

Chaos' Heir 191

Chapter 191 - Entertainment

The sudden punch left everyone speechless. Only a few had paid attention to the entire scene, but no one could miss George after some surprised gasps resounded in the area. The boy was sitting on the ground, and a hand covered his nose as blood flowed out of it.

The recruits froze, and Paul's hands instinctively went to his hair when he thought about the many political consequences that the event could cause. George was even in his class, so he knew that he had to handle the issue by himself.

Natalie had just started to feel some relief after the tough weeks that she had to experience, so anger filled her face when she gazed at Havaa. She didn't care about George enough to get into a fight for him, but that girl had hurt her by hitting her friend.

Paul decided to step forward and defuse the situation, but Khan stopped him by placing a hand on his shoulder. The soldier turned to question him, but he discovered that he didn't move his eyes from George and Havaa.

Khan performed a grabbing gesture with his free hand, and Ilman promptly put a cup filled with booze in his palm. Khan handed that cup to Paul before repeating the process to get a drink for himself.

Paul continued to stare at Khan in confusion, but the latter soon whispered to explain the situation. "Let them handle that. Everyone has waited for this to happen since learning about the meeting."

Paul wanted to complain, but his words remained stuck in his throat when he saw the other Niqols staring with prying eyes at George and Havaa while taking quick sips from their cups. Everyone seemed serious about the situation but for stupid reasons.

Natalie prepared herself to voice an angry berate, but Veronica reached her and pulled her away before she could say anything. The same confusion that afflicted Paul fell on Natalie, and she couldn't help but question her friend with her gaze while she continued to pull her away.

That confusion spread among all the recruits. Only Khan and the others who had lived in the academy knew what was happening and managed to take it as a mere fight between partners.

George rarely managed to keep his mouth shut, especially after drinking. Almost every student had learnt about his previous love interest, so they had waited for that event to unfold. Still, they didn't expect Havaa to hit him when he was talking with Natalie.

"[That's a bit too-]," Doku began to comment, but Azni slapped his shoulder to make him stop speaking.

Paul noticed that interaction and glanced at Khan again, hoping that the latter could give him explanations. Yet, Khan only had short answers for him, and he even had to whisper them out of fear of Azni's anger. "She has been George's girlfriend during these months."

"That's still-," Paul tried to argue, but he didn't contain his voice, so a series of annoyed gazes converged toward his figure and made him go silent.

"The Niqols generally like gossips, especially those involving couples," Khan explained through whispers.

Paul could only nod while Khan took a sip from his cup and remained focused on the scene. The soldier turned to look at George and Havaa and discovered that the other envoys had taken care of calming down the recruits who wanted to intervene.

"Why aren't you helping them?" Paul asked in a faint voice.

"This is a perfect spot," Khan responded. "I'm not giving it up."

"[Khan]?" Azni's cold voice resounded from behind the two, and Khan immediately fell silent. Paul also understood the silent threat and stopped talking.

"[Why did you do it]?" George asked in a poor accent. "[We were just talking]!"

"[I know what talking means for you]," Havaa scolded angrily. "[Did these months mean nothing to you]?"

"[Of course, but my family-]," George replied, but Havaa suppressed a sob before kicking his leg and leaving the scene in a hurry.

George followed her departing figure with his gaze, but an army of disappointed eyes unfolded in his vision when he turned to look at his companions. Some of the Niqols were even shaking their heads.

"[A man who can't listen to feeling-]," Ilman started to shout while standing up, but Khan and Doku promptly reached his shoulders to keep him on the ground.

Ilman still struggled, but Azni's cold glare eventually put an end to his desire to scold George. The girl appeared ready to kill to preserve her source of gossips.

George remained in that position for a few seconds before exploding into a loud groan. He nimbly jumped on his feet and wiped his bleeding nose before turning toward Natalie.

"I'm sorry," George announced. "We can't be together."

Natalie's eyes widened before her eyebrows closed into a frown. "We have never come close to that."

George pretended not to hear that answer. He began to run in the direction where Havaa had left, but he stopped after a few meters to turn toward Khan's group and voice a request. "Can I get a cup before g-."

The boy couldn't complete his request since a series of angry reprimands flew in his direction and forced him to resume his march. Curses and satisfied nods appeared among the group of Niqols after George left the areas, but Ilman's sudden announcement ruined that mood. "[Love wins in the end]!"

"[We have yet to see if she accepts to get him back]," Azni commented.

"[Don't appear too excited about it]," Doku teased.

"[Come on]," Azni complained while pulling Doku's sleeve. "[They are so cute together]."

"[We are cuter]," Doku winked, and Azni blushed in front of that unexpected gesture.

A series of cute exclamations resounded among the group when Azni hid her face in Doku's chest. Ilman ended up being the loudest of them, and Khan also showed an honest smile at the sight of the happy couple.

"What did you even do during these months?" Paul whispered when Khan rejoined him.

"You might discover that some of us have changed after adapting to the Niqols' lifestyle," Khan vaguely explained, and Paul stared at him for a few seconds before giving up on the matter.

The recruits found it hard to join the Niqols right away, but Khan, Helen, and Veronica did their best to unite the groups while the servants were still setting everything for the meeting. Tables filled with food slowly appeared on both flat areas at the sides of the gorge, and the event soon moved there.

The atmosphere in the valley wasn't tense. The main meeting was happening in the palace, and the Niqols discovered how easier it was to connect with the humans when Khan helped them out. That was the first time someone of their age had grown so close to them, so he could effortlessly act as a bridge between the two species.

Doku, Azni, Ilman, Asyat, and the other Niqols that had built a good relationship with Khan also helped since they knew that a good performance in the event would help their human friend. They didn't hesitate to bring the recruits inside their groups and make them join their conversations.

Many recruits remained biased or hesitant about the vague carelessness shown by the Niqols. The squad leaders also avoided drinking too much since they couldn't consider the event a simple celebration. Their serious approach made them unable to miss how deeply Khan had entered that social environment, and the four of them didn't forget to memorize that detail.

Yeza's mention and the scenes during the meeting put Khan above the other envoys. The squad leaders felt that the humans had finally gained a decent foundation regarding the relationship with the Niqols. It might take a few years, but Khan could transform into the connection they needed to get past that mutual distrust and start developing a proper alliance.

George returned a few hours later. He had a few bruises on his face, but Havaa held his hand as they walked back to the event. The girl was even blushing, which caused a series of excited gasps and laughs, with the loudest being Ilman and Azni.

"Why is everyone so excited?" Paul questioned Khan about that reaction.

"Ask the others," Khan laughed. "I'd rather not be the one to have this awkward conversation."

Paul listened to his advice and questioned the other envoys. Veronica ended up revealing everything to the squad leader, even if she blushed and used shy words to explain the matter.

The squad leader had no words to express how he felt. Paul didn't know whether to feel angry that George had left the meeting to be intimate with his girlfriend or happy that another recruit had established a strong relationship with the Niqols.

In the end, Paul let go of the matter and decided to ignore every strange outcome that had resulted from that political mission. It was part of the envoys' tasks to blend with an alien species without

forgetting their origins. George seemed to tend too much toward the Niqols, but he chose not to care that day.

Truth be told, all the recruits needed to relax and vent the stress accumulated in the past weeks. They didn't have the parties to vent their tension, and their missions had been messy due to the lack of proper tools at their disposal.

The humans had to live in constant tension during those almost four weeks. The small area under their control was their only advantage over the Niqols since the weaker troops could always retreat and rely on stronger troops if the situation became too dangerous.

The peaceful meeting helped the humans rest their minds and enjoy a night among the hellish landscape that Nitis had become.

"What will you say to your family?" Khan asked once George separated from Havaa and walked past all the compliments and teases voiced by the Niqols.

"What can I even say?" George shrugged his shoulders before taking a sip from his cup. "It's not totally stupid from a political perspective, right? I'll get to see this alliance flourish while my talented friend does all the work for me."

"I wish it were so easy," Khan sighed while toasting with George and moving his gaze on the palace.

Some of the important figures who had entered the palace were on the long balcony of the central structure. Khan was too far away to recognize all of them, but Captain Erbair, Yeza, and Liiza were easy to find even at that distance.

Captain Erbair was too tall to mistake her for a Niqols, Yeza had her unique charm, and Liiza made Khan feel warm. The others were nothing more than vague figures in his vision.

It seemed that the meeting inside the palace had reached a cordial phase since many Niqols and humans were on the balcony. Still, Khan noticed how Liiza and Yeza left the area together and in a hurry.

The two Niqols didn't immediately return on the balcony. Khan only shot glances every once in a while when no one looked, but he kept track of the changes on the palace. It felt strange for such important figures to disappear from the main event, but a familiar screech eventually reached his ears and revealed the nature of the situation.

The group in the valley noticed a dark-grey Aduns when they glanced at the sky, but they quickly disregarded the matter. Only Khan continued to inspect the eagle because it was his girlfriend's ride.

Liiza soon appeared on the open roof of the right building and jumped on her Aduns to leave the palace. At the same time, Yeza returned to the central balcony and resumed her political tasks.

'They must have fought,' Khan concluded in his mind as he followed Liiza's Aduns crossing the valley.

Snow almost replied to the emotions filling Khan's mind, but he made sure to stop it. He couldn't follow her now even if he desired to do it with every fiber of his body.

A helpless sigh escaped Khan's mouth as he decided to bring his focus back on his surroundings, but a faint tremor suddenly reached his feet. No one except for the squad leaders seemed to have felt it, but a stronger vibration soon ran through the valley and made everyone aware of the event.

Khan looked at the Niqols to understand how worried they were about the earthquake. They didn't appear scared. They only frowned in front of that event, and annoyance filled their faces when the tremors intensified even more.

The first sign of danger appeared when a crack opened at the edges of the gorge. Yet, panic didn't spread since azure symbols appeared on the ground and the gorge's walls to reinforce their structure. Everything continued to tremble, but nothing broke anymore.

Liiza stopped above the valley when she noticed the azure symbols. It took her a while to notice the earthquake, but she didn't feel worried about the event either. However, her peculiar position allowed her to see that cracks continued to open in some mountains around the area.

The students couldn't see those events from the bottom of the valley, but that wasn't enough to cause worry. Liiza had to see a massive claw coming out of one of the cracks to understand that something was deeply wrong.

Liiza made her Aduns shoot toward the group, but her expression froze when her senses noticed something giant hiding right inside the gorge's edges. Her eagle unfolded its wings to stop its momentum, but everything happened too quickly for her to do something about the incredible event.

Part of the gorge's edges exploded even if the azure symbols were reinforcing them. A dark-green lightning bolt shot out of the rocky surface and illuminated a massive mutated Lysixi that had pointed its strange mouth toward Liiza.

The lightning bolt was too fast for the Aduns. It hit its chest and spread part of its destructive power on the other side.

Chapter 192 - Worry

Ilman's feelings bordered what humans would define as madness, but they were real. His gaze moved on Liiza as soon as the dark-green light of the lightning bolt filled the area. It was as if he could instinctively sense that she was in danger.

The lightning bolt pierced the Aduns' chest and released what remained of its power on the other side. Liiza couldn't do anything as the attack hit her right shoulder and flung her out of her ride.

The Aduns and Liiza started to fall as the Lysixi stretched its massive body forward to reach its prey. Similar scenes happened everywhere in the area as other giant monsters came out of the mountains and gorge. They all appeared as mutated versions of the lizard that the envoys had seen in the underground tunnels, but Ilman didn't care. His full attention was on the woman he loved falling toward the darkness.

The gorge was vast. Even his best leap couldn't cover all of it. However, Ilman believed to be fast enough to catch Liiza mid-air and reach the opposite wall before touching the bottom of the crack.

A suicidal plan quickly formed in his mind as chaos unfolded. Everything went in slow-motion in his eyes as he came up with a desperate idea to save Liiza's life.

Ilman wouldn't be able to control his fall, but Liiza might have the chance to climb back to the surface if he brought her on the opposite wall. That alone wouldn't save her life and would most likely kill him due to the speed reached before the impact, but it could create some hope for her.

Determination appeared in Ilman's eyes as his muscles tensed up. He was ready to sacrifice his life if that gave Liiza a slim chance to survive. He felt no hesitation as he bent himself forward to muster his strength, but a shadow crossed his vision before he could sprint ahead.

Strong winds followed the passage of the shadow. Ilman hair fluttered and his robe almost opened due to the intensity of those gales. His gaze left Liiza's falling figure for the first time since the beginning of that chaotic event, and reassurance spread inside him when he managed to identify the boy who had moved before him.

Khan had gone through everything that Ilman had experienced, but his emotions had been far stronger. His resolve to risk his life to save Liiza had also been more intense, but he could actually back it up with some confidence.

Khan had been a first-level warrior for a week already. Hunts had followed his breakthrough, but he had always held back during them to avoid arousing suspicion. However, everything had disappeared after the lightning bolt hit Liiza.

Giant monsters capable of eating Khan with a single bite were coming out from every surface of the valley, but he didn't feel any fear. His immediate reaction could make others wonder about his relationship with Liiza, but those worries didn't exist in his mind either.

A deafening urge resounded Khan's mind and made it impossible for him to think about anything else. He had to save his loved one. All the worries, fears, and consequences had to wait for when Liiza was safe.

Khan reached an unfathomable speed when he called upon the entire power that his body could unleash. The air transformed into a dense membrane that tried to slow him down as he shot ahead, but his eyes managed to see everything clearly.

The gorge was too vast, even for Khan. He couldn't cross it in a single jump, but the Lysixi coming out of the walls had created multiple footholds that he could use.

The giant lizards coming out of the walls and the boulders flying in the gorge allowed Khan to see a path. His experience in the Lightning-demon style told him that he could cross the opening thanks to the new power that filled his body.

Khan generated winds as he moved forward, but his steps didn't release any sound. The edges of the gorge were falling apart, but the tiny boulders created a path that led him directly to the back of the lizard.

The monster was stretching its giant body toward the center of the crack in a desperate attempt to catch the falling Aduns. The creature had become almost seven meters long after the mutations. It was even using its tail to reach deeper parts of the canyon, and Khan didn't hesitate to use it as a bridge to get closer to Liiza.

The mutated Lysixi didn't notice Khan's arrival. His steps on the dark-green scales were too faint, but his pace changed when he reached the tip of the creature's mouth.

Khan almost stopped once he stepped on the mouth's tip. The Lysixi noticed him at that point, and its claws tried to converge in his position, but a massive force suddenly flung its head downward.

A rumbling noise spread among the canyon as Khan jumped using all the strength that his legs could muster. The central parts of the canyon didn't have debris, so he couldn't commit any mistake. Yet, his feelings made his mind reach levels of concentration that he had never experienced before. His leap was perfect.

Khan flew as his body slowly spun. He went so fast that even the improved skin obtained after the breakthrough burned in some spots. A direct clash with Liiza would only kill her, but he had calculated his rotation perfectly.

Liiza had almost lost consciousness after the lightning bolt pierced her shoulder. Her worry for her Aduns and her pain had kept her vaguely awake, but seeing Khan flying toward her made her eyes widen in surprise and concern.

Liiza immediately realized where she was, so seeing Khan flying in the middle of the gorge made her fear for his life. Still, everything happened too quickly for her to do anything. Khan reached her before she recalled what had happened.

Khan didn't hit her directly. He continued to rotate with the same momentum generated during his jump and grabbed her gently before continuing to shoot ahead.

The impact remained hard to endure for Liiza even if Khan had done his best to make it easy for her. Moreover, the speed that she reached wasn't something that her body could endure. Her bare skin started to burn as Khan held her close to his chest and gazed at the path ahead.

Khan was far faster than Ilman, but he couldn't reach the other side of the gorge even after using the Lysixi. Grabbing Liiza had made him slow down and descend toward the wall, but that area had a path that he could walk.

Many monsters had come out of the wall and had filled that area with falling boulders. Khan continued to descend diagonally until he reached those cracked rocks, and one of them eventually appeared in front of him.

"[Hold still]," Khan whispered as his eyes remained on that boulder.

Liiza instinctively wrapped her arms around his chest, allowing him to focus the entirety of his attention on the issue at hand. Khan's side slammed on the falling boulder and pushed it away, but he used his free hand to keep it close.

The boulder continued to fall, but Khan nimbly jumped on it. His eyes went on the sky now that he had finally gained a foothold. Many rocks and giant lizards filled his vision, but he didn't consider them as potential threats. They were his path toward the surface.

Liiza tightened her grip on Khan's chest when he jumped upward. His faint steps landed on multiple cavities on the wall as he pushed himself closer to the surface.

Khan climbed until he exhausted the viable cavities, but he turned toward the falling rocks at that point. A suitable boulder was right above him, and he didn't hesitate to jump there.

The new spot opened new paths. Khan saw other cavities and boulders, and he quickly jumped again by following a simple tactic. He had to prioritize the boulders since they would end at some point. Instead, the wall would still be there once they fell past him.

Khan climbed until the surface reappeared in his vision. A Lysixi had come out from a spot above him and had created a large cavity that could lead him back on the valley with a single jump. Yet, the creature was still there, and it had noticed his arrival.

That monster was smaller than the lizard seen on the other side of the canyon, but fuming claws grew from its eight legs. They appeared able to melt everything they touched, including the rocky cavity that allowed it to stand next to the surface.

A single touch from those claws would cleave Khan in half, but he didn't feel any fear while jumping away from the wall to reach a falling boulder behind him. The second foothold allowed him to leap back toward a higher spot of the wall that was quite close to the cavity occupied by the mutated Lysixi.

The creature couldn't follow his movements, but the instant that Khan spent on the second foothold told it that the prey was coming. The Lysixi started to stretch its claws forward even if Khan disappeared from its vision.

The claws aimed for Khan even after he jumped off the boulder, but he didn't panic. He had never intended to reach the mutated Lysixi in a straight line. A small rock stood between him and those fuming talons, and that was enough to make him change direction mid-air.

The small rock shattered as Khan performed a quick jump that led him next to the lizard's head. The creature remained stunned, but Khan vanished right after. He climbed the small wall behind the monster until his feet stepped on the dark-grey grass of the valley.

Khan didn't stop there. The monster was behind him, but other mutated Lysixi were coming out in the distance. The safest spot appeared to be the center of that side of the valley, and he reached it in no time.

"[Khan]," Liiza sobbed when Khan placed her on the ground.

Liiza had hidden her face on his chest, but burns had appeared on her hands, forearms, legs, and neck. Her shoulder had never stopped bleeding either, and Khan's speed had only worsened her injury.

Still, the pain felt during the flight had awakened her completely. Liiza had recalled everything that had happened, and tears inevitably fell from her eyes.

Khan didn't need to question her to understand the source of her sorrow. Liiza had just lost the friend that had accompanied her throughout the long years as an outcast. Her Aduns had been her only trusted companion before Khan's arrival, and its corpse was somewhere in the depths of the gorge now.

"[I couldn't save Zama]," Khan explained while holding her hand. "[I'm sorry]."

Liiza tried to stand up and go toward the gorge, but Khan hugged her before she could stand up. The girl struggled to escape his grasp and shouted the Aduns' name, but she eventually hid her face in Khan's neck to cry.

Khan studied Liiza's injuries while she wrapped her arms around his neck to hide her face even more. The burns weren't an issue, but blood still flowed out of the hole in her right shoulder. He had to patch that wound before it became too severe.

A powerful presence entered Khan's range while he was busy tearing apart a piece of his robe. His hand immediately went on his sheath and drew the first-grade knife as he turned toward the source of that sensation, but his eyes widened when he noticed Yeza.

Dark blood had tainted the woman's revealing dress and hair, but she didn't seem to care. Yeza's face was cold, but evident worry filled her eyes as they moved between Khan and Liiza.

Khan wanted to relax his face, but he noticed that his muscles didn't reply to his thoughts. His grip on the knife remained firm, his eyes continued to express coldness, and his feet had instinctively prepared another sprint.

The dangerous situation and the injured Liiza crying in his arms had made Khan focus the entirety of his power on protecting her. Of course, that was an irrational desire in front of her mother, and Khan slowly managed to lower his knife, but his expression remained cold and wary.

Chapter 193 - Bridges

The relationship between Liiza and Yeza was far from good, but the latter still loved her greatly. She had been on the balcony of the palace's central building when the chaos had unfolded, and she had immediately noticed the dark-green lightning bolt hitting Liiza.

Yeza was incredibly strong. Her position had requirements that went beyond simple political skills, and she met all of them perfectly. However, her power was useless in that situation. Liiza was too far away.

Despair had started to spread in Yeza's mind when she realized how powerless she was in that situation. Still, a peculiar scene unfolded in her vision before she could lose herself to grief. She saw Khan unleashing an unfathomable speed and jumping after her daughter while everyone had yet to realize what was happening.

Something strange happened in Yeza's mind. She wasn't thinking clearly, but she still felt confident that Khan would succeed in saving her daughter's life.

That confidence made her jump from the balcony, step on the ground, and run toward the valley's left side. Khan had reached Liiza by then, so Yeza already knew where he would land.

A mutated Lysixi came out of the ground in front of her, but Yeza barely looked at it. She softly pressed her palm on the scaled chest, and the creature spat a torrent of blood before collapsing on its back. Part of its dark insides fell on her hair and dress, but she didn't care about her appearance when she had yet to confirm the state of her daughter.

A smile appeared on Yeza's face when she saw Khan jumping on the surface while carrying Liiza in his arms. She felt even happier when she noticed that her daughter was alive, but the sobbed screams that called the Aduns' name turned her expression dark.

Yeza knew that she couldn't offer Liiza any emotional support. Their relationship was too bad, and she suffered when she realized that Liiza would have to go through that pain on her own. Her daughter was all alone in the world now.

However, something even stranger happened while she continued to run forward. Liiza abandoned herself to Khan's hug with ease that Yeza had never seen in her daughter. Moreover, Khan appeared truly in pain and worried about her situation.

Yeza was an expert in manipulating mana and political interactions, but her true mastery was in the study of people. She could understand secrets from hidden glances and uncover relationships from vague gestures. Liiza was her weak point in that ability, but she couldn't fail to sense the deep feelings that the couple was sharing now.

Everything became more evident when Yeza reached the duo. Khan raised his knife in an instinctive attempt to protect Liiza from an unknown threat, and his desire had been so strong that he couldn't lower his weapon even after recognizing Yeza.

Moreover, his expression carried the same determination that Yeza had seen during the meeting. She couldn't fail to connect that secret Niqols' partner with the girl in his arms.

Khan managed to lower his knife after a few seconds, but the coldness in his eyes didn't disappear. Still, Liiza was in pain, and she needed medical attention, so he didn't hesitate to consider her health a priority.

"She is injured," Khan limited himself to say while using the human language on purpose.

Yeza snapped back to reality and hurried toward the couple before placing a hand on Liiza's head. Her mana flowed inside the girl and fixed her injuries in a matter of seconds, but the latter only held Khan tightly as strength returned inside her body.

Instead, Khan glanced at Yeza and met her cold gaze. He immediately realized that she had understood everything, so he waited for her judgment.

"[Since when]?" Yeza eventually asked, and hearing that voice made Liiza raise her head in surprise.

Liiza's grief had made her fail to realize that someone had healed her, but hearing that voice forced her senses to focus on her surroundings again. Yeza's stern face appeared in her teary eyes, and she instinctively glanced at Khan to understand what they had to do.

Liiza immediately understood that her gesture had been a mistake, so her eyes darted back on Yeza. Still, her attempt to hide how deeply she cared about Khan's opinion only made the situation more obvious.

A wave of panic swept Liiza's mind. Her thoughts were still a mess due to Zama's death, and the fear that her actions had uncovered her relationship with Khan only worsened her mental state.

Her breath became irregular, but a familiar warmth spread from the back of her head and calmed her down. Liiza turned again toward Khan and relaxed when she saw his loving smile. Another sob inevitably escaped her mouth as she made their foreheads touch and took his face in her hands.

Yeza struggled to maintain a cold expression. She saw the love in Khan's caresses and smiles. She noticed the affection in her daughter's reactions. Her position had forced her to consider the political implications and dangers that the relationship could cause, but those worries vanished in front of the couple's feelings. They even felt offensive in front of their intense emotions.

"[Right after my arrival on Nitis]," Khan revealed when he and Liiza turned to show their firm gazes to Yeza.

"[It was my fault]," Liiza quickly added. "[He would have neve-]."

"[It was only a matter of time before we ended up together]," Khan interrupted her, and the two exchanged meaningful glances.

Yeza could almost read their intentions in those gazes. Liiza wanted to take the blame for the relationship, but Khan didn't let her. She then questioned him with her eyes, and he made her understand that they were in that mess together.

The two seemed on the verge of kissing after that silent exchange of gazes. Yeza had to clear her throat to claim their attention.

Khan and Liiza snapped back to reality and fixed their eyes back on Yeza. The situation around them had only grown more chaotic, but they only cared about her judgment.

"[You have no idea what I can do with my mana]," Yeza threatened while bending toward Khan. "[I hope you don't force me to review the Niqols' long history in torture techniques]."

Yeza then turned toward Liiza to continue. "[You have seen how men are. Don't give yourself away easily even if our species finds it hard to hold back]."

Liiza sniffed before performing a weak nod, but something in her gesture made Yeza frown and question the couple. "[Did you two have sex already]?"

"[I won't accept your opinion on the topic]," Liiza stated while showing a firm expression.

Yeza's frown deepened and forced Khan to add something to defuse the fight. "[We have been careful. We have used protections]."

Liiza and Yeza turned toward Khan, and he obviously chose to look at his girlfriend. Both women appeared angry about something, and Khan guessed that they didn't want him to step between them.

"[You have gone through a lot]," Khan explained while pulling Liiza closer to his chest. "[This isn't the time to argue with your mother]."

Khan's words reminded Liiza about Zama, and a sob accompanied the nod that she used to answer him. Yeza's eyes widened in astonishment. Khan had actually managed to stop Liiza's angry outburst.

"[Your father would like him]," Yeza commented, and Liiza turned to show an angry expression toward her mother.

Khan managed to stop the second outburst by calling her name with the Niqols' accent, but he also turned to say something to Yeza once Liiza calmed down. "[With all due respect, you aren't helping]."

Yeza ended up smiling at that remark, but she quickly covered her mouth. She couldn't appear happy when the crisis had reached such a critical point. Still, she had been unable to hide her feelings after confirming that her daughter had someone worthy of her trust during that problematic situation.

"[We'll talk properly after everything is over]," Yeza eventually sighed before turning her gaze on the valley. "[Make sure to be there for her. Zama was a good Aduns]."

Khan nodded even if Yeza wasn't looking at them. Liiza's grasp on his neck tightened as she realized what had just happened. That announcement wasn't a proper approval of their relationship, but it was something that went in the right direction.

The valley had fallen deeper into chaos during those minutes. The Niqols and humans in the palace had chased after Yeza, but mutated Lysixi had blocked their path. The students and recruits on the other side of the crack had tried to reach their higher-ups, but monsters had eventually stopped their advance.

Both Niqols and humans needed to regroup and create proper battle formations to get out of that situation. The pack of Lysixi wasn't too numerous, but all of its members were monsters that had developed abilities. Yeza, Captain Erbair, and soldiers at a similar level wouldn't have problems against them, but the same didn't apply to the others.

"[Khan, help the other students]," Yeza ordered. "[Bring Liiza with you. I will make the higher-ups regroup and join you before leading everyone to another safe location]."

"[How should I reach th-]?" Khan began to ask, but Yeza suddenly tapped the ground to activate one of the functions that the Niqols had set there beforehand.

The entire valley was full of monsters, and the students were on the other side of the gorge, so Khan didn't know how to reach them. Yet, many openings appeared on the rocky walls of the canyon after Yeza's gesture. Large bridges full of cracks came out of the holes and stretched toward the other sides.

Azure symbols filled the bridges and increased their stability. Khan saw some Lysixi attacking them only to have a shining membrane blocking their abilities. That protection even deflected the fuming claws of the giant lizard near the spot where he had landed.

"[Can I trust you with this task and my daughter]?" Yeza asked without turning.

Yeza appeared in a hurry to leave, but she didn't move. She wanted to hear that Khan had understood how important those things were for her.

"[Of course]," Khan confirmed in a calm voice that made Yeza smile in satisfaction.

Yeza didn't want loud or arrogant announcements. She had already seen how Khan had been ready to risk his life to save Liiza. Still, she needed to hear how he felt about the task, and his calm comment expressed his confidence perfectly.

Yeza shot forward at that point. Khan took that as the signal that the mission had started. He stood up while lifting Liiza with him, and she didn't hesitate to complain. "[You can't fight like this. Put me down]."

"[I'm not going to fight until I reach the other side]," Khan commented, and Liiza immediately understood what he wanted to do.

Liiza hid her face and hands inside Khan's robe before covering the bare skin that she couldn't protect naturally with her ice. Khan waited for the process to be over and shot ahead when Liiza pinched his side.

The bridges were still stretching forward. They would reach their counterparts on the other side soon, and the Lysixi had given up on stopping the process.

The lizard on the bridge near Khan had also stopped attacking and had turned toward him, but it stretched its long body on the structure when it lost track of his figure. Khan would need to pass over its body to go on the other side of the gorge, but that wasn't a problem for him.

The Lysixi didn't even notice when Khan crossed it. He had only needed to perform steps too faint for the creature's senses. The monster in front of him also was quite similar to the lizard seen in the tunnel, so he didn't need to perform long jumps that would have made him slow down.

Still, Khan didn't feel satisfied with a simple sprint. The first-grade knife was already in his left hand, and testing a technique at that speed wouldn't even slow him down. Moreover, lowering the number of monsters sounded like a good idea.

Khan reached the end of the bridge and jumped on the structure stretching from the other side. The action inevitably slowed him down and forced him to release some sound, so the Lysixi turned. Yet, a long wound that went from its neck to the base of its tail opened during the process.

"[You have said no fights]," Liiza complained once Khan stepped on the other side and stopped running.

"[Technically, it was training]," Khan justified. "[I'm not used to deploying my full power]."

"[I'll forgive you if you kiss me and hold me tightly afterward]," Liiza whispered.

"[Now]?" Khan asked as he glanced at the students who had noticed their arrival.

"[Yes, now]," Liiza repeated, and Khan gave in to her request.

Chapter 194 - Tail

The Niqols' sensitivity to mana generally was pretty good, so they sensed Khan and Liiza stepping among their group even if they didn't turn. The humans didn't study that topic in the academy, but some of them had developed decent senses anyway, while others had simply heard the couple stopping behind them.

Paul and the other squad leaders were keeping the three mutated Lysixi that had attacked the group at bay, so many students and recruits had seen Khan saving Liiza. Ilman had even cheered after the event, so missing it had been quite impossible.

The other side of the gorge was quite far away, and the confusion of the battlefield never gave the group the time to perform a long inspection. They focused on the fact that Liiza and Khan were fine, but they didn't go further, so no one noticed the intimacy shown by the couple. Yet, the scene that unfolded in their eyes after Khan and Liiza crossed the bridge left everyone stunned.

Khan lowered his head to kiss Liiza right in front of everyone. It felt good, incredibly good to savor each other's lips after having spent long weeks in different tents. That feeling was even more intense since they could finally stop pretending in public.

The chaos unfolding in the valley forced Khan to keep the kiss short, but Liiza tightened the grip on his neck and made him remain on her lips. Khan couldn't help but smile and wrap both arms around her waist to bring her closer, and the two separated after she decided to hide her face on his chest again.

Khan gently caressed Liiza's hair while she tried to use his warmth to fight the grief that was devouring her insides. She could stop herself from exploding into tears only due to the vague acceptance that her mother had shown toward her relationship. Still, that break from her sad emotions never lasted more than a few seconds.

Many saw that stunning scene, and the voices that followed made everyone aware of what had happened. Azni had voiced a high-pitched excited cry, Ilman had shouted some encouragement, and George didn't hold back from expressing his surprise. Everything else was a series of murmurs, gasps, and exclamations that eventually reached those involved in the battle.

Paul, Felicia, and the other two squad leaders were busy fending off the three monsters trying to approach the group. They were all first-level mages and warriors, so mutated creatures weren't too much of a problem for them. Yet, the three Lysixi had developed abilities, and one of them appeared able to crack its tail at an unfathomable speed, which ended up controlling the pace of the battle.

The other two Lysixi also had troublesome abilities. One of them spat a sticky fluid that forced the squad leaders to retreat or use spells to remove it. The other seemed able to make anything shake as long as it kept its gaze fixed on it.

Those abilities wouldn't be too troublesome if taken singularly, but the monsters appeared intelligent enough to deploy a raw battle formation. The sticky fluid creature made the squad leaders unable to advance, the quick tail forced them to dodge often, and the specimen with the powerful gaze dispersed every spell they tried to cast.

The battle had reached a stalemate, with the squad leaders unable to advance or launch spells and the monsters waiting for one of their opponents to commit a mistake. Jumping on the creatures would solve most of the problems, but no one was fast enough to dodge the tail. Even Ilman had to remain behind.

The surprised gasps, rumors, and other voices informed the squad leaders about Khan's return. None of them had seen Khan crossing the gorge, but they had learnt about his success in the feat, so they had confirmed that he had grown faster in those months.

The battle required a fast soldier who could approach the monsters, so Paul didn't hesitate to jump back and turn to call Khan. Still, his expression froze when he saw the end of the kiss and the subsequent loving hug.

Khan raised his head to inspect his surroundings after Liiza hugged him tightly. An honest smile appeared on his face when he saw Doku and Azni, but his expression turned awkward when he noticed Ilman's proud expression.

The awkwardness intensified when Khan went over all the stunned humans. Liiza was still the untouchable "Miss Liiza" in their minds, so the scene shook them deeply. Instead, the Niqols added

faint smiles when their eyes met Khan's. They had a complicated relationship with his girlfriend, but they respected her current grief.

The awkwardness reached its peak when Khan found Paul staring at him. The soldiers' hands were in his hair as he expressed his complete disbelief.

Khan wanted to say something, but the scenes of the battle claimed the entirety of his attention. He inspected the abilities of the three monsters and quickly understood what the squad leaders lacked. They needed him to sprint past the fast tail and disrupt the creature's teamwork.

"[Can I let Azni take care of you for a bit]?" Khan whispered to Liiza's ear.

Liiza could be very useful in that situation, but her mental state was a mess. Half of her world had fallen apart after Zama died. Khan believed that she would join a battle if necessary, but he wanted to spare her that struggle.

"[It's never a bit with you]," Liiza complained while raising her face to fix her eyes on him.

"[I'll come back soon]," Khan promised as a hand reached her cheek.

Liiza nodded, and Khan left a quick kiss on her lips before walking toward Azni. The two didn't need to say anything. Azni took Liiza's hand, and the latter whispered soft words before separating from Khan.

"[The tail is really fast]," Ilman warned when he saw Khan walking toward Paul.

"[I'm faster]," Khan announced, and Ilman smirked proudly.

"I'll stop the monster with the annoying tail," Khan declared when he reached the stunned Paul. "Make sure to kill one of them in the meantime."

"Why can't you be a normal soldier?" Paul cursed without moving from his spot.

"A normal soldier wouldn't be helpful here," Khan replied in a vaguely mocking tone.

Paul turned toward the battle. The squad leaders were about to lose their ground now that he had abandoned his position. He had to return and make Khan join the fight, but he didn't forget to voice a reminder first. "You and I will need to have a long talk once everything is over."

"Your spot in the line is behind Ambassador Yeza," Khan joked before running to the side and waiting for Paul to reach his position among the squad leaders.

Paul's return relieved some pressure from the other squad leaders' but only because he added a target to the threatening tail and vibrations that one of the monsters could cause. The four soldiers never had the time to gather their mana to launch spells, so they limited themselves to dodge and escape from the expanding sticky fluid.

Khan waited until he confirmed that the lizards weren't paying attention to him. The monster with the fast tail kept an eye on its surroundings, but Khan disappeared during the sprint. The creature noticed his absence when he had already reached the trio.

The first monster on Khan's path had the powerful gaze. He felt confident in slashing its eyes or killing it directly with a perfect technique, but he couldn't take risks in that situation.

Khan jumped on the monster's head and mustered the entirety of his strength to leap toward his real target. The latter was at the center of the trio, but a massive force suddenly slammed on the side of its flat head and pushed it toward its companion.

Khan found himself airborne, but that lasted for less than a second since the lizard's head had been close to the ground. The knife in his hands shone with an azure light as he stabbed it at the center of the creature's skull.

The execution had been perfect, but the lizard didn't stop moving. Instead, it grew angry and made its quicky tail crack toward Khan. The latter dodged it by stepping on the creature's back and approaching the base of that annoying limb.

A swift attack with his blade severed the tail. The limb was quite large at its base, but it remained thin due to the Lysixi's strange bodies, so the knife was enough to cut it with a single slash.

The monster bellowed in pain and tried to turn toward its opponent, but a fireball exploded on its face and pushed it back by a few meters. Khan had to jump off the creature to remain next to the two lizards, but he had to sprint away when he saw the sticky fluid flying toward him.

Khan didn't fear that substance, but his waist suddenly trembled and made him lose his balance. He fell to the ground and started rolling on himself due to the momentum accumulated in the first part of the sprint.

The two monsters approached Khan as he slid on the ground, but a fireball and a dense gas flew toward them. The first attack exploded on one of the lizards' back while a dark cloud covered the other creature's head.

The two monsters found themselves unable to reach Khan, so he could stand up and back off safely. Meanwhile, one of the squad leaders from the other camp unleashed a beam-like ability that pierced the dark cloud and made the creature inside it fall lifelessly on the ground.

Khan noticed the fuming hole in the lizard's head before turning toward the squad leader who had launched that threatening attack. A trail of smoke came out of the woman's fingers, but she quickly waved her hand multiple times to disperse the heat accumulated there.

'That's dangerous,' Khan commented as he watched the other squad leader taking a deep breath before clapping his hands in front of his chest.

The gesture created a soundwave that flew toward the tailless lizard. The attack landed at the center of its body and almost opened it into two parts. The monster had survived the fireball, but the last spell killed it once and for all.

Only the monster with the sticky substance remained. A fireball had hit its broad back, but that wasn't enough to kill it. Still, its companions had died, so it tried to escape in front of the obvious disadvantage.

Paul didn't let the creature run. He jumped forward and crossed the layer of sticky substance to grab the monster's tail. He closed his eyes, and a wave of energy seeped inside the lizard, ran through its back, and reached the back of its neck.

Khan saw the monster's head exploding into a rain of dark blood. The squad leaders had only needed a short window to kill three giant mutated creatures. They were strong, and their display of power proved to him once again how incredible spells could be.

Chapter 195 - Goddesses

The group could finally experience a peaceful moment. The squad leaders had done an excellent job keeping the monsters at bay, but both students and recruits couldn't feel completely safe. Still, Khan's arrival had helped turn the situation in their favor.

Khan inspected the four squad leaders with deep interest. He had learnt everyone's names, but he could add abilities to the descriptions in his mind now.

Paul's element was unclear, but he seemed to require physical contact to activate his spells. The sheer power of his ability balanced those disadvantages and created a skill that could kill in a few seconds.

Felicia's element was fire, and she had only shown her fireballs during the battle. Her attacks weren't as powerful as her companions' abilities, but she could cast them multiple times in a row without getting tired. Moreover, their range was decent, and they didn't require long preparations.

Iris' element was unclear. She appeared older than her fellow squad leaders, and her short dark hair enhanced the mature aura that surrounded her body. Her abilities involved the threatening bright beam that had pierced the mutated Lysixi from side to side.

The last squad leader, Ryan, clearly had an element connected with the wind or the air in general. He appeared as old as Paul, but he had short dark hair, and his eyes were so clear that they created a stark contrast with the dark shades of his skin.

Ryan was short but thick. His muscles bulged from under his military uniform, and his last spell seemed to have forced them to inflate. The man was the source of the dark gas and the sharp soundwave, and their differences were the main reason behind Khan's struggles to recognize his element.

'Are they stronger than me?' Khan wondered as he walked past the squad leaders to return among the group.

The Lightning-demon style gave Khan a massive advantage, especially now that he had become a first-level warrior. He could probably defeat the squad leaders in a one versus one as long as he attacked first. The Divine Reaper also gave him incredible deadliness, but he felt he fell short in terms of destructive power.

The students and the recruits created a path for Khan while he was busy cleaning his knife with his sleeve and walking back to Liiza. Azni had been with her the whole time, but she didn't dare to miss Khan's battle, and she didn't hesitate to reveal a warm smile when he took her in his arms again.

"[I told you it would have been quick]," Khan whispered while kissing Liiza's on the side of her head.

"[I was about to step in when the Lysixi survived your attack]," Liiza teased while slipping a hand under his robe.

The event had taken Khan by surprise too. He didn't expect the lizard to continue its offensive even after he dug a hole in its brain. Those creatures seemed too big to die due to the small injuries that his knife was able to open.

The students around the couple remained speechless once again. Most of the girls there had tried to flirt with Khan during his stay in the academy, but it felt obvious that he had already ended up with Liiza back then. They even connected her usual blush to their relationship, and murmurs eventually filled the group.

Khan could almost hear everything those Niqols said, and he felt grateful that most of the humans on the scene couldn't understand their language. He didn't want them to learn those gossips so soon, especially while the valley was still a mess.

"What did Ambassador Yeza say?" Paul asked as he and the other squad leaders approached Khan.

Everyone had seen Yeza reaching Khan and Liiza, and their new open behavior even hinted at her acknowledgment of their relationship. Azni had gossips ready to spread among the Niqols, but she held back and limited herself to smile every time her eyes fell on the couple.

"We have to wait for her to gather the higher-ups and bring them here," Khan explained. "She'll lead us to a safe location afterward."

Paul nodded, but his struggle was evident. That emotion was even stronger in the other squad leaders. All of them tried to keep their eyes on Khan, but they always fell on the girl snuggling closer to his chest. She was basically uncovering his torso as her hands went deeper inside his robe and her mouth left soft kisses on his bare shoulder.

Liiza's mental state was awful now, and her mother had sort of acknowledged her relationship. Khan's higher-ups weren't there either, so her self-restraint didn't bother to appear.

Her explicit behavior put the humans who had never gotten used to the Niqols' customs in an awkward position. The squad leaders mostly managed to force themselves to keep their eyes on Khan, but the other recruits instinctively diverted their gazes. It was simple politeness on their end not to stare at those intimate actions.

"Do we have to remain here?" Iris asked in an annoyed tone.

"How long do you think it will take them?" Khan asked while pointing at the palace with the hand that held the knife.

Everyone turned to look at the palace, and the scene that unfolded in their eyes left them dumbfounded. Yeza had quickly regrouped with the other higher-ups and had led them back near the building before making them advance across the valley to reach the students.

Many mutated Lysixi had charged toward their group as soon as they came out to the ground, gorge, or mountains nearby. Some creatures had even been closer to Khan and the others, but they didn't mind them as they rushed toward the strongest warriors in the valley.

Their charge toward Yeza's group appeared almost instinctive. The monsters knew who they had to defeat to conquer the area, but their efforts ended pitifully.

Almost fifty monsters had come out of the valley and the mountains nearby. That massive number of mutated creatures would make the squad leaders tremble in fear, but they were nothing more than dummies in front of the overwhelming power shown by the higher-ups.

Yeza was dazzling as she danced among the abilities, tails, claws, and teeth that flew toward her. Her body appeared able to dodge those attacks on its own. She performed elegant but sharp turns whenever something was about to reach her, leaving her untouched even if five monsters tried to gang up on her.

Moreover, her hands were deadly weapons. Yeza was holding her true power back since higher-ups from another species were on the scene, but that didn't make her weak. She only needed to touch her opponents to make them puke a torrent of blood. The spot where her fingers landed didn't even seem to affect the power of her ability.

Captain Erbair was also hiding her true power, but she appeared unstoppable nonetheless. She was massive but incredibly fast. Her body resembled a cannonball as she covered long distances in less than a second to slam head-on on the monsters.

The impact with those creatures directly shattered their scales and insides. Khan even turned in time to see her slam her massive arms on a monster's head to turn it into a bloody pulp.

Khan had to go all-out to handle even the weaker monsters. He was strong, but he couldn't allow himself to commit mistakes. However, those fights couldn't make the higher-ups sweat. They easily handled multiple mutated creatures and their abilities at the same time without ever stopping their advance.

The leaders of the two factions did most of the work. The two Lieutenants, the Chiefs, the soldiers, and the other Niqols in the group rarely had the chance to do much.

They tried to help multiple times, but their leaders ended up killing their targets before they could even reach them. The Lieutenants and the other soldiers wanted to show off a bit in front of Yeza, but they never got a chance to shine since Captain Erbair and the enchanting Niqols were simply too strong.

Iris lost the desire to complain. She remained stunned in front of that sheer display of power. It was rare to see higher-ups fight, but the sight was spectacular, and knowing that they weren't using the entirety of their abilities made everything even more surreal.

Yeza and Captain Erbair weren't even close to being human in terms of the power that they wielded. They were goddesses of war who were having fun among monsters putting their lives on the line to take them down.

Liiza felt Khan's hug tightening while he remained captivated by that scene. She raised her eyes only to see how a deep resolve had appeared on his face.

The power revealed by the two leaders was his goal, at least one of his first goals. Khan knew that Captain Erbair was only a third-level warrior and mage, which meant that beings stronger than her existed in the world. Many of them were potential threats, and the Nak were among those.

"[I'm not watching your mother]," Khan explained without moving his gaze from the battle when he felt Liiza's gaze on him.

"[I know]," Liiza sighed before resuming her snuggling. "[That power suits you. You will obtain it in no time]."

"[Of course he will]," Ilman shouted from behind the couple as he approached the two to pat Khan's shoulder. "[We will reach the peak of our respective worlds]."

"[Ilman, this was kind of a romantic moment]," Khan scolded, but Ilman ignored him to focus on Liiza, who looked at him from behind Khan's shoulder.

"[My condolences for Zama]," Ilman announced in a serious tone while performing a deep bow. "[Your Aduns deserves the loudest party that The Pure Trees can offer]."

Both Khan and Liiza remained stunned in front of that serious statement. Liiza even sniffed before performing a respectful nod to show her appreciation.

"[Also, for what it's worth, I'm happy that you have found someone who can make you smile]," Ilman continued. "[I'm even happier that the honor went to Khan. You couldn't find a better human or Niqols]."

"[You are making me blush now]," Khan joked, but Liiza pulled his hair to make him shut up.

"[Thank you, Ilman]," Liiza responded. "[I'm sorry I couldn't give you what you wanted]."

"[Nonsense]," Ilman contradicted. "[You more than anyone else deserve happiness, and I'm glad that Khan can give it to you]."

Ilman took a few steps back to return among the crowd watching the higher-ups, and the couple watched him getting too far away to hear their comments.

"[He isn't a bad guy]," Khan said while focusing on Liiza to see if that interaction had improved her mood.

"[He is cute]," Liiza commented before wearing a faint playful smile at the jealousy that flashed in Khan's eyes.

Liiza approached her mouth to Khan's ear as he turned to look at the battlefield again and whispered words that sounded far more captivating than the scenes unfolding in his vision. "[Don't forget that nothing can stop us from sleeping together now. Can I ask you not to leave me alone at least tonight]?"

Liiza appeared almost scared to ask that favor. Her suppressed begging tone made Khan give up on any training he had planned for when Yeza brought the students to a safe location. His girlfriend needed him, and he wouldn't deny her his company.

The two ended up exchanging a long kiss without bothering to worry about their surroundings. The higher-ups seemed on the verge of defeating all the monsters by themselves since those creatures kept charging at them. It was hard to feel in danger when Yeza and Captain Erbair made giant lizards explode every time they moved.

Similar thoughts spread among the rest of the group. They might not need to abandon the valley if everything continued to progress so smoothly. Still, both students and recruits ignored something that only those with vast knowledge of monsters could guess.

The mutated Tainted animals were usually quite independent, especially those that managed to develop abilities. They created packs to improve their hunts, but they would never charge toward certain death. Their survival instincts would prevent that.

Nevertheless, the monsters kept charging at Yeza and Captain Erbair recklessly without caring for their lives. Their dead companions had already shown them how the two warriors were unbeatable at their level, but they continued to shoot toward them as if driven by an unreasonable hunger.

It turned out that hunger wasn't their drive. The mutated Lysixi were attacking out of fear of something that showed its face only when the pack had almost disappeared.

A mountain right behind the palace opened into two parts before revealing a massive cavity that contained countless mutated Lysixi. Those creatures came out of their lair to storm the valley and uncovered a pair of shining dark-grey reptilian eyes that made all the snow in the area light up as their glow intensified.

The event made the entire valley tremble. The snow started to move on its own and generated multiple avalanches that threatened to submerge the dark-green plains among the mountains.

A primordial aura that everyone could sense also spread from the mountain with the massive crack as a giant set of claws came out of its dark insides. Those talons appeared as big as the short buildings behind the palace.

Chapter 196 - Lucky

The atmosphere in the area went from relaxed to chaotic. Only a few seconds had passed between the appearance of the new opponents and the avalanches. Still, that time had been enough to make everyone in the valley understand that the situation had changed drastically.

The danger carried by the incoming avalanches paled in front of the primordial aura radiated by the giant creature inside the mountain. The valley was big, and the students were quite distant from the palace, but they felt that suffocating pressure as if it were right on them.

The Chiefs, the Lieutenants, and the other soldiers finally had the chance to show their power since Yeza and Captain Erbair turned toward the new threat to show their surprise. The two leaders had also believed to be almost over with that crisis, but the world was ready to throw far more at them.

Khan didn't know how to react to the giant mutated Lysixi coming out of the mountain. He had almost grown used to sensing monsters, but the new creature made a chill run down his spine.

The giant creature seemed to be far stronger than its peers. It even appeared to control the large pack of Lysixi. Khan felt almost sure that the new threat couldn't be a simple monster.

Khan glanced at the Niqols before moving his eyes on the squad leaders, but his inspection left him disappointed. Everyone was as stunned as him, which revealed how his companions were also unaware of the nature of that new threat.

Only the higher-ups could have answers to his doubts, but they were too busy to gaze at their underlings. They didn't take long to vanquish the monsters already around them, but they couldn't divert their attention when the sea of lizards was about to descend toward them.

"[Ilman]?" Khan shouted during that desperate moment since he was the only Niqols who could react quick enough to the scene.

"[I don't know]," Ilman replied as he kept his wide eyes on the giant creature coming out of the mountain.

Khan tightened his grip on Liiza's back and lifted her a bit. He was ready to run away at full speed if the situation turned out to be too much, even for the higher-ups. He also had to decide what to do quickly since the avalanches were about to submerge everyone.

Remaining in the valley wasn't an option. Khan could run away, but he didn't know where. He had memorized the path crossed during the flight, but that only confirmed how lost he was.

An azure halo suddenly shone among the group. The sudden radiance startled the students awake and made them pick the cubes in their robes. Khan's device had also lit up, and he didn't hesitate to touch it to establish the mental connection.

"[Go here without us]," Yeza's voice resounded in Khan's head, and a detailed map accompanied it.

The map described many areas and had far more details than any other mental image Khan had ever received. He could even zoom in a specific location to inspect its general environment.

A distant location had a mark that made it stand out from the rest of the areas. Khan could vaguely guess that it would take the group half a day to fly there, but getting on the Aduns was impossible in that situation.

Still, Yeza's orders were clear. The students had to leave the higher-ups in the valley and reach the safe location on their own. It seemed that the new threat was too much even for the leaders.

"[Hop on my back]," Khan whispered while relaxing his grip on Liiza's back.

Liiza didn't complain. She quickly went behind Khan and jumped on his back. Similar scenes happened among the other Niqols as Doku announced the contents of the mental message. The students knew each other's abilities quite well, so they didn't hesitate to rely on the fastest among the group if their speed weren't good enough for the task.

"Let us be in the lead with you," Felicia interrupted the Niqols and Khan, who had already turned toward the direction of the safe location. "We can handle snow."

A fireball appeared on Felicia's palm, and that simple gesture convinced the Niqols. Khan, Ilman, Doku, and the four squad leaders stepped in front of the group before gazing at the glowing avalanches ready to sweep them.

The group was on the right side of the gorge. They only had to run past the avalanches to reach a safe spot where to wait for their Aduns, but the glowing dark-grey snow carried an ominous aura as it approached the group.

Only a few seconds separated the group from the snow. Khan prepared himself to deploy everything he had achieved with the Lightning-demon style to run over the avalanche, but he didn't feel too confident in the task.

Khan was strong and fast, but he was in front of a tall wall of snow under the control of a monster that even the leaders had to take seriously. He could jump and rely on light steps, but his opponent remained a natural calamity that didn't give him many options.

"We'll open a path," Felicia announced. "The priority is to remain on the plain. Don't fall."

Gulps and deep breaths resounded as the rumbling noises of the incoming snow intensified. The clash was a few seconds away, but everyone remained still.

Then, Felicia and Ryan launched their spells. A large fireball and a large gale shot forward and clashed with the glowing avalanche. The two attacks pierced the snow and created a conical opening in that calamity, but those two attacks only opened a path where the group could jump.

Liiza hid her face on Khan's back when she sensed that his body tensed up. What followed was too intense for her to feel it clearly. A heavy pressure fell on her arms and legs since she had wrapped them around Khan's neck and waist, and her gown broke in many spots due to the friction generated with the air.

Khan flew. He mustered the entirety of his strength to jump forward and use the opening created by the squad leaders to gain some ground over the overwhelming avalanche. He did his best to remain in the air as long as possible, but he eventually fell on the glowing snow and used his quick steps to fight against the force pushing him toward the gorge.

The rest of the group couldn't even come close to performing as well as Khan. Ilman and those capable of surpassing the tall avalanche jumped on that glowing snow but ended up falling prey to its raging momentum.

Other students and recruits exploited the opening created by the squad leaders to run inside the avalanche for a while, but the snow eventually trapped them in its unstoppable grip.

The avalanche pushed almost everyone backward, and someone inevitably fell inside the gorge. Khan was barely maintaining his balance on that slippery and unstable surface, so he couldn't keep track of what was happening behind him. Yet, Liiza could look behind her now that his speed had fallen, and she saw many familiar faces disappearing among the glowing snow.

The avalanche appeared never-ending. Khan continued to leap forward, but the snow under his feet moved in the opposite direction, so he ended up losing ground instead of gaining it. Still, he did his best to limit that trend, and a deep sigh escaped his mouth when everything around him stopped flowing toward the gorge.

"[Khan]," Liiza pleaded as she released her grasp to jump off him, but Khan promptly bent forward to make her remain on his back.

Liiza shot a confused glance toward him, but her expression darkened when he saw his cold expression. The couple didn't need words to express their intentions in that situation. Khan was telling her how he wouldn't let her go until they were in a safe area.

Liiza couldn't complain, but she felt better when Khan turned to help the survivors. The squad leaders, Ilman, and a few Niqols had managed to remain on the new surface, but everyone else was under that thick layer of snow.

The avalanche had turned the valley into a dark-grey glowing spectacle. The gorge was large enough to remain visible, and the bridges had also survived the calamity, but almost everything else had ended up submerged by the snow.

The castle was too tall to fall prey to the calamity, and a relatively large area around the higher-ups had remained untouched by the snow. However, none of those strong warriors dared to divert their eyes from the many lizards approaching them.

The giant leader had even disappeared inside the snow. The suffocating pressure that had filled the valley had vanished after the creature used the glowing material under its control to hide its presence.

Khan only allowed himself to perform a quick inspection of the area before focusing on his group. The snow made it hard for him to sense the students and recruits hidden under the surface, but he helped everyone he could and even spent some time digging in the spots where he felt something.

Many had ended up surviving the calamity, and Khan could only rejoice at that sight. He heaved a relieved sigh whenever a familiar face came out of the snow, but his anxiety intensified as time passed.

The giant leader didn't come out even if the higher-ups had started fighting the horde of lizards. Khan didn't know whether the creature was waiting for an opening or was misleading everyone. Still, he didn't want to remain in the area long enough to find out.

Some recruits and students remained missing no matter how deeply those who had reached the surface dug. Khan and those who had some experience with tragedies inevitably exchanged understanding gazes after they spent a whole minute without finding anyone else.

The situation was still tense, so many failed to understand how tragic everything was. The Niqols didn't have problems accepting what had happened, but the recruits struggled to accept that some of their friends were still missing.

Someone had to force them to move. Doku, Ilman, Azni, and the other Niqols naturally glanced at Khan in the hope that he could handle that issue, but he had no power over those recruits. A few of them probably respected him enough to follow his directives right away, but he didn't have the time or the authority to command the others.

Only the squad leaders were in the position to force the recruits to move, but they didn't get the chance to use their authority since a massive figure suddenly came out of the snow. The suffocating pressure returned as a giant reptilian mouth pierced the surface and ate two recruits who had been busy searching for their missing companions.

Khan almost remained frozen in fear as the monster revealed its giant body while gulping the two humans. It didn't manage to make the second recruit enter its mouth completely, but its teeth severed the girls' right leg and made it fall on the snow.

Everyone panicked. The giant monster had appeared among the group, and its glowing eyes revealed how the two recruits didn't satisfy its hunger. Those reptilian organs inspected its potential targets coldly and noticed that some of them had already started running away.

Khan and the Niqols knew where they had to go, so they didn't hesitate to run toward the mountains. The squad leaders, and envoys, and some other humans who managed to overcome their fears chased after them, but the monster didn't remain still either.

The glow radiated by the snow intensified as its texture changed. Khan was relying on his faint steps, but his feet fell inside the surface after the monster changed it to trap the group inside its hunting area.

The snow went from incredibly soft to solid in an instant. Khan saw his right foot digging the surface before remaining stuck inside it. No amount of strength allowed him to break free of that prison. He couldn't leave the area, and his thoughts immediately went on the girl on his back when he accepted that he had no power over his situation.

"[I'm going to throw you]," Khan announced while taking Liiza's wrists and forcing her to break the grip on his neck.

"[What]?" Liiza asked in surprise.

Liiza had yet to realize how desperate the situation was, but Khan's announcement made her understand that everyone who had touched the snow was dead. Even Felicia's fireballs appeared unable to melt the surface that was keeping her feet locked in an unbreakable grip.

"[No, no]!" Liiza complained. "[Don't you dare to throw me]!"

Khan pretended to be deaf to Liiza's complaints. Truth be told, his physical strength wasn't something that she could match. He could force her legs to leave his waist easily, and his girlfriend soon appeared in his arms.

Khan was ready to use that time to give Liiza a chance to survive. Almost nothing could make him stop, but his girlfriend knew him too well by then. Liiza took Khan's face in her hands and fixed her glowing eyes on him before voicing a simple request in a firm voice. "[Khan, let me die with you]."

Almost nothing could stop Khan, but those words made his determination waver. He was suppressing his fear of death to prioritize Liiza's well-being, but she shared his feelings. She didn't want to lose her Aduns and her boyfriend on the same day.

"[Liiza]," Khan said in a begging tone, but she promptly shook her head.

"[We have been incredibly lucky]," Liiza smiled as faint tears appeared on the corners of her eyes. "[Don't add pain to my love]."

Khan wanted to ignore her request, but even the mental barrier failed to remain in its place in front of Liiza loving expression. He could only heave a helpless sigh before pulling her mouth closer to his lips. In his mind, death couldn't be too bad if it arrived after sharing a long kiss with his girlfriend.

"[Stop wasting time]," Yeza's voice suddenly resounded in the area, and everyone snapped out of their desperation to turn toward the giant monster.

An azure halo had created a cubical prison around the monster. The cage had come out of the plain hidden by the snow and had trapped the giant lizard, but its glowing surfaces weren't strong enough to survive the creature's physical strength.

Cracks opened on the azure prison whenever the giant lizard slammed its head and claws on those shining surfaces. It was clear that the cage wouldn't last long, but it still gained enough time for Yeza and a few higher-ups to reach that area.

"[Move, move]!" Yeza shouted, and the group suddenly discovered that the snow wasn't trapping their feet anymore.

Khan didn't hesitate to hold Liiza tightly and shot forward. The same went for the other students and recruits who finally found a chance to escape. Everyone left the area quickly, but Yeza made sure to shout one last announcement before they got too far away. "[Khan, take care of my daughter]."

Chapter 197 - Concerns

Khan didn't think about the deeper meaning of Yeza's words right away. She had decided to shout that announcement, which basically forced the humans to accept his relationship. Still, the situation was so dangerous that his mind stored her voice in the back of his mind and prepared itself to release it only when he reached a safe area.

Everyone shared the same mindset. The valley's defenses had managed to buy the group some time, and the higher-ups were bound to do the same. Still, the avalanche and the giant monster had already inflicted casualties, so the students didn't dare to remain in the area any longer.

The recruits and squad leaders followed after those who had learnt where the safe area was. Khan was in the lead far in front of them, but he turned to check that everyone was following him from time to time. The fact that Liiza was in his arms didn't affect his movements at all.

A deep bellow resounded throughout the valley when the giant monster broke free of the azure cage. Yeza and many higher-ups had reached the creature's position by then, but Khan took that event as the time to stop worrying about others.

Ilman, Doku, George, and those who were important to Khan were in safer positions already. Liiza was even in his arms, so he could ignore everything else. The priority was to cross the mountains, and he accelerated to reach that destination faster.

Khan didn't summon the entirety of his speed since Liiza was in an odd position. She was in his arms, in front of him, so she would suffer too much if he went all-out. Still, he became fast enough to leave his companions behind.

The sterile environment of the mountains soon unfolded in his vision. Snow filled the areas and sides of those tall structures, but the region remained unfamiliar even with the map in his mind.

Khan moved forward until he couldn't see the valley anymore. His senses searched for every trace of danger around him, but everything appeared empty. He couldn't find monsters or other threats, so he advanced until Liiza pulled his hair.

"[This is enough]," Liiza explained as Khan slowed down to hear her voice. "[No monster can see the Aduns from here]."

Khan nodded before stopping completely. He could vaguely see the figures of his companions in the distance, and he heaved a sigh of relief when familiar faces appeared in his vision.

It took only a few minutes for the entirety of the group to gather in the uneven spot among the mountains where Khan had stopped. The group of students and recruits had lost a quarter of its members, but everyone was still too shocked to think about the event.

No words resounded among the group. They didn't dare to waste time after having escaped from such a dangerous situation. Everyone used their mental connections to summon their Aduns while exchanging meaningful glances.

Many eyes ended up on Khan. His interactions with Liiza still left almost everyone stunned. Both students and recruits couldn't understand how the two could reach such a level of ease.

However, the Niqols could see something deeper than simple feelings in the simple gestures that the couple exchanged. They gasped at how carefully Khan let Liiza on the snow. Faint smiles appeared on their faces when they saw the two looking at each other with eyes that carried many words. They would toast at that evident show of love if it weren't for their tragic situation.

The humans had it a bit harder, especially when it came to the squad leaders. They didn't ignore Yeza's announcement. Actually, they had understood its meaning thoroughly. The alien ambassador in charge of the relationship between the two species had officially acknowledged Khan and Liiza as a couple.

Paul had told Khan to consider Liiza as a princess during his first days on Nitis, so that announcement had turned him into a prince. Khan was more than untouchable now. He had become the pillar on which the humans had to build that political relationship.

"How bad is our luck?" George cursed while nearing Khan. "This is the second time already. I'm starting to believe that everything is my fault."

Khan smiled when he saw George and Havaa holding each other's hands. The girl even clung to George's arms once he stopped in front of his friend.

"It must be me," Khan stated while pointing at the azure scar visible from the opening of his robe. "I have one tragedy more than you."

Liiza slapped Khan's chest before glaring at him. Those depressing rants made her angry, but he didn't hesitate to caress her cheek and bring her closer to his chest. Liiza would have usually made it harder for him, but her grief was too intense that day.

"So," George cleared his throat while looking at that scene, "This explains a lot."

"I didn't want to keep us hidden," Khan explained, "Not from you at least."

"Don't worry," George shook his head. "I understand completely. I'm happy for you, both of you."

"I didn't expect Yeza to approve you so quickly," Azni commented while approaching the two couples with Doku.

"[She has seen them together]," Doku added. "[Who can even be against them after that]?"

"Khan, we need to talk," Paul announced while the couples gathered.

Khan glanced at Paul. He was with the squad leaders, among the other recruits, and the four wore stern expressions. It seemed that they wanted to use that peaceful moment while they waited for the Aduns to talk about the matter.

"Now?" Khan asked.

"We have to set a few things clear," Paul announced.

Khan sighed before kissing Liiza's head and breaking his embrace to move toward the human group. Yet, Liiza didn't let him go. She took his hand to wrap his hand around her waist so that they could approach the squad leaders together.

"[This might be classified]," Khan whispered.

"[I was ready to die with you]," Liiza reminded. "[Do you think I would care about the regulations of your species]?"

Khan wanted to contradict her, but he felt that no words could work. Liiza's expression had never been so resolute. She had lost Zama, but her mother had acknowledged her relationship. Khan had basically become her whole world, and she had no intention to leave him alone.

Moreover, Liiza had understood the situation far better than Khan. She was the daughter of an ambassador. She knew how influential Yeza's name was, and she could use part of that power in front of the humans.

"What is it?" Khan asked once he reached Paul.

The squad leaders remained at Paul's side to let him handle the conversation. Brandon, Kelly, and the other envoys were right behind them, while the other recruits were further behind.

"I hoped we could remain alone for a while," Paul said in an awkward tone while forcing himself not to look at Liiza. "This issue is something that concerns humanity as a whole."

"Are you trying to separate me from my man?" Liiza asked in a cold tone and perfect human accent.

Khan, the Niqols, and the humans shot surprised expressions toward Liiza. They had never heard her talking like that. Paul and the other squad leaders started to worry about the political consequences that their next words could cause.

"[We wouldn't dare]," Paul eventually uttered while performing a deep bow.

Paul pointed at a spot nearby, and a small group moved there. The squad leaders, the envoys, Khan, and Liiza walked among the snowy environment and separated from their companions to have that private conversation.

The Niqols and the students let themselves go a bit now that their leaders weren't on the scene. The aliens didn't suffer many casualties since they had developed better instincts throughout the years spent hunting. Still, their intense emotions made them unable to ignore the companions lost during the crisis.

The recruits were worse off. They had gone through losses only recently due to their battles near the teleport, so they had yet to grow used to the event.

Sobs and sniffs resounded now that students and recruits had the time to realize how much they had lost during those short minutes. They did their best to suppress their grief, but tears inevitably fell.

"Do you have any preference about the language, Miss Liiza?" Paul asked once the group stopped in a slightly distant spot.

"Speak your language," Liiza ordered. "My presence here must not risk causing misunderstanding among you."

Khan shot another surprised glance toward Liiza. She had never been involved in political situations, and it felt strange to see her caring so much about the issue. Still, he had to admit that he liked seeing her using her authority to order his superiors around.

Paul felt awkward about the situation, but he took a deep breath before stating the nature of the topic. "Your relationship arises concerns. We want to confirm that your loyalty is still in the right place."

Liiza opened her mouth to complain, but Khan promptly pulled her closer to interrupt her. His eyes went on the other recruits before revealing a sad smile and giving the best answer that the restrictions allowed him to say. "Do you have any idea what we had to do in the academy?"

Paul frowned, but he noticed that the envoys lowered their heads when Khan made them recall the scenes in the village. Fighting monsters was far better than what they had to see there.

Khan relaxed his grip on Liiza, and she understood that her time to speak had come. Her expression turned dark as she gave a brief explanation of what had happened during the solar wind. "The Niqols have a harder time dealing with emotions, and the sunlight for a few months ago has taken us by surprise."

An azure symbol appeared on the side of her neck near the end of her explanation, but she stopped speaking before triggering the punishment. She couldn't add other details, but the squad leaders could fill the gaps by themselves.

Paul and the others had kept the solar wind a secret, so they knew what it could cause on the unprepared Niqols. Yet, they didn't expect the aliens to send the envoys to clean up the mess. Learning about that actually made them feel awful, and Ryan even had to cover his mouth to suppress retches.

"I'm still here after everything," Khan continued. "What else do I have to prove?"

The squad leaders couldn't muster the strength to say anything. None of them dared to question Khan's loyalty. His explanation didn't solve their doubts, but they didn't feel right questioning someone who had given the Global Army so much already.

Screeches resounded among the sky during that sad silence. Everyone glanced at the sky and showed broad smiles at the sight of many Aduns approaching the area. Only Liiza kept her face hidden in Khan's chest, and he made sure to hold her tightly during the event.

The Aduns were the kings of the sky. The group would be safe after hopping on their backs. The tragic events from before were about to turn into nothing more than a bad memory, but a breathtaking event diverted everyone's attention from the pack of eagles.

Nitis' orbit was peculiar, and the same went for its atmosphere. Khan didn't know how everything worked during the crisis, but he was sure that the sun would have eventually appeared in the sky. Still, he didn't expect that to happen so suddenly.

A blinding yellow sphere suddenly became visible in the sky. It started as a bright spot in the azure spectacle right above the group, but it quickly transformed into a sight that the humans found familiar.

The sun didn't rise. It suddenly became visible among the sky, and its intense light blinded the incoming Aduns. Those creatures cried in pain as that radiance filled their eyes and forced them to change their trajectory.

The eagles stopped flying toward the group to hide from the new light that filled the sky, and Khan remained speechless when he felt the mental connection growing thin. He found himself unable to contact Snow now that the sun had appeared.

Chapter 198 - Path

The appearance of the sun swept away the hope that had spread among the group. The Aduns would have solved every problem, but they turned out to be unable to withstand the intense light radiated by that flaming star.

Khan didn't know how to react to that scene. He tried to call Snow through the mental connection, but his words couldn't reach the other side. A barrier had appeared between his Aduns and him, and no amount of mental shouting could get past it.

Khan instinctively looked at the Niqols, but they appeared as surprised as him. They didn't expect the sun to hinder the mental connections with the Aduns. They didn't even predict that the creatures would have been unable to withstand that radiance.

"What is happening?" Felicia asked while moving her gaze among the group, but she found no one with answers.

Felicia, the other squad leaders, and those who managed to study the situation without letting panic take over their minds could understand what was happening. That conclusion wasn't even too hard to reach. It simply was too stunning and depressing.

The Aduns were an essential part of the Niqols' lives and society. The humans on Nitis had also learnt to appreciate how valuable those creatures were after the aliens had allowed them to go through the taming test.

Those eagles were one of the few stable assets during the crisis, but the arrival of the sun had changed that fact. Khan and his group found themselves on foot now. Their path to salvation had vanished in a matter of seconds.

Khan quickly touched his cube. The map appeared in his mind, and he tried to calculate how long it would take to reach the safe area on foot. He struggled to come up with an accurate estimate, but he could guess that the travel would take entire days, if not a couple of weeks.

The monsters on the path were another issue that Khan couldn't ignore. The past weeks spent hunting had taught him how messy Nitis had become. The group was bound to find multiple packs during the travel, and eventual alternate paths would only stretch their stay in the wild.

Still, Khan didn't see other options. The Aduns were unavailable, and the Lysixi had clearly turned against the Niqols. The aliens probably had other methods to cross long distances, but he believed that everything had become unrealizable after the arrival of the sun.

"[Liiza]," Khan whispered in the hope that his girlfriend could tell him something that he didn't know.

Liiza had studied the scene after hearing the painful cries of the Aduns. The situation was tragic, and she was as lost as everyone else in the group. Yet, she knew who could help.

Liiza took her cube and started a mental conversation. Other Niqols did the same to contact some members of their tribes, and Khan inspected their faces to see if he could hope again. He mostly saw dark expressions, but he turned to look at Liiza when he sensed her eyes on him.

"[Zaza can't help right away, but she will try to meet us]," Liiza announced while placing the cube on the snow.

The device spread its light on the dark-grey surface and recreated the map. The humans could finally study how distant the safe area was, and desperation inevitably appeared on their faces at the sole thought that they had to cross so much on foot.

Liiza stepped on the map and used her feet to point at each checkpoint stated by Zalpa during their mental conversation. "[We have to cross the mountain chain, the lakes, and the marsh to meet Zaza. Getting to the safe area should be easy once joining her]."

The path marked by Liiza went a bit off track. It didn't go directly toward the safe area, but Khan didn't dare to underestimate the help that Zalpa could offer. She probably was as strong as Yeza, and her knowledge of the crisis was far deeper than the rest of the Niqols.

"[Zaza]?" Iris asked.

"She is an ally," Khan shortly explained without moving his eyes from the map. "I suggest you call her Zalpa. She doesn't like humans too much."

"Why should we trust her then?" Paul asked while stepping on the map to mark the quickest path to the safe location on the snow. "We would lose many days of travel if we decide to follow this new path."

"She knew that the sunlight would have caused a mess even before humans," Liiza coldly explained. "She probably is the best expert when it comes to this situation."

"Why wasn't she with Ambassador Yeza then?" Felicia continued.

"Her position toward humans doesn't suit the new ways adopted by the Niqols," Khan gave another short explanation.

"Why would she even help us then?" Paul wondered. "I won't put what remains of our forces here in the hands of a xenophobic alien."

"How come you even know about all of this?" Kelly joined the conversation. "Why didn't you tell us about such an important figure?"

Khan wore an aloof expression while moving his eyes among the squad leaders and the envoys. Even Veronica was wearing a confused expression. It was clear that Khan didn't only keep his relationship with Liiza a secret. That realization even made sense when considering all the nights that he had spent outside the academy.

"She was my nanny," Liiza intervened. "I wanted her to know Khan, but I made him promise not to say anything since her situation is unique."

Liiza wasn't as good as Khan when it came to lies, but her cold expression and the authority coming from Yeza prevented eventual questions. The squad leaders accepted that the matter involved the

couple. Also, Liiza had vaguely hinted at how close she was with Zalpa with her announcement. That explained why the humans could trust that unknown ally.

Paul and the other squad leaders fell silent as they inspected the map. The path marked by Liiza would make them lose a few days of travel, but they would end up gaining from that detour if they added an actual expert to their group.

"Do any of you know what these areas have in store for us?" Iris asked while looking at Liiza.

"We usually fly over these empty regions," Liiza shook her head.

"Walking blindly isn't ideal," Ryan commented.

"We would walk blindly anyway," Felicia stated.

"We can still wait here," Paul suggested while looking at the sun high in the sky as a hand partially covered his eyes. "The Aduns might come back, and the same goes for our superiors."

"My mother wouldn't lose the chance to show off," Liiza explained. "The monster must be powerful for her to send us in the wild on our own."

"She probably didn't expect the Aduns to fly away," Paul continued, but Liiza shook her head.

"We must walk," Liiza exclaimed before storing her cube and glancing at Khan.

"You heard her," Khan said as he reached Liiza to take her back into his arms.

"Khan," Paul called to discuss the matter a bit more.

"That thing can hide in the snow," Khan promptly replied. "We are walking on snow."

The squad leaders and the envoys glanced at the snow under them while Khan resumed walking back to the rest of the group. The ground couldn't be too deep there, but the monster had shown the ability to cause avalanches. Hiding under that dark-grey layer didn't sound too impossible, so they hurried after Khan.

Khan took care of explaining the situation in both languages. The group didn't accept that decision too easily, especially after learning how long they would have to travel through the wild. Still, it was clear that they didn't have other options, so everyone eventually started moving.

The mountains remained barren even after a few hours passed. The group didn't have problems adjusting their direction with the map in their cubes, but other problems became evident as that march continued.

The snow could appease the group's thirst, but the lack of food was an issue they couldn't ignore. Khan and the squad leaders could endure their hunger better than others due to their status as first-level warriors, but they would also starve if they remained in that condition.

The issue was that the mountain chain stretched for a long time. The group would take a few days to cross it, and the absence of food would become hard to bear for some of the recruits. The Niqols would be a bit better off, but the starvation would slow down their advance anyway.

Khan, Ilman, Doku, and the squad leaders ended up in charge of the group. The Niqols and the recruits didn't complain that they made every decision, but they didn't have much to discuss to begin

with. Groans and curses resounded when they understood that they wouldn't have the chance to sleep that day, but the situation didn't give them different options.

The group spent an entire day walking among the snowy and uneven environment of the mountain chain. They had to climb and descend hills multiple times to stick to their path, and the effort only made them tired faster.

The second day of continuous travel brought most recruits to their limit. The lack of sleep, the uneven terrain, and the lack of food managed to defeat even those with a high attunement level. They could still move forward, but their leaders opted to make them rest for a few hours. They simply didn't want their underlings to be completely useless in case a battle fell on them.

"Just like Istrone," George laughed after those resilient enough to skip another night of sleep set the guard duty.

Khan smiled, and warmth appeared on his face when he saw Liiza walking toward an isolated spot near a steep rocky wall that marked the base of a mountain. She even cleared the snow on the ground before turning toward her boyfriend.

Everyone noticed that scene, and the squad leaders had to divert their gazes to avoid voicing reprimands. The spot chosen by Liiza would keep her hidden from the rest of the group and grant her some privacy. Her choice was perfect for her and Khan, but it wasn't ideal in that serious situation.

Khan ignored the squad leaders and the curious glances that the recruits shot toward him when he crossed the rocky corner and reached Liiza. The humans noticed how many Niqols did something similar, even if many had to remain visible since the area didn't offer too many hidden spots.

Liiza sat on the dark-green grass that had come out in the open after she removed the snow from the ground. She laid her back on the rocky wall as her intense eyes remained fixed on Khan. He almost lost himself in that glowing gaze, but a series of foreign presences suddenly entered the range of his senses and forced him to divert his attention.

Cawing noises filled the area and alerted everyone about the arrival of unwanted guests. Khan raised his eyes and saw a flock of big dark-red birds descending toward the group. He couldn't study them clearly since they were still far away, but his knife ended up in his hand right away.

Chapter 199 - Hunger

Each bird was as big as a man's chest. They resembled crows, but they had two pairs of wings and curved beaks. The flock filled the bright sky with a dark-red cloud that descended toward the group and prepared to storm the snowy area.

No one knew why the sunlight didn't affect those creatures, but they were too fast to let the group think about the issue. The flock was only a few seconds away from filling the area occupied by those young troops, and only a few of them could step up to face the danger. The long travel without food had made even the most resilient of them unable to stand.

Khan, Ilman, and the squad leaders exchanged a worried glance when they inspected the surface. They could see other students and recruits struggling to stand up, but they wouldn't be helpful at all in that condition.

Khan glanced at Liiza. She could also fight, but her position was odd. The flock was descending toward the crowded part of the area, and she wouldn't have the time to reach it before the initial impact.

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Liiza nodded when she saw the hesitation in Khans' eyes, and he didn't hesitate to shoot toward the friends farther away from his position. Orders also came out of his mouth during his sprint. "[Ilman, protect George and Havaa]."

The couples in the group had settled in various partially isolated spots. Doku and Azni had even found a good place where to exchange intimate moments without letting the others see them, but their area was on the path of the flock.

Khan arrived in front of them in an instant. He was ready to defend them, but the couple tried to complain. Still, they felt weak after the prolonged starvation. The birds were even on the verge of clashing with the recruits in front of them. They only had the time to stand up before the loud caws fused with painful cries.

The flock moved quickly. It only took a few seconds to reach Khan's position, but an azure halo had already covered his blade by then.

Khan kicked directly at the dark-red cloud, and his attack released a rumbling noise before clashing with the birds. Blood and feathers immediately rained toward him and hindered his vision, but nothing escaped his senses.

Two birds flew past the barrage of feathers and crossed his position to reach Doku and Azni. However, Khan continued to rotate on his rear leg as his arms spread. One monster saw the glowing knife severing its body in half, while the other ended up in Khan's grasp.

Khan didn't hesitate to rotate again to throw another kick forward. He even used that chance to launch the monster toward the cloud before waving his left arm a few times. Maimed corpses fell at his feet, but he didn't stop attacking until the bright sky unfolded in his vision again.

Doku and Azni had to deal with little to no threats due to Khan's efforts. The flock was full of monsters, but they were pretty frail. Moreover, none of them had shown abilities, so everything had been a matter of avoiding being overwhelmed.

Khan glanced at his two friends before moving his sharp eyes on the sky. A few cuts had opened on Doku and Anzi's arms, but they were superficial. Still, the flock in the distance was turning to prepare another assault. The painful cries behind him explained how effective the first attack had been, so he understood that the current tactic wouldn't work.

"[Khan]," Liiza called as she approached him.

Liiza pointed her hand at a spot behind Doku and Azni, and a wall of ice grew from the snow. The structure was only two meters tall and three meters large, but it was thick enough to endure the assault of the flock.

Liiza took deep breaths after the feat. She appeared tired, but she could remain on her feet. Doku and Azni even nodded at her to express their gratitude.

"Take cover!" Iris shouted from the other side of the group.

Ilman had sprinted to reach George and Havaa, but the squad leaders shot toward the other underlings to defend as many Niqols and humans as they could. The crow-like monsters didn't give them the time to cast spells, but their martial arts had been enough to relieve some pressure.

Khan could inspect the state of the group now that he had turned to look at Liiza. Many had suffered injuries, and some of them were quite severe. A few recruits were even lying lifelessly on the snow as pools of blood expanded from their figures.

The squad leaders had helped, but they were only four first-level warriors without their spells. They could probably fight the entire cloud of monsters on their own, but protecting the group behind them was pretty impossible.

Iris, Ryan, and Felicia prepared their spells while the recruits and Niqols tried to find cavities hidden by the snow or in corners created by the rocky walls nearby. They were ready to counterattack properly now, but that would temporarily disregard the lives of their underlings.

Khan found Ilman with his eyes, and the two exchanged a meaningful glance. George and Havaa had been in an isolated spot already, so they could find cover before the return of the flock. Ilman was free to defend those still in the open, and Khan silently agreed to do the same.

Khan jumped forward. He took Liiza by her waist and threw her toward the couple under the ice wall. Doku and Azni widened their eyes before catching the girl mid-air and moving their attention on their friend.

The couple couldn't find Khan in his previous position. He had already reached a group of recruits who had been too weak even to attempt to find cover, and Ilman was nearby, protecting a few Niqols that the snow had tricked. Those aliens had started digging after sensing a hole under them, but they had only found a short pit that didn't offer any protection.

The flock returned, and many monsters slammed on the ice wall in a desperate attempt to pierce it. The clash filled the outer surface of Liiza's spell with blood since it remained intact, and she didn't stop expanding her ice to make sure that the monsters didn't open any significant crack.

The rest of the dark-red cloud swept the area occupied by the group again. The first to face the monsters were Khan and Ilman, who unleashed a flurry of palm strikes, kicks, and slashes that managed to protect those behind them from most creatures.

The monsters reached the four squad leaders afterward, and a spectacle of lights began. Ryan gave birth to an intense wind that made the cloud stop for a second, Iris launched her piercing beam toward a crowded area, and Felicia threw fireballs everywhere else.

The discharge of those three spells killed many monsters in a single exchange. Paul only had to punch away the few birds that managed to fly past that destructive barrage. His attacks were precise and powerful. His arms resembled snakes as they cracked in the air while killing the few creatures that entered his range.

The flock couldn't advance further. It rose higher in the sky instead of forcing its way forward, but it didn't leave the area. The monsters flew toward the sun before turning to dive back at the group.

Khan and Ilman didn't know how to protect the recruits and Niqols behind them from that vertical attack. They jumped among them and prepared themselves to do their best, but the squad leaders stepped forward to place themselves right under the descending dark-red cloud during that time.

The monsters reached an insane speed and threatened to squash everything under them, but the four squad leaders didn't feel any fear. Ilman and Khan shared the same confidence, but their efforts didn't involve only their safety. Still, their worries ended up being unnecessary.

Ryan used his control over the wind to generate another spell that made the descending dark-red cloud shrink. Intense gales forced the monsters to slam on each other and slow down their advance, and Iris didn't waste that chance. She shot one of her piercing beams, and the attack crossed the flock from side to side, killing many birds at the same time.

Those who continued to descend even after that display of superior might had to deal with Felicia's fireballs. She only managed to launch three of them before the flock reached the surface, but her attacks had appeared quite effective against those feathered creatures.

Khan, Ilman, and Paul relied on their martial arts to kill as many monsters as possible after those creatures stormed the surface. Many corpses fell on the dark-grey snow that had started to melt after everything that had crashed there. That barren and pure area had turned into a bloody spectacle in a matter of minutes.

The flock dispersed in the area before flying higher in the sky. Khan and the others prepared for another wave, but they remained surprised when they saw the monsters leaving. It seemed that those creatures had given up on the hunt.

Everyone remained silent even after the flock left the area. The group wanted to be sure that they had actually won, but sighs of relief eventually started to resound. Even the squad leaders relaxed, and Khan also accepted that they had won that battle.

The faint happiness felt due to that feat didn't last since the state of the battlefield was impossible to ignore. Many dead monsters had tainted the dark-grey snow, but they couldn't hide the few corpses among them. One Niqols and three recruits had died during the sudden assault, and many more had suffered injuries that required immediate attention.

Some recruits and Niqols exploded into tears due to the casualties, but the others looked at the dead monsters with hungry eyes. Grief existed in the minds, but they couldn't think about it with their stomachs grumbling to no end.

Almost everyone remained silent out of respect for that sad moment, but Khan couldn't allow himself to waste time. The group was basically standing on top of a pile of food, which could attract other predators. The flock had found them, so the same could happen with other monsters. The new threat might be too strong for them, and it might even force them to leave the area, so eating had the priority now.

Khan picked a few birds from their legs before bringing them next to the ice wall where Doku, Azni, and Liiza had remained hidden. The couple smiled at that sight, but Liiza pouted even if Khan could read the hunger in her eyes.

"[Do you know how to cook them properly]?" Khan asked, and Doku forced himself to stand up.

"Squad leader Felicia!" Doku shouted with his weak voice while pointing at a relatively empty spot in the area. "I need your help to set off a fire. Can you help?"

The woman initially felt surprised, but she eventually nodded and approached Doku. The two started preparing the fire to cook those monsters in no time while the other squad leaders handled the issue about the corpses.

"[You have thrown me]," Liiza complained when Khan sat next to her and let the coldness of the ice wall spreading throughout his back before taking her into his arms.

"[It was quick]," Khan explained before mocking her a bit, "[And fun]."

"[You are lucky to be cute]," Liiza snorted before cuddling on Khan's lap and closing her eyes.

"[Thank you, Khan]," Azni exclaimed after Liiza finished teasing Khan.

"[I'm glad you are okay]," Khan announced. "[Everything is already quite grim. I would have found it hard to bear all of this if something happened to you]."

"[I suspect someone would have helped you getting through that]," Azni smiled while glancing at Liiza half-sleeping in his arms.

Khan caressed Liiza's hair before focusing on the squad leaders. He had obtained another demonstration of how strong spells were, which intensified his desire to get his hands on the Wave spell. Still, the scent of roasted chicken soon reached his nostrils, and every complicated thought vanished in front of his hunger.

Chapter 200 - Shout

Everything improved only to worsen again. Felicia and Doku made sure to refill everyone's stomach. Khan, Iman, and the squad leaders had killed many monsters, so the entirety of the group got the chance to appease their hunger. Yet, the lack of that distraction allowed them to focus on what they had just survived and lost.

The calm achieved after scaring away the flock forced the recruits to acknowledge their new situation. They had gone from fighting to defend the teleport to a struggle for their very survival. The battles had been part of a mission before, but everything was different now.

The crisis didn't differ between the species.. It killed both humans and Niqols without caring about their status, wealth, and origin. Only power mattered in the wild, and it became clear how the aliens were one step above the recruits in that field.

The recruits weren't only generally inferior in terms of sheer battle prowess and experience. The casualties suffered by the group also affected them deeply, which sounded strange when the Niqols experienced stronger emotions. Those young humans had not been used to death, but the crisis quickly educated them in that field.

Moreover, the recruits had seen Niqols helping them without minding their different species. That sight was heartwarming, but it also originated deep regret.

The humans had learnt about the solar wind before the actual event, but they had let it happen without warning the Niqols. That cruel decision had been easy to make from their safe and distant camp, but it only caused disgust now.

The recruits had been proud about the idea of exploiting their superior knowledge to make the Niqols suffer and force them to ask the humans for help. Yet, those same Niqols were protecting and defending them now. It was hard to describe how bad the humans felt after sharing food and sleeping next to the students.

The group left the area in a hurry after eating and storing some provisions. They couldn't carry much due to the lack of backpacks and similar items, but they didn't want to end up in the previous grim situation. Still, the food issue would be over once they crossed the mountain chain, which was bound to happen the very next day.

The squad leaders prioritized leaving the battlefield to avoid meeting predators attracted by the appealing smell of the corpses. They didn't even bury the Niqols and human bodies since they could act as baits for eventual monsters.

The food didn't accomplish miracles, so the group had to sleep right after reaching a new safe area. Khan and Liiza could finally be alone for a while, but they only rested in each other's arms after finding a relatively isolated spot.

The third day of the travel finally caused a change. The mountains suddenly stopped filling the groups' vision and opened into a plain covered in snow that stretched far in the distance. The vegetation appeared scarce or hidden by the dark-grey layer, and faint winds started to blow after diving deeper into the new area.

Liiza checked the map often to make sure that the group was on the right path. It was easy to get lost in the snowy plain due to the lack of structures that the group could use as signals. They could only rely on the mountains behind them, but they were a bit too vague as a landmark.

The doubts and worries disappeared when a frozen lake appeared on their path. The group could finally confirm to be on the right way toward Zalpa, but they still needed to inspect the area thoroughly and compare what they learnt with their maps to understand where they were.

It turned out that the group was slightly off the planned course, but adjusting it wouldn't be a problem. They would only lose a few hours of travel, which were nothing when they thought about how distant they were from their destination.

The temperature rose as the group continued their march. Dark-green grass replaced the snow, and small bushes also grew near the shores of the other lakes that appeared on the path.

The environment didn't feature animals in its frozen areas, but Tainted creatures started to appear once the snow retreated. However, most of them lived inside the lakes and couldn't breathe outside. Even the few monsters that the group found shared that feature.

The group initially felt safe since the monsters couldn't leave the lakes, but the lack of water became an issue they couldn't ignore after spending two days traveling in the area. Even the food became scarce and forced the squad leaders to come up with plans to fish out the Tainted animals and monsters.

The emptiness of the areas outside the lakes hinted at how dangerous the monsters inside the lakes were. The environment was far from barren, so it didn't make sense for packs to ignore it. The

group didn't find anything on the surface, so something had to make it uninhabitable, and only the creatures in the water could succeed in that feat.

The creatures that occupied the lakes could be strong enough to prevent other packs from appeasing their thirst, but humans and Niqols were far smarter than monsters. Also, the group could coordinate their spells and approach the hunt safely.

The lakes mainly contained an odd species of fishes capable of changing the color of their scales to hide inside the dark waters. Some Niqols recognized them, but the presence of monsters made their knowledge unreliable due to the abilities that those creatures might have developed.

Still, the group didn't need to learn the nature of those abilities. The lakes didn't hide the presence of the monsters, and those creatures weren't even too big, so Iris could slowly take them out with precise beams aimed at their heads.

Liiza also helped by freezing large chunks of the targeted lake whenever the monsters tried to send their Tainted underlings toward the group on the shores. Felicia and Ryan supported her in the process, so no one risked facing dangers.

The lake chosen by the group was relatively small since they aimed to clear it completely. The hunt provided more food and water, and it also told the squad leaders that they could repeat the process throughout that region as long as they continued to pick small targets.

The barren mountain chain had exhausted the group, but the travel through the plain filled with lakes restored their physical condition. Both Niqols and students could rest and eat quite freely, and the lack of dangers on the surface allowed them to ignore the constant pressure that surrounded them.

That peaceful period ended as the vegetation started to thrive and the lakes expanded to transform into a large marsh that featured multiple muddy areas. The change in the environment made the group enter in the last part of their travel, but it also brought their mindset back into the crisis.

It had taken the group many days to reach the marsh. They had already entered their second week of travel, but everything could potentially end after crossing that region. Liiza even contacted Zalpa to confirm that she was on her way to meet them. The last struggle separated students and recruits, so tension inevitably fell on them again.

That marsh differed from the region that Liiza and Khan had almost started to view as their personal home. It almost completely lacked stable areas. Mud and dirty water covered the entirety of its surfaces, and a few giant trees occupied sparse spots. Those plants had dark trunks as large as buildings, and their roots spread for many meters before going underground.

The water reached the group's knees in many areas. The roots that spread on the surface also hindered the travel, but the trees could act as signals since the maps had marked them.

The travel inevitably slowed down due to the many hindrances that the environment put in front of the group. Still, the monsters remained the main threat. Packs of snakes and leeches filled the shallow dirty waters. Some of those mutated creatures had even developed abilities, but they couldn't do much when Khan and the others were at their peak.

The trees started to appear more often as the group trod forward, and patches of ground began to replace the mud and dirty water. The destination was finally in sight. They would meet Zalpa in the

strange forest past the marsh, but an unexpected event happened when they entered their last day of travel.

Khan, Liiza, and Zaliha were the first to notice multiple presences quite close to their position. They would have normally changed direction in front of such a numerous group, but they decided to walk toward them since the source of that mana came from Niqols.

The other group did the same when it sensed those potential allies. Almost thirty familiar Niqols appeared in front of Khan once the two teams met. Those aliens were the servants who had worked in the valley. Khan even recognized someone that he had only seen during the meeting with Yeza.

'His name should be Zura,' Khan thought while glancing at the middle-aged Niqols in the lead of the other group.

Zura had been the servant who had given Khan the warm change of clothes after he stabbed his own leg. His presence made Khan reevaluate how joyful that meeting was since it forced him to recall Yeza's comment about the xenophobic Niqols.

"[This is a fortuitous meeting]," Zura bowed once the two groups got close enough to talk.

The Niqols wore the same blank face that Khan had seen in the palace, but his gestures were polite enough to put the squad leaders in a good mood. The other aliens behind him also bowed to greet the other group and built a friendly atmosphere in mere seconds.

"[It's nice to meet allies for once]," Ilman announced while performing a bow, and the squad leaders imitated him after voicing polite greetings.

Khan also performed a bow, but he didn't say anything in that situation. Still, he didn't miss the curious and surprised glances that converged in his position when Liiza took his hand to wrap his arm around her waist.

Many didn't hear Yeza's announcement, especially the servants who had remained inside the palace during the outburst of monsters. The relationship between Khan and Liiza was a surprising event which her political position highlighted.

Liiza didn't care about her legacy, but the same didn't go for the other Niqols. She remained part of her mother's tribe, with claims on her position as ambassador. Yeza was even a unique figure in the social and political environments, so Liiza's partner was an important topic for some aliens, especially those loyal to the old ways.

Liiza didn't consider that her actions could cause problems. Yeza had acknowledged her relationship, so no one could dare to say anything about it. However, Khan had become paranoid even before teleporting toward his first alien planet, and that feeling couldn't remain silent after recalling about the xenophobic groups of Niqols.

"[How did you escape the valley]?" Ilman asked without adding any negative meaning to his tone.

"[The Lysixi left the tunnels connected to the palace, so we used them to leave after Yeza sent us the location of the next safe area]," Zura shortly explained, and the squad leaders nodded even if they didn't know anything about the tunnels.

"[Aren't you off track]?" Zura continued after placing his cube on the muddy ground and creating the map with its azure light. "[You came from the valley, right? How did you even end up here]?"

"[Liiza had an ally in this area], Ilman revealed while pointing at the forest in the distance. "[We planned to meet with her before reaching the safe location]."

"[Do you mind if we tag along]?" Zura asked as his eyes moved toward the four squad leaders.

"[Not at all]," Iris replied before performing another polite bow. "[We must stick together in this dangerous period]."

Khan slowly led Liiza on the opposite side of the newly arrived Niqols after the groups fused and resumed the march. Only she noticed those vague actions, but he limited himself to reveal a meaningful gaze when she looked at him with her questioning eyes.

Liiza didn't understand the reason behind Khan's actions, but she accepted them for now. She would simply question him once they got some privacy.

The marsh eventually ended, and a thick forest unfolded in front of the group. The same giant trees with roots that spread on the surface filled the next region and created a wild scene. That would be another tricky area to explore, but Khan rejoiced at the sight of proper footholds.

The students and recruits remained stunned in front of that strange environment for a few seconds, but Zura suddenly shouted something in the Niqols' language that most aliens didn't understand.

The shout distracted everyone and made them unable to see how their new companions curved their fingers into claws and slashed them at the humans in their surroundings.

The event had been too sudden and unexpected. The newly arrived Niqols had already blended with the group, so they didn't have problems finding human throats. Their fingers pierced skin and muscles easily and made blood spurt out everywhere.

Everything happened too quickly, even for the squad leaders. Iris had focused on the sudden shout only to move her attention on the painful cries of her underlings. She noticed Zura's attack only after his fingers pierced her throat.