary. Their duties basically forced them to go to the party.

The group soon left the underground habitations and left the membrane as Doku and Azni led the humans across the forest. The two Niqols explained details that the envoys and Ilman had left behind, like the paths toward the various mountains. It seemed that the camp had seven vague exits meant for that specific purpose.

Each mountain also had a name that humans struggled to pronounce. The Niqols used them to divide the valley into different quadrants, and only the professors mentioned them during the

planning of special lessons outside the membrane. Most of the students had learnt them only to have an easier time planning parties or similar events.

"I knew it," Doku sighed when the group arrived in a relatively empty area.

Thirty or so Niqols had created small groups around a fuming cauldron that contained the familiar pink liquid. They all had drinks in their hands, and piles of wooden cups stood a few trees away from the empty area.

The arrival of the humans didn't go unnoticed, but the Niqols didn't appear bothered by that. Instead, some of them wore excited faces and raised their glasses toward them.

Doku forced the group to take cups and fill them with the scorching pink liquid. It turned out that no one actually smuggled the drink inside the valley. The academy had a few Niqols who could produce it as long as they had a cauldron and a few core materials. Doku happened to be one of them.

The recruits started to relax as the drinks began to show their effects. The other Niqols also grew more friendly after emptying a few cups. Everyone became tipsy after a few hours, and the humans never had the chance to remain alone since they were a great attraction in that situation.

Khan limited himself to drink a few cups while getting to know everyone. He even exchanged honest laughs after some of them cracked jokes in the human language, and he did his best to use the Niqols' language as much as possible.

The situation grew slightly awkward for the recruits after some couples formed. A few Niqols started kissing and whispering sweet words before leaving the empty area and disappearing among the trees.

Veronica, Kelly, and Gabriela couldn't help but blush when they understood what was happening. They felt that they genuinely understood the Niqols' freedom during the party, and that mood slightly affected them.

Khan glanced at Azni kissing with Doku on a fallen trunk used as a bench. The girl eventually stood up and led him inside the forest without caring about leaving their human friends in that awkward situation.

A few Niqols approached Khan and exploded into happy laughs when they saw him looking straight in their eyes during the toasts. The fact that he respected their customs made him quite popular around the aliens that focused on drinking.

Some daring Niqols tried to flirt with Helen, Veronica, and Brandon, but the three humans only played along without ever considering something more than that. It didn't feel proper due to the political importance of their mission. Moreover, they thought that the aliens were moving too quickly for their standards.

The situation was enjoyable, even fun at times, but time moved quickly, and it soon became too late, especially for the recruits. George and the others searched for each other with their gazes once their phones revealed that it was already past two am, but they quickly discovered that Khan was nowhere to be seen.

Brandon and the others from his camp initially felt worried about his sudden disappearance, but George took care of reassuring them.

"He leaves often," George explained while leading the group back inside the forest, on a path that would bring them back to the academy. "Don't worry. He'll be at the lessons before us."

Chapter 136 - Compliments

Sneaking out of the party had been extremely easy, especially when everyone was busy flirting, drinking, or trying to enjoy themselves. Khan had simply been focused on leaving even before reaching that spot in the valley.

Snow arrived on the other side of the mountain a bit before two am, and Khan was already waiting for the creature in the first empty spots that he found. He didn't know much about the area outside the academy ground, but the Aduns could rely on the mental connection to pinpoint his exact location. The thick crowns of the trees even covered the sky, so those still in the party had no chance to notice its arrival.

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The Aduns needed less than three hours to reach the marsh from the academy, and that only if it didn't play around during the flight. Time wasn't on Khan's side that night, but the Niqols' customs managed to bring some relief to his packed schedule.

The Niqols were aware of their character. The professors and superiors knew that the students would spend their time enjoying themselves at night. Suppressing that nature to enforce a stricter discipline would go against the very disposition of their species, so they preferred to avoid planning the lessons and other events early in the morning.

The Niqols' relaxed approach to discipline gave Khan the chance to approach the long flight without risking being late for his first lesson. Of course, that depended on how long he spent with Liiza. He would have less than three hours with her even if Snow did everything perfectly.

Skiping an entire night of rest for mere three hours with his girlfriend sounded pretty unreasonable, especially since Khan wasn't even sure that Liiza would be in the marsh. Yet, the couple had already failed to meet the previous night. Khan also didn't ponder too much about the issue either. He had a chance to see Liiza, so he would take it, even if it consisted in mere minutes.

Khan would normally meditate while on Snow's back, but he didn't want to arrive at the lessons exhausted, so he decided to sleep while the Aduns took care of bringing him to the marsh. The noise of the thin waterfalls awakened him before the eagle could dive toward the muddy ground and drop him near the cliff's base.

The path toward the secluded cave felt easier to remember already. Khan could reach it in no time and remain under the three hours required by the travel. The clock on his phone had yet to hit five am when he saw the entrance of the cavity unfolding in his vision.

A pair of white lights lit up at the end of the cave when Khan crossed its entrance. All the Niqols had those captivating glowing eyes, but he felt able to see the tiny differences that made Liiza's gaze unique.

"Why did you even come?" Liiza's sleepy voice resounded in the darkness of the cave. "You have lessons soon."

"Five hours and a few minutes, to be precise," Khan commented while walking straight for the two glowing eyes.

Liiza's features slowly grew clearer as he approached her. She had wrapped herself in a blanket that appeared thicker than usual. The warm fabric was even covering part of her head and hiding her hair.

"That leaves us with a bit more than two hours," Liiza complained without moving her eyes away from Khan. "Why didn't you remain in the valley? Don't tell me that Ilman got to your head."

"I'm definitely not fine with Ilman," Khan snorted while sitting cross-legged in front of Liiza, who had just started to straighten her back. "George even set me up. I have to advise Ilman on girls-related matters now."

"How did you even end up in that situation?" Liiza tried to maintain a stern expression, but giggles inevitably escaped from her mouth when she placed her back on the rocky wall.

"I have no idea," Khan sighed. "What should I even tell him? I don't know why George thinks I'm good with girls."

Khan and Liiza were basically sitting in front of each other. Their legs were close enough to make them experience their partner's temperature, but they never touched.

"I can think of a few reasons," Liiza revealed while diverting her gaze.

"It's different with you," Khan replied. "Our mana messed up with our minds."

"Am I nothing more than an alien unable to control her urges for you?" Liiza scoffed as her smile vanished. "Do you think that I kissed you just because mana told me to do it?"

"You know that I didn't mean that," Khan quickly explained. "I'm saying that I didn't do anything special with you. I've just been myself."

Liiza's expression froze for a few seconds before she broke it to heave a helpless sigh. Khan felt unable to understand the reason behind that reaction, but he didn't have to wait too long to receive an explanation.

"You can be so stupid at times," Liiza remarked in an annoyed tone. "You work, fight, and train harder than everyone else, but you always fail to recognize your value."

Khan opened his mouth to speak, but Liiza promptly glared at him. She wouldn't let him say anything until her speech ended.

"Yes, mana made deciding to kiss you easier," Liiza admitted, "But I think we are way past that, right? Also, I didn't just jump on you because our mana is compatible. I remember telling you to climb a mountain first."

Khan couldn't help but reveal a smile at those words. He had already teased Liiza about their first meeting after learning that she had withheld many explanations about the Aduns back then. It turned out that part of her wanted to test his character, and the result of the climb confirmed that she liked him.

"Khan, it's not even just that," Liiza sighed again. "You looked for me even if your superiors told you to stop. I could sense your sorrow when we first met, but you still decided to risk everything over faint sensations. You also had to fight your feeling for your friend to pick me, and I know that you still feel bad about it."

Liiza seemed able to look right inside Khan's mind. Everything she said was true, and he couldn't help but feel warm when those words reached his ears. She had learnt so much about him, even if she was unaware of many details about his life. Her sensitivity to his feelings had simply taught her a lot.

"It wa-," Khan began to say to clarify Martha's issue again, but Liiza interrupted him with another glare.

"You are good-looking," Liiza continued with her descriptions of Khan's positive aspects. "You have no idea how attractive you are when you stop pretending, and I bet every girl would fantasize about you after seeing you shirtless. Trust me when I say that you only have to be yourself to make girls fall for you."

"You sure know how to improve my self-esteem," Khan commented before widening his eyes in fear of receiving another glare.

"I won't let you dismiss my words with a simple joke tonight," Liiza scolded while unwrapping the blanket and spreading her arms to reveal her usual white tracksuit. "I'll make sure that you understand them properly."

"I'm still angry at you for hiding Ilman for so long," Khan teased, but Liiza's serious expression made him lose any desire to laugh.

"That's fine," Liiza announced in a firm tone. "I also want to know more about your friend. Just come here first. I can't handle the cold as well as before."

Liiza's voice gained a timid tone toward the end of her line, and Khan's mind directly went blank as he bent toward her and sat between her legs. Liiza didn't hesitate to wrap the blanket around his chest and imprison him in a cold hug. Khan could feel her heart beating on his back due to how intense her embrace was.

"I missed you yesterday," Liiza whispered while digging her head on Khan's neck.

"Do you really feel cold without me?" Khan asked as some worry seeped into his voice.

"It's not actual cold," Liiza explained as her lips trembled on Khan's neck. "My body didn't change. It's just intense longing."

Khan couldn't help but remain astonished at how intense the Niqols' feelings were. Liiza's species had evolved to endure the Nitis' cold environment, but her longing for Khan made her cover herself in blankets that she didn't need. Her emotions could affect her body in ways that humans barely could explain, and Khan felt blessed to realize how deeply his girlfriend cared about him.

Liiza kissed the base of Khan's neck and played with the same spot for a while. She even bit at times to reveal her intentions, but he didn't stop her. His hand reached the back of her head to accompany her movements. He would let her leave a large mark that night.

"Ilman is harmless," Liiza whispered when she finished playing with his neck. "He proposes to me so often that I take it as routine. I didn't hide it on purpose. I just don't see him as relevant."

"It's fine," Khan sighed. "I'm just annoyed about our situation. He isn't hard to handle."

"Are you bragging about being a good liar?" Liiza asked while bending backward and making Khan lie on her.

Khan ended up resting on her chest, but the softness of her captivating curves didn't make him divert his attention by her intense gaze. Liiza had left his neck to look at him, and her expression seemed to carry a faint hesitation.

"Why do you want to hear about my friend?" Khan asked after understanding that Liiza's hesitation came from that topic.

"She made you hesitate to get with me," Liiza explained, "Even with mana messing up your mind. I want to know her, even if only through your words."

Liiza wanted to sound as if she were teasing Khan, but he understood that there was something else to the matter. He could even guess the meaning behind her doubts. They had been together for only a month, but their intense feelings were making their relationship incredibly important in their lives.

Liiza had already reached the point when her body suffered in Khan's absence, and he had always been willing to skip sleep or risk making his superior angry to see her. She was also the main pillar on which he had built his current happiness. They had already brought their relationship to the next level when it came to its physical aspect, but they had to do the same with their feelings now.

"Is it time to go over our whole lives?" Khan asked as a faint smile appeared on his face.

The couple had started describing parts of their lives during the past month, but they had never gone too deep about it, and they had never been too detailed either. However, it felt almost necessary to do that now, especially since their situation kept worsening due to their duties. A complete knowledge could help remove eventual doubts and pointless worries.

"I want to, but...." Liiza stated as her worry filled her voice, "But you travel even if you knew that our time together would have lasted only a few hours. Are you sure that you want to spend it talking?"

Khan arched his eyebrows in surprise, and a broad smile appeared on his face as he understood what Liiza meant. He turned in her embrace to face her and bring her on his lap. Liiza didn't oppose the process, and she soon ended up sitting on him, with legs wrapped around his waist and arms clung to his neck.

"How come you are becoming shyer as we learn more about each other?" Khan asked as his arms went around her waist.

"Feelings intensify," Liiza revealed while closing her eyes and enjoying the warmth spreading inside. "My body plays tricks on me, and it needs a few days to adapt to the new intensity. I'm lucky my boyfriend doesn't exploit my temporary weakness."

"I wonder what would have happened if we didn't have to hide our relationship," Khan wondered while ignoring Liiza tempting tease.

"Our situation is rarer than you think," Liiza smirked as the darkness of the cave hid her intense blush. "I've heard that two Niqols with compatible mana can decide to spend their lives together after a single week of relationship."

"Wow," Khan gasped. "We are done for then."

"We might be an exception due to the differences between our species," Liiza contradicted him.

"Do you want us to be an exception?" Khan asked, and they both opened their eyes to stare at each other at those words.

"Didn't you have to tell me about your life?" Liiza promptly switched the topic of the conversation.

"You first," Khan grinned. "This good boyfriend is too busy suppressing his urge to exploit your weakness to talk."

"You won't escape this," Liiza warned. "Don't even try to use our short time to your advantage and leave before your turn comes."

"I won't do that," Khan exclaimed as an honest smile appeared on his face. "I want you to know about me."

Khan's serious reaction made Liiza's expression freeze. She gulped and pushed him toward the ground before kissing him and lying on his chest. He took care of adjusting the blanket while she moved her fingers through the insides of his uniform. It took a few minutes, but she eventually started to speak, and his turn arrived almost thirty minutes later.

Chapter 137 - Return

Khan remained in a daze even after Snow dropped him near the same mountain where he had departed eight hours ago. It was still ten am. He had an entire hour to return to the academy and attend his first lesson with a Niqols professor.

He would normally look forward to the lesson. He would have the chance to learn a completely different approach to mana, something humans wholly ignored out of arrogance and confidence in their methods.

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Khan didn't feel able to underestimate those subjects after witnessing how intense and accurate they could be. He had seen Liiza's body suffering after she failed to experience his warmth for a single night, and she even continued to understand his feelings with mere glances or touches.

In his opinion, the Niqols' way had immense potential, but the conversation experienced in the past hours made him unable to focus on the imminent lessons. Khan knew that he should feel excited, but he could only think about the words he had exchanged with his girlfriend.

Sex had brought them closer, but that was a mere physical connection. The Niqols experienced it on many levels that could even be completely emotional, but it still couldn't compare to what they had gone through that night.

Liiza and Khan had spent their two hours describing their whole lives without hiding anything. They both knew that normal couples wouldn't go over those topics so soon in their relationship. Some would even completely ignore them and leave them in the past. Yet, they had felt the need to grow closer, so they spoke without putting any filter to their words.

Khan went through jealousy, annoyance, anger, and pain as he heard Liiza's story. She had always been a rebellious kid, and her boyfriends had been a simple expression of her nature. She didn't like to have a privileged status, so she had always picked Niqols that would make her mother angry.

Her father's story turned out to be rather sad. Liiza had always been close to him since they shared the same unruly character, but Yeza had eventually led to their separation.

Deni, Liiza's father, truly loved Yeza. He was one of the few men on Nitis who could look past her striking beauty and appreciate her for her dedication toward the Niqols' species. Yeza also loved him for that, but their different priorities eventually led to harsh fights.

Yeza was an ambassador, and her beauty could become a weapon that she didn't hesitate to use for the greater good of her species. She had also ended up cheating on Deni to get her hands on important information.

Her dedication made her become a hero for her species, but it only worsened Deni's situation. He felt forced to leave to maintain his sanity, and he even ended up cutting ties with his daughter due to the intensity of his feeling. Thinking about his family simply made him suffer too much.

Liiza put all the blame on her mother. Her rebellious character even worsened after that event, which led her to refuse a good partner like Ilman just because Yeza had picked him.

Liiza spent the years after that event mostly in solitude. Her peers ignored her, Zalpa and Deni had left, and her relationship with her mother was so bad that she struggled to remain inside her home. She still helped with specific social events or tasks because she cared about her species, but the rest of her time belonged to her Aduns and Nitis' wild regions. Her life didn't have anything else.

Khan had been a surprise in her life. When Liiza thought about it, it made sense that only someone belonging to a different species could awaken her feelings. He even met all her requirements and had the mana on his side. It almost felt like a fated encounter in her mind.

In theory, the Niqols wouldn't mind if a member of their species were to end with a human. They might even push that relationship toward an official union. However, the situation would be different with Liiza due to her peculiar social status and her famous character.

Yeza would oppose the union with a nobody like Khan, and the other higher-ups would even question Liiza's loyalty since her record wasn't great. She might decide to reveal classified information to the humans due to her grudge, and her status as a Niqols made her easier to exploit when love was involved.

Liiza had also learnt everything about Khan's life. His story went from the Second Impact, lingered on Istrone, and reached his current state on Nitis without hiding the ugly parts that had filled his tragic moments. She could finally understand the depths of Khan's sorrow at that point, especially when it came to Bret's probable involvement in events that he struggled to imagine.

The reasons behind their compatibility became clear after they shared their stories. They both had lost a lot during their lives. Their pain had created a wall between them and their peers. Liiza had become an outcast, while Khan had developed exceptional lying skills to hide among normal kids. The intensity of their suffering was clearly different, but their character had advanced on similar paths as they dealt with those feelings.

Needless to say, Khan and Liiza had to fight against their very nature to separate after that long conversation. They would have done everything in their power to remain all day in each other's embrace, but they had duties to attend, especially Khan. He would have surely missed his morning lessons if Liiza didn't kick him out of the cave and sent him back to the academy earlier than planned.

Liiza's decisiveness was the very reason why Khan had an entire hour at his disposal to return to at the center of the valley. Still, he knew that her actions carried deeper meanings. She didn't want Khan to ruin his record because of her, and she also wanted to remain alone.

That desire didn't come from her feelings. Liiza wanted to do her best to absorb what she had learnt that night and let her emotions stabilize. She was aware that her condition could lead to bad decisions that might worsen Khan's situation. She didn't want their relationship to pick up speed again until she was in complete control of herself, and only some time on her own could bring that clarity.

Khan understood that, and he even agreed with her silent decision. His mind was too into her after the night spent with her. He had to calm down and focus on his training to make sure that his relationship didn't hurt another important aspect of his life.

It didn't take Khan much to return to the location where the party had unfolded. He even found cups lying around and the cauldron still half-full when he reached that empty spot.

The area appeared empty, but the path back to the academy felt quite clear even if the ground didn't carry any footprint or similar traces of the passage of the students. It seemed that part of the defenses in the valley took care of those issues, but Khan didn't need external factors to find his way back inside the membrane.

Still, a familiar figure appeared in his view right after he crossed the empty spot. Khan found Doku sleeping naked on the ground with only the upper part of his clothes covering his manhood.

"[Wake up]," Khan laughed while lightly kicking his foot.

Doku frowned due to the sudden awakening, and a few words that Khan couldn't translate even came out of his mouth. Then, the alien gave voice to a loud groan when he opened his eyes and noticed Khan standing above him.

Doku tried to speak in the Niqols' language again, but Khan quickly interrupted him. "Don't go so fast. I'm not good at it yet."

"You are good enough to interrupt my beauty sleep," Doku complained while lifting an arm toward Khan. "Help me stand."

Khan smirked and grabbed his wrist before pulling Doku to his feet. The Niqols didn't like that sudden change in his position, and he supported himself on Khan's shoulder while his mind found some balance. He swayed back and forth a few times before he felt stable enough to leave his companion.

"I knew that you were a player," Doku commented while revealing a knowing smile when he noticed the hickey at the base of Khan's neck.

Khan had made sure that his uniform covered the hickey, but Doku had pulled it down enough to reveal it while he found his balance. Still, the Niqols didn't even come close to connecting that mark to Liiza.

"You definitely did better than me," Khan smirked while pointing at his naked lower half.

Doku suddenly realized that the clothes that covered his manhood were now on the ground. His naked body was completely in the open, and he couldn't help but exchange an awkward glance with Khan before bending to pick the garment.

"I swear it doesn't usually end like this," Doku justified himself while tying the clothes around his waist and covering himself.

"Let's both avoid spreading the news then," Khan suggested while hiding his hickey.

"You humans are strange," Doku scoffed. "I've read about your decency. I didn't think it was true."

"They need a good Niqols to show them the way," Khan teased while patting Doku's shoulder and resuming his walk through the forest.

"Don't even joke about that," Doku pleaded while following Khan. "Azni will literally cut it if she feels that I'm cheating on her. If you end up with a Niqols, don't make her angry. I'm telling you this for your own safety."

Khan couldn't help but think at the threat that Liiza had voiced before they had their first time. The image of the bull inevitably appeared in his mind, and he also imagined himself in the monster's position.

"Are they all like that?" Khan asked.

"They go crazy as soon as they start feeling something," Doku revealed. "Well, it's the same with the men of my species, but most of us have more self-control."

"Our species are so different," Khan commented.

"That's the beauty of the universe, I guess," Doku groaned as his hangover sent a wave of pain through his mind.

"Is that the self-control you were talking about?" Khan laughed while turning toward his companion.

"Azni likes to make me drink," Doku complained. "She says that I'm too stiff when we are together, but I can't do much about it. I'm in the second year, and I already command troops. She is still in the first year, and in my team even. I need to create a wall between us."

"You almost sounded human there," Khan continued to mock him.

"Shut up," Doku cursed. "It's really annoying because she doesn't get it."

"I mean, you are a Niqols," Khan responded. "Just do what you feel like. What's the point of going against your nature?"

"That's not a bad idea," Doku honestly exclaimed.

The duo walked quickly across the forest and reached the membrane in no time. However, Doku didn't cross it with Khan. He said goodbye to his friend and decided to enter through a more isolated part of the academy.

Khan entered directly and approached the central empty area that featured multiple squares demarked by glowing azure symbols. The clock on his phone had yet to reach eleven am, so the academy appeared mostly empty. The first lessons would still require half an hour to start.

Khan limited himself to meditate to make that time pass quickly. The envoys from yesterday had only told him to wait there to attend the lessons, so he didn't bother to pay too much attention to his surroundings.

Familiar voices eventually resounded near Khan and awakened him from his short meditation. He could see George and the other recruits when he opened his eyes. They appeared relaxed and well-rested.

"I told you that he would have been here before us," George exclaimed as a faint laugh escaped his mouth.

"Where did you disappear yesterday?" Brandon asked. "It's not wise to separate since our phones don't work here."

"I'll be fine," Khan smiled. "I only like to have my space."

"I have to agree with Brandon here," Kelly added. "Your actions reflect on us and the entire human species. Nitis is dangerous, and the slightest delay to a lesson might worsen our relationship with the Niqols."

Khan didn't have words to express how little the Niqols would care if one of their students were to skip a lesson. Still, he would need to disappear almost every night to attend his secret relationship, so it was better to take care of that topic once and for all.

"I was the first to ride an Aduns," Khan announced. "I dealt the final blow to the monster that has killed Glenn Padlyn, and I've already joined hunts where I was the only human among Niqols. Do my actions really worry you?"

Kelly couldn't say anything in front of that sharp response. Khan's sudden serious answer even left the rest of the group speechless. He would often crack a joke to dismiss the matter, but he had actually defended his right to do what he wanted now.

An awkward atmosphere spread among the recruits. They couldn't force Khan to respect their desires, and his actions had only benefited the Global Army until then. However, their concerns made sense, especially since they were now in the middle of the alien territory.

A Niqols wearing a white robe saved the group from arguing any further. The recruits turned to see that Professor Supyan approached the humans before stopping and moving his eyes between Khan and George.

"You two," Professor Supyan ordered. "With me."

Professor Supyan's seriousness made the other recruits unable to say anything. They remained speechless as they watched Khan and George approaching the Niqols and following him into the distance.

"You two are ready to take lives," Professor Supyan announced after leaving the empty area and leading the two recruits across a faint path inside the forest. "That might lead you to a dark path that will never stop requiring blood."

Professor Supyan eventually reached the entrance of an underground area and descended its staircase to lead the two recruits into a strange room covered in roots.

The underground hall didn't have walls, ceilings, or floors. It seemed that the roots had naturally created that space and the Niqols had simply added a few glowing runes to illuminate the area. However, it was clear that something so precise couldn't be a natural occurrence. The aliens probably had tinkered with the direction of the roots for a long time so that they could give birth to a neat rectangular room.

"Your mana inherits features from your character," Professor Supyan explained. "It evolves with you as you grow up. That shows its innate potential to gain different forms."

Professor Supyan raised his palm and gathered mana over it. An azure membrane that radiated a peaceful feeling spread through the underground room before he placed his hand on the wall and released the accumulated energy.

The roots that made the wall shook, and a spiderweb of cracks even appeared when the Niqols pulled his hand back. However, a second wave of power suddenly gathered on his palm and spread a suffocating feeling in the air.

Khan and George felt certain that Professor Supyan had gathered the same amount of energy as before, but the second batch appeared far more dangerous.

Professor Supyan didn't hesitate to place his hand on the roots again, right next to the first cracked spot, before releasing the accumulated energy. A series of fissures opened on the wall and stretched past his hand at that point. It was impossible to miss that the second attack had almost been two times more effective.

"Mind you," Professor Supyan explained while turning toward the two speechless recruits. "I didn't use different techniques, and I didn't vary the amount of mana deployed. I've only altered the features of my mana and enhanced its destructiveness."

Chapter 138 - Manipulation

Professor Supyan's demonstration left the two recruits speechless, especially George, since his knowledge about mana was vaster due to his excellent background.

Humans paid attention to the mana's nature, but only when it came to its element. They didn't bother to go deeper in its study or understanding and treated it as a simple fuel for martial arts and spells. However, the Niqols had a completely different approach which shown clear benefits.

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'How are humans unaware of this?' Khan wondered without daring to speak those words out loud.

Khan didn't know how much the Niqols knew about humans. His words could have political repercussions or reveal classified information, but everything felt pointless when he noticed George's astonished expression. Anyone would understand how surprising that lesson was when looking at his face.

"Don't worry," Professor Supyan reassured when noticing Khan's cold expression. "Both humans and Niqols know about these differences between our species. You will simply be the first to receive proper lessons from us."

Professor Supyan could be lying to exploit the recruits' naivety to learn more about the humans, but Khan felt too curious to hold back. Moreover, George had already revealed the nature of his doubts, so he found no problem voicing them.

"Why don't humans teach this?" Khan asked while his eyes darted between the two damaged spots. "We should be able to replicate these applications of mana even without knowing your methods."

"That's for sure," Professor Supyan replied in his usual plain tone. "Very little is out of your range with your technological achievements."

"Then why no one teaches this?" Khan continued.

"I can think of multiple reasons," Professor Supyan revealed. "First of all, I believe you can learn about this branch. You humans always record everything."

Khan and George exchanged a glance and nodded internally. There was a high chance that some specific branches of the Global Army had a catalog with all the different applications to mana learnt from alien species.

"As for why humans decide not to teach this," Professor Supyan continued, "I believe they think that its benefits don't match its difficulty."

That answer didn't satisfy the two recruits. They had just seen how a simple discharge of mana became two times more destructive with a simple thought. It didn't matter how difficult that ability was. It should still be available to the soldiers due to its incredible potential.

"I think you are underestimating the difficulty of this task," Professor Supyan exclaimed after inspecting how the recruits reacted to his words.

The Niqols showed his hand to the two boys. A lump of azure mana seeped out of his skin and gathered on his palm to form a rotating sphere of energy.

The amount of control over mana shown by that simple gesture left the two recruits speechless. They would struggle to do something similar outside their bodies. Even Khan didn't know if he could force so much energy to work together in such a seamless and precise way.

Controlling mana once it came out of his body was incredibly hard, which was the very reason behind the Divine Reaper's difficulty. Khan would have already succeeded in creating a stable membrane around his null-grade blunt knife otherwise.

"This is simple manipulation," Professor Supyan explained as the small sphere in his palm started morphing. "This mana shares a connection with me, so I can control it to take different shapes. However, the previous ability has to go beyond forms."

The mana inside the sphere slowly started to move oddly, but Professor Supyan didn't seem to control those small movements. It was as if the nature of the energy had changed and had started to affect that small structure.

The azure energy grew unstable at times, and the sphere shook while tiny flares tried to escape its edges. Everything turned incredibly calm right afterward, and the glowing ball even condensed due to the stability achieved by the mana in the Niqols' palm.

Professor Supyan appeared able to change the mana's nature at will. He could turn it into energy ready to explode or a dense gas that almost gained liquid features. He could even make those two behaviors coexist to highlight the stark differences that they carried.

Everything felt obvious now. The subject actually was so simple that even a child could understand it. Turning the mana unstable would increase its destructiveness, while stabilizing it would make it gain denser forms.

The ability didn't need other explanations, but Khan and George couldn't understand how to replicate that process. The Divine Reaper actually featured a similar requirement, but it was extremely specific, and Khan had yet to study that lesson properly.

"There obviously are other issues caused by our different techniques," Professor Supyan announced. "Humans rely on techniques that use specific movements to make the mana express the intended effects. The Niqols approach the matter differently, changing the nature of the mana depending on the ability that we want to use."

George frowned, and Khan diverted his eyes. They both tried to review those words in their minds, and a conclusion soon grew near, but Professor Supyan decided to explain himself better out of fear that his students could misunderstand his teachings.

"Imagine to throw a punch," Professor Supyan explained. "Humans would move mana alongside the attack to augment the movement and discharge it once the attack ends."

The Niqols was oversimplifying the issue, but the two recruits didn't hesitate to nod. Their techniques required mana to flow in different directions at the same time to express the intended effects, but the theory behind those moves matched Professor Supyan's explanation.

"Instead, Niqols transform the mana before throwing the punch," Professor Supyan continued. "We alter its nature before the actual move. A simple touch can transform into a punch since that's what we prepared our mana to do."

The example made the theory behind the Niqols' different approaches to techniques far easier to understand. It even made Khan and George realize the benefits that their methods could bring to their power. Removing the need to perform specific moves to perform an attack sounded too good to be true.

"If I were to prepare my mana for a kick with the Niqols' method," Khan wondered, "But then use that energy during a punch, would the attack still carry the effects of the intended technique?"

"Of course," Professor Supyan affirmed. "The power and effects of your techniques mostly come from mana, so speed, strength, and precision will change depending on the nature carried by that energy."

"Won't that cause conflicts?" Khan guessed. "After all, a punch is a punch, and a kick is a kick. There is a reason why we use different limbs to execute them. They have clear physical limitations."

Professor Supyan's face showed a rare reaction. His eyebrows arched in surprise when he heard Khan detailed doubt. George experienced a similar emotion since he didn't expect his friend's understanding of martial arts to be so deep.

Khan didn't consider himself an expert in martial arts, but he had relied extensively on the training areas on Onia and Earth. He had done his best to face different styles to improve his overall battle experience, so the flaws with the Niqols' methods felt quite obvious.

The Lightning-demon style also made Khan aware of how the physical limits could affect a technique. He could already hurt himself during his attacks, so he could guess that the Niqols' method would carry similar flaws.

"Your doubts are sound," Professor Supyan stated. "You will see weaker effects if your moves don't match the nature of your mana. You can even hurt yourself if you aren't careful. Yet, what do you think will happen if you fuse the human and Niqols' methods?"

George's eyes widened in understanding, but Khan maintained his natural cold expression. The answer was obvious. Mastering the Niqols' methods would significantly shorten the preparations required by martial arts and spells, and it might even lead to stronger effects if used correctly.

"Why are you teaching us this?" Khan asked.

Khan's question could mean two things. It could refer to the obvious danger of teaching potential enemies techniques that could make them far stronger than their peers from both species. Still, it could also wonder about the reason behind that private lesson while the other recruits were with other professors.

"[The Pure Tress] has its pride to follow," Professor Supyan announced. "Holding back its teachings out of fear toward your different species would be a permanent spot in its history."

The firm exclamation didn't match the Professor's aloof appearance, but it became clear that he valued his position inside the academy and the fame that accompanied it. George and Khan couldn't help but respect the Niqols after understanding how easily he could disregard the differences between their species.

"You also have deep problems," Professor Supyan continued. "I won't dare to guess what has happened in your lives, but your mana is on a dangerous path. I fear what can cause in your character once its weight starts to affect your behavior."

George struggled to understand that part, but Khan had accepted how his energy could sway his thoughts and affect his behavior. He wouldn't even be with Liiza if his mana didn't convince him to move on toward what it felt could make him happy.

"Blood is covering your blade," Professor Supyan declared while pointing at George. "It might submerge you, dull your edge, or become a core part of your character. You need to gain control of your mana to decide where you want your mind to evolve."

Professor Supyan's expression darkened when he turned toward Khan. He even seemed to hesitate to point at him, but simple words eventually escaped his mouth. "You are cursed."

Khan didn't react at all to that statement. Instead, his eyes went on George. The boy had lowered his head and was staring at the roots that made the floor. The Niqols' words had reminded him of the mess constantly happening inside his mind.

"I'm willing to create additional lessons due to your special situation," Professor Supyan explained. "The other humans can attend them too, but my focus would remain on you two since you need it

the most. I can't promise that my teachings will improve your condition. You will only learn to control the nature of your mana. What to do with that ability is up to you."

Khan couldn't help but curse in his mind. He appreciated Professor Supyan's concern. Such seriousness in his role was almost moving. However, Khan inevitably thought at his shrinking free time, especially since he knew that refusing those additional lessons wasn't an option.

Khan didn't feel too scared about the effects that his mana could have on his psyche. His focus was on the evident benefits that mastering the Niqols' method could provide.

Learning how to control the nature of the mana wouldn't only allow him to reach levels that the simple human path couldn't touch. It would also benefit his future martial arts and spells since he would have the chance to approach them from multiple angles. For example, the Divine Reaper wouldn't appear so hard if he already knew how to create a membrane of energy and give it sharp features.

Of course, Khan didn't delude himself. The Niqols had mana since birth, and they spent years studying its nature before approaching actual techniques, but Professor Supyan considered the matter difficult nonetheless.

It was unclear how hard it would be for a human to reach satisfying levels of mastery over that ability. Khan even guessed that Professor Supyan's lack of worry came from that exact reason.

The Niqols seemed to have good intentions, but the Professor was probably only tempting the recruits with his speech about the superior power achievable after fusing the methods of both species. He didn't really believe that Khan and the others could reach high levels of control over mana since they lacked years of training in that field.

The cynical mindset developed in the Slums made Khan see how a complete openness between humans and Niqols would clearly benefit the latter.

The techniques of the Global Army were far easier to deploy, so the aliens would achieve a perfect fusion between the methods of both species faster. Instead, the humans had already indirectly refused the Niqols' approach. They preferred to limit the manipulation of the mana's nature to specific techniques rather than gain a general mastery over that field.

"Can it really help?" George suddenly asked in a timid voice as his hopeful gaze landed on the Niqols.

"Only if you want it to help," Professor Supyan nodded, and his stern expression almost broke in front of George's evident sorrow.

Khan's expression darkened when he saw George in that state again. The boy was usually cheerful, but the traumas hidden inside his mind felt overwhelming to witness whenever they escaped his suppression.

"We have to seize this chance, right?" George asked while turning toward Khan.

The boy was clearly excited about that opportunity, but he still looked for Khan's support. George still considered him as the figure in charge of such important decisions.

"Of course," Khan stated while showing an honest smile. "We can't ignore [Guru]'s kindness."

The private meeting ended after a few polite exchanges of words and bows. George's excitement almost made him unable to stop thanking Professor Supyan. Khan soon had to drag him out of that underground hall to return to the empty spot where their companions were attending another lesson.

The female Niqols in charge of that lesson didn't bother introducing herself since she preferred putting Khan and George to work right away. Her subject involved the sensitivity to mana, and the duo could finally experience the teaching methods of the alien species after following her instructions.

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The professor had made their companions sit cross-legged on the ground around her. Their position matched spots with azure symbols meant to expand the range of their senses and intensify the influence that mana could have on their perception. Khan and George experienced those effects when they took their position on empty glowing marks, and gasps inevitably escaped from their mouths.

Khan wasn't a stranger to those sensations. He had felt something similar on the teleports and the Niqols' elevators, but the experience was far more intense while he sat on the azure symbol. His mind expanded past the circle and went beyond the usual range of his senses. Khan also noticed many details that his normal sensitivity to mana had never allowed him to see.

The purpose of the lesson was to make their minds used to that state. It was conditioning meant to improve their base sensitivity to mana, like a meditation focused only on their senses. It felt relaxing to experience such a tight connection to the world. The recruits even remained in a daze after the professor deactivated the symbols and interrupted their training.

The recruits had been in that state for only three hours, and it felt strange to return to reality and experience the limits of their senses again. The change was easier to endure for Khan, but his companions ended up feeling off for a few minutes while their minds readapted to their normal sensitivity.

Lunch happened inside an underground structure that harvested nutrient roots and the usual worms that even the human camp served. The Niqols didn't actually eat there since the forest offered a far nicer environment. Khan's group also went outside, and they ended up meeting with Azni and some aliens met the previous night in an isolated spot that gave them some privacy.

The atmosphere was quite relaxed during lunch. Khan and the others exchanged jokes, learnt gossips, and threw questions at each other to deepen their relationship. Those conversations mostly involved the events of the parties, but some topics explained aspects of the academy and the lessons that the recruits still ignored.

It turned out that the Niqols' academies only had two years. They divided their students depending on their achievements in the three major branches connected to mana which involved sensitivity, control, and manipulation.

Meeting the standards set by the Niqols when it came to sensitivity and control was enough to gain access to the second year. Manipulation was already an advanced skill, and the aliens required a certain mastery over it to approach more specialized courses.

A decent mastery over the manipulation of mana wasn't necessary to graduate. It turned out that even the Niqols found it hard to alter the nature of mana past certain levels. [The Pure Trees] only

had a handful of geniuses in that field, and Liiza was one of them. Her ice came from one of the specialized courses of the academy.

The students were mostly free to decide their own future after graduating. Many of them usually became active parts of their tribes while others continued to pursue their studies to enter or expand specialized courses.

Money didn't seem to be an issue in that society, and it started to matter only when it came in significant quantities. Apparently, the elders were quite generous with the distribution of wealth when it concerned projects that could benefit the Niqols species as a whole.

Azni revealed how Khan and the other recruits wouldn't even gain access to the first year during normal times. It wasn't a matter of weakness or battle prowess. They simply didn't have any foundation when it came to the Niqols' methods.

The issue concerned the different approaches to mana of the two species. The human martial arts might require the recruits to express a level of control that only Niqols in the second year wielded, but that ability would apply on a single technique or move. Instead, the aliens had it as a general requirement for each process that involved mana.

That explained why their lessons didn't involve any specific topic. Their schedule was more packed than the Niqols in the first year because they had to go over basics that the aliens had mastered even before approaching the academy. Yet, they still involved the three major fields.

The recruits had gone through the lesson involving the sensitivity to mana in the morning. The afternoon would feature two more classes that would try to teach them the fundamentals of control and manipulation of mana.

An old male Niqols called Professor Kunta handled the control lesson. The alien was quite odd compared to the other members of his species. He was short and slightly fat. A long white beard even grew from his chin, but the light radiated by his white eyes appeared more intense than usual.

The recruits felt quite confident when they approached the lesson since the human methods had forced them to control the mana inside their bodies in ways that the Niqols ignored. However, the nature of the class shattered their hopes.

The lesson happened in one of the underground areas that had roots coming out of the ceiling. The external interference was at the lowest in that room, so Professor Kunta could inspect every mistake that the recruits committed during their assignment.

In theory, the Professor's assignment was quite simple. He wanted the recruits to move mana above their skin. His request almost sounded like a game, but the Niqols took it very seriously. The other students in the first year would be able to move a nail-sized mass of mana over their figures for an entire hour, but the humans could barely keep their energy stable for ten minutes.

Professor Kunta was severe and never let them rest. He forced the recruits to restart the exercise whenever he saw ripples appearing on their mana. The process was mentally exhausting, and only Khan, George, Helen, and Rodney showed some improvements after each attempt.

The lesson lasted almost three hours, and the recruits' mood worsened when they approached the manipulation class. An old female Niqols called Professor Zakhira was in charge of that course, and her methods were even more severe than Professor Kunta.

Professor Zakhira supported herself on a cane while she inspected the eight recruits sitting in a circle in a structure that completely isolated them from the outside world. Her hunched back bent even further when she stared at the white crystals that each human held in their hands. Those minerals changed color whenever mana ran through them, but they never showed shades different from the iconic azure of that energy.

"Pour feelings!"

"Use your minds!"

"The mana is alive!"

Professor Zakhira shouted those same three lines while tapping her cane on the smooth floor of the short structure. She appeared on the verge of hitting the recruits since they continued to fail with the task even after they spent hours trying to fill the crystals with different shades.

Luckily for them, the Professor held back from adding physical punishments to her lesson. Yet, recruits couldn't feel happy about the overall class since the Niqols never explained how to generate different shades. She had basically handed them the crystals, given them the task, and started tapping on the floor while repeating her three lines.

The lesson ended after three hours, finally putting an end to that long day. The recruits' clocks warned them that the afternoon had long since passed, but none of them felt hungry.

Sharp headaches had ended up afflicting their minds after spending nine hours listening to the three professors. The recruits only wanted to meditate and sleep to make that day end.

"Why would you even want to do more of this bullshit?" Brandon shouted after George explained Professor Supyan's offer.

The recruits had turned to their room. They were alternating themselves to take showers, but they didn't fail to speak about their second day in the academy during those moments.

"I understand improving the sensitivity to mana," Brandon continued, "But why would I even need to learn to move mana over my skin? Who cares? I'll just learn to perform specific movements if my next martial art asks me to use mana outside my body. I don't see the point of mastering this ability."

"It would improve your future training," Gabriela uttered, even if doubts filled her voice.

"How many martial arts and spells can we even learn in one life?" Brandon asked in a frustrated tone. "I'm not surprised the Global Army doesn't bother to teach this stuff. We have the chance to skip the intermediate steps and approach the techniques directly instead of spending years building a foundation that we'll never have the chance to exploit to its fullest."

"He is right," Helen commented while she adjusted her clean white robe and created a sensual spectacle that the boys in the room struggled to ignore. "Our control gets better after each technique that we master anyway. It's pointless to spend years creating a foundation when we can do specific exercises for our styles."

"I think the sensitivity and control lessons can have benefits," Rodney commented while lying on his bed. "The problem is Professor Zakhira. She didn't explain how we should change the color of those damned crystals."

"That's why we should attend Professor Supyan's additional lesson!" George repeated.

"I'm sorry, George," Veronica sighed. "I don't know if any of us will decide to spend three more hours of our days for something like that."

"You two even put us in a bad situation," Kelly scolded while moving her eyes between George and Khan. "You shouldn't have accepted the offer without considering us. We have to justify our decision not to attend the additional lesson to our superiors now."

"Well," Rodney cleared his throat, "They don't need to know."

"I won't keep secrets from the army after getting this chance," Brandon snorted. "I don't think they'll blame us anyway. We still have to prioritize real training over this useless stuff."

"Khan?" George asked when he saw that the recruits had no intention to support him on the matter.

Khan closed his locker before tying the null-grade blunt knife to the belt of his uniform. He couldn't hide his new martial art with that lack of privacy, so he opted to reveal a few clues without lingering in detailed explanations.

"I don't see the point with this discussion," Khan honestly explained while crossing the room and picking a white robe of his size. "We are here on a political mission, but we still have different goals inside the Global Army. Just do what you feel like."

"Where are you going?" Kelly asked when she saw Khan approaching the staircase that led to the surface.

The group didn't meet Doku that day, and Azni had confirmed the absence of parties. Khan could still decide to leave the habitation to train in a private spot in the forest, but Kelly found it strange that he was bringing clean clothes with him.

"Outside," Khan explained while stopping his track and turning toward the recruits. "I'll take Snow out for a flight."

"Do you care about this political mission at all?" Kelly blurted. "You have already spent an entire night outside, and you want to add a second right after accepting more workload in our name. I'm not going to cover for you if you start missing lessons."

Khan shrugged his shoulders before turning toward the stairs again. He had already expressed his position to Kelly. It wasn't his fault if she continued to be angry about that.

"What about tomorrow?" George asked as his voice almost faded toward the end of his question.

"Room full of roots, eight am," Khan said without bothering to turn.

George showed a broad smile after Khan confirmed that he would attend the additional lesson. The recruits could only wear ugly expressions when the boy turned to look at them and the faint steps coming from the staircase stopped resounding in the room. That was only their second day in the academy, but some factions had already formed among their group.

Khan walked toward the mountain in the same direction as the marsh. The trip forced him to pass through the empty central area of the academy, and a lonely figure appeared on his path right before he could enter the other side of the forest.

"It's you," Ilman exclaimed in a sad tone when he noticed Khan.

The Niqols was sitting on the ground, with his back on one of the white trunks. The glow of the large leaves above him illuminated his figure and made his sad expression even more evident.

"Bad day?" Khan asked as a curse resounded inside his mind.

"Usual day," Ilman grunted while forcing himself to stand up and make his face regain his usual determination, "But love isn't only happiness. I know this struggle will lead to better times."

Khan showed a fake smile before performing a polite bow and going back on his way. However, a second curse resounded in his mind when Ilman spoke to him again.

"You are good with women, right?" Ilman asked. "Can you tell me your secret?"

Khan turned to look at Ilman. The Niqols appeared really honest about his feelings and request for help. The alien was trying to date his girlfriend, but even Liiza had confirmed that his character was far from bad. Actually, Ilman had been one of the few Niqols who had never blamed her for her decision to break the engagement.

'Maybe it's better if I keep him close,' Khan concluded in his mind even if he hated that option.

"I don't have a secret," Khan revealed while thinking about Liiza's words from the previous night. "That's my secret."

Ilman frowned before his eyes lit up in understanding. The Niqols performed an honest bow before hurrying somewhere in Khan's opposite direction.

'I should keep Liiza updated about what I say to him,' Khan sighed in his mind before continuing on his way.

It was still relatively early, but his days had shortened. Khan had to hurry to fit everything in his packed schedule. Still, he knew that sleep wouldn't come for him that night.

Chapter 140 - Threats

The first week inside [The Pure Trees] tested Khan's physical and mental limits. Attending lessons that heavily focused on his mind for twelve hours a day, fusing them with his regular training, and leaving some time for Liiza forced him to sacrifice his sleep often. He even had to forsake his naps on Snow's back to fit his mental exercises and meditations at times.

The problem wasn't with Khan's ability to manage his time. He simply had too much to do, or, rather, he didn't want to forsake any aspect of his life.

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His companions didn't have it as bad as Khan. Only George and Veronica attended Professor Supyan's additional lessons, but the girl decided to stop going after only two days. Instead, the other recruits didn't even bother to try them, no matter how much George praised them.

Khan often supported George's claims. Professor Supyan was far better than Professor Zakhira at explaining the manipulation field. It turned out that the subject heavily depended on the user's emotions, so Khan and George spent entire mornings practicing their control over those feelings.

The additional lessons even showed small results by the last class of the week, when Khan managed to make his crystal glow with a dark-azure shade. Professor Zakhira didn't bother to compliment him for that small achievement, but everyone noticed that her cane didn't hit the floor violently anymore after that event.

The Niqols' easygoing approach didn't reflect on the distribution of lessons throughout the weeks. Both humans and aliens had classes for five days in a row, and the matter changed only for the students in the second year, especially those who already had access to the special classes.

It turned out that Liiza could ignore the academy for entire weeks as long as she kept the professors updated on her field. Her freedom made her decide to spend most of her time outside or in the marsh since she had no reason to be inside [The Pure Trees].

Her presence when the humans arrived wasn't casual either. Liiza had decided to remain a bit longer inside the academy to watch her boyfriend. Otherwise, she would avoid remaining in those areas because Ilman never lost the chance to propose to her.

Liiza confirmed that Khan's advice didn't cause any change in Ilman's behavior, but their talks rarely focused on the Niqols. She saw how Khan's condition worsened as the days passed and he failed to rest properly. Yet, she held back from exploding until her boyfriend was done with the weekly lessons.

"No sex until you accumulate four hours of sleep," Liiza announced as soon as Khan sat next to her and placed his back on the cold, wet walls of their cave.

Khan's tough week had finally awarded him with free time. He had completed the last lesson of the fifth day just a few hours ago, and he had even stayed in Doku's party for some time to keep up appearances. He could finally spend an entire night with Liiza without worrying about his duties, but she had surprised him with those words before they could even hug.

"What do you mean?" Khan complained. "I'm as fine as ever."

His appearance didn't agree with his words. Khan had large dark eyebags, his complexion had paled due to the relentless training, and his bloodshot eyes expressed how much effort he put in the Niqols' lessons and mental exercises.

His responses were even vague at times. Khan lost himself in his tiredness at times, but that was understandable when considering his condition. He had basically stopped sleeping. Even his naps had become a rare occurrence.

"You have been in the academy for five days," Liiza stated. "How much did you sleep during that time?"

Khan opened his mouth to complain again, but Liiza's angry glare forced him to think about the matter seriously. The situation didn't look too good when he played the previous four nights in his mind. He found it hard to recall his last nap.

"Five hours?" Khan honestly guessed. "Maybe six. I remember that I fell asleep with you once."

"For a few seconds!" Liiza angrily remarked. "That's it. I've studied your limits in the month that we have been together. Your resilience is incredible, but that's not a good reason to make use of it. You must accumulate four hours of sleep every two days, or my legs will remain sealed!"

"Wait," Khan growled. "What about your feelings? I thought you still had a hard time controlling yourself. Also, we didn't get the chance to celebrate our month together...."

Khan's tease made Liiza blush, especially since he wrapped an arm around her waist and brought her in his embrace. Liiza sat on his lap and let him hug her, but she didn't leave her blanket for even a second.

"You are four hours short," Liiza snorted. "You shouldn't worry about my self-restraint either. I have always been quite popular, and Ilman has become strangely attractive lately. Maybe your advice really helped him."

A tremor ran through Khan's body, and his body tensed up while he brought Liiza closer to his chest. The girl didn't turn at all, so he failed to check how serious she was about the matter.

"Liiza?" Khan called her in a worried voice. "You are joking, right? Please, don't use Ilman to scare me."

Khan pulled Liiza closer and even lightly tugged her to attract her attention. However, the Niqols continued to keep her back straight and cover Khan's vision with her white blanket.

Khan relaxed only when he heard Liiza suppressing a cute giggle. Her efforts eventually failed to hide her real feelings and made her explode into a loud laugh. The Niqols relaxed her back at that point, and she slid over Khan's chest to make sure that her face could stare straight at his eyes when she turned it.

"You are so cute when you play along," Liiza whispered before showing a warm smile toward Khan.

Khan also smiled when those glowing eyes shone on his face. He had always known that Liiza was teasing him. She wouldn't even think about cheating on him after what Yeza had made Deni go through.

"I know that you like it," Khan revealed. "I didn't only look at your legs in this month."

"Oh, trust me," Liiza scoffed. "I know that you have looked everywhere else too."

Liiza failed to fake the anger in her voice and ended up giggling by the end of her line. The two exchanged a long kiss at that point, but Khan saw an actual worried expression appearing on his girlfriend's face when they separated.

"Though I'm serious," Liiza said in a pleading voice. "I know that I can't control you. I don't want to do that either. I also know that you consider me and your training more important than yourself, but I don't. I'll force you to rest even if it ends up hurting me."

"I don't want you to suffer because of me," Khan responded in a stern tone as he recalled Zalpa's warnings.

"Then rest," Liiza pleaded, diving into his neck.

"I forced you to do this again," Khan sighed while lying on the ground and making sure to keep Liiza above him.

"It's fine," Liiza mumbled in a sleepy voice. "It's in your nature. I hate it, but I like you for being like this."

Khan couldn't help but caress Liiza's back. He couldn't express how close he felt to her in that situation, but an unrelated doubt still appeared in his mind.

"Do I really have to accumulate four hours of sleep every two days?" Khan wondered. "I'm pretty sure I can be fine with three or even two."

"Ilman is taller than you now that I think about it," Liiza teased while her peaceful smile remained on her face.

"I'll sleep right away!" Khan announced, and his eyes closed while Liiza's cute giggle resounded in his ears.

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"I can accept you spending your nights outside the academy," Kelly scolded when she saw Khan descending the staircase that led to the human habitations, "But how can you justify remaining an entire day somewhere on an alien planet? What if the Niqols requested our presence? What if the Global Army requested a briefing?"

Khan descended the last step and glanced at Kelly before throwing the dirty robes in his grasp toward the corner of the room. He had ended up spending the entire day with Liiza. That was already the sixth night of his first week in the academy, but Kelly had yet to accept his habits.

George and the others were all inside the underground room. Doku didn't organize any party that night, so they had the chance to focus on their training and get back to their habitation early.

The days spent attending the lessons had made their minds reach their limits, so they wanted to sleep as soon as possible now that they had free time. The recruits had only completed their real training and exchanged a few talks with the other Niqols returning to their room. Khan had returned by nine pm when they were about to crash on their beds.

George, Veronica, and the recruits who had kept track of Khan's worsening condition during the past days couldn't help but notice that he appeared to be far better that night.

Khan's face still carried the faint trace of eye bags, but they had dimmed a lot since the last time the recruits saw him. Moreover, his clean white robe and the messy long hair that fell from his head gave him a rested appearance.

"You know," Khan sighed as he adjusted his robe to make sure that the marks left by Liiza remained hidden, "Your remarks are getting annoying. You have no authority over any one of us, so I don't understand why you keep thinking that I should listen to you."

"Your behavior is putting the mission at risk," Kelly explained in a firm tone. "We aren't here to enjoy ourselves. You can't do whatever you want."

"Risk?" Khan scoffed. "I attend more lessons than you, the Niqols don't hesitate to search for me when a party is about to happen, and I'm even the only one showing results in their training methods. How am I putting the mission at risk?"

"A good soldier on the field should be able to blend with the aliens without forgetting his troops!" Kelly quoted a famous phrase that Khan vaguely recalled from the lessons in the human camp. "You aren't doing that. You don't consider your companions at all!"

"Technically, we are still recruits," Khan stated while shrugging his shoulders. "You might have had a point if I were an ambassador, but I'm just another kid sent to make a good impression, and I think I'm doing well."

Kelly opened her mouth to say something, but no words came out of it. She hated to admit that Khan was right, but his uncaring behavior only made her angrier.

"I won't hide this from my report once the mission is over," Kelly eventually threatened.

"And what would you even say?" Khan laughed before clearing his throat and trying to imitate Kelly's voice. "Khan has spent every night outside the academy without notifying his companions. His desire for privacy has been a major threat to the mission, even if he has been the only one who has actually tried to learn from the Niqols. George has done the same, even if his interest usually peaked during the parties."

Khan winked toward George, and the latter couldn't help but laugh at his joke. Veronica also giggled while covering her mouth. Rodney and Helen showed similar reactions, even if the girl added an interested gaze to her suppressed chuckle.

"I'm telling you that you have to stop spending your nights outside," Kelly ordered while standing up from her bed.

The laughs stopped at that scene. Kelly appeared livid and ready to do something drastic. Brandon and George wanted to stand up to defuse that situation, but Khan's words resounded in the room before they could attempt anything.

"Otherwise?" Khan asked as his expression grew cold. "Did you forget who I am?"

Khan's expression radiated a chilling aura. He had shown the same face when the lake created the image of a Nak, and he had even worn it for most of his time on Istrone. George's mind inevitably went battle-ready, but he remained unclear about who he had to stop in that situation.

Faint steps echoed through the room as Khan began to walk toward Kelly. The girl's face showed no fear, but she didn't move either. She was doing her best to appear confident, but the rumors about Khan inevitably filled her mind.

Khan's chilling expression was enough to warn her that the boy in front of her wasn't a simple recruit. There was a graveness in his face that she found herself unable to endure. The vague rumors picked up in the days in the other camp and during that week also filled her mind with worries.

Khan had initially decided to ignore Kelly's behavior. He even understood her worries, but he wasn't willing to sacrifice his time with Liiza to reassure her.

Still, the repeated scolding and her threat had forced Khan to show a face that only George knew well. Kelly was revealing herself as a potential issue for his relationship, so Khan decided to make her understand that they weren't at the same level.

"Do you have any idea what I did on Istrone?" Khan whispered in a chilling voice when he reached Kelly.

The girl was taller than him, but she appeared incredibly small when he stopped in front of her. The cold worlds echoing in the room even worsened the atmosphere. Kelly suddenly didn't feel safe anymore. Her instincts were telling her that Khan was dangerous.

"Uhm, is this a bad moment?" A familiar voice suddenly resounded from the staircase and attracted the recruits' attention.

Everyone turned to see that Doku had appeared at the end of the staircase. The Niqols wore an awkward expression since he had heard part of the discussion while descending, but Khan made sure to get rid of his hesitation.

"I don't think that we are in the mood for a party tonight," Khan announced while his cold expression broke into a smile.

"It's not that," Doku explained while fixing his eyes on him and dodging the other's gaze. "I have an important mission tomorrow, and Professor Zakhira suggested that you should join my team."