

Chaos' Heir 301

Chapter 301 - Consequences

Khan's political life had seen a minor incident with the Blackdell girl and the four bullies during his time in Ylaco's training camp. However, everything had been excellent afterward. Every door had been spread open for him after Istrone's rebellion.

The complaints from his students' families had taken him by surprise. Khan didn't expect that reaction, and he immediately realized that he had no idea how to handle similar situations. He wasn't even sure he understood why someone would be so angry over a subject that wasn't mandatory.

'How do you dare put our boy in the same room with a violent Tainted animal without any safety measure!'

'I suggest you change your teaching methods, young man. You might be a hero for now, but my family has produced dozens of them throughout the years. I won't remain silent while my Carla risks her life to gain extra points!'

'Who even decided to give this job to such a barbaric and ignorant youngling! Prepare yourself, young man. The Headmaster will hear me about that torture that you call teaching!'

Those threats were only some of the messages that Khan had found on his phone. He didn't even manage to connect those profiles to the students they represented, but he quickly fixed that issue by going over his class list.

Finding those connections turned out to be far from enough. Khan didn't know how influential each family was, so he searched those names on the network, and the results made his expression freeze.

'Rich, rich, super-rich,' Khan read as he looked through the public records concerning the families that had contacted him. 'Wait, this one isn't considered wealthy. Estimate of the total assets: s-, two hundred million Credits! How should I even conceive that sum?! Fuck the food cans! I could buy the entire Slums with it!'

Khan thought about the matter for a few seconds before cracking a joke in his mind. 'Who would even want to buy the Slums?'

A faint laugh escaped his mouth, but he didn't forget his situation. Khan still had more than twenty complaints to address, and he didn't know where to begin with them.

Khan thought about the matter for a few minutes, but he felt lost. He wanted to ignore those complaints, but they involved influential families that could make his life difficult.

It didn't take Khan long to realize that his lack of knowledge was the issue's core. He could go over those complaints all night, but he would still be unable to find a real solution.

'I need help,' Khan concluded in his mind as he closed the messages and went over his contacts.

Cora knew more than Khan, but he didn't want to involve her in his problems. The same went for Amber. The two women were also so kind that they had probably never faced something like that.

Lieutenant Abaze seemed the right woman for the job. Yet, Khan didn't want to feel indebted to her. She had been nothing but gentle with him, but her interests in the political array were evident, and he didn't want to become one of her pawns.

'I can't find where the Captain lives,' Khan thought after picking his phone and browsing through the network.

His position as a professor granted him access to information that regular students wouldn't be able to find. Khan could easily find the location of Lieutenant Abaze's habitation, but the same didn't go for the Captain. The latter's rank made that knowledge classified.

Khan knew that the Captain lived inside the camp, and he was even sure that Lieutenant Abaze could point at his habitation. Khan sent her a short message, and she only took a few minutes to reply.

'I suggest you bring something good to drink if you want his help,' Lieutenant Abaze wrote in her message while adding a map of the camp with a location marked.

Khan didn't mention anything specific in his message, but Lieutenant Abaze had understood the nature of his request anyway. That event made him feel right about his decision to avoid her as a helper. She was too interested in her position, which made Khan unable to trust her fully.

It was still dinner time when Khan received Lieutenant Abaze's message. He had yet to eat, and he took that chance to reach the canteen to find something good to bring to the Captain.

The delay in his trip to the canteen forced him to meet many recruits. Khan kept a fake smile on his face and nodded whenever the soldiers performed military salutes, but his hurry was evident. He rushed through the camp's streets and ate quickly. He even told Cora that he was busy before approaching one of the many menus in the building and going over the list of bottles.

'How can someone charge nine hundred Credits for a single bottle?' Khan wondered when he looked at the price of the best booze that the canteen had to offer.

Khan hesitated for a few seconds before purchasing the bottle anyway. He was asking a favor that would probably teach him important lessons. In his mind, that was the whole point behind money.

Khan left the canteen in a hurry and marched through the camp's streets to reach the location described in Lieutenant Abaze's message. He didn't know how to approach the Captain, but he hoped that the bottle in his hands would do most of the job.

The outskirts of the camp had most of the structures that required large and open spaces. Those buildings had vehicles, prisons, flying platforms, and big machines capable of creating holograms with almost no limitations in their range. The same technology Lieutenant Unchai had used during the entrance test.

Instead, the camp's central parts had most of the structures required by the recruits. The dormitories, canteen, training halls, and similar buildings occupied those areas and were relatively easy to reach by anyone living there.

The professors and other buildings meant for the soldiers with some important positions stood in-between those two circles. Khan's flat was there, and the same went for Captain Goldmon's flat.

Khan knew that he had reached his destination when a short building unfolded in his view. Those structures were rare inside the camp. It was actually his first time seeing something similar. The Global Army always tried to make the best out of the available space, but the house went against that rule.

The two-story building had large dark windows on both floors and a flat roof. Its entrance featured the usual menus, but it had the red words "restricted area" written on its surface. Khan couldn't see anything that could connect the house to Captain Goldman, but that was the very clue that he was looking for.

"Captain Goldmon," Khan said after placing his hand on the entrance, "It's Lieutenant Khan. I need your help."

No answer came from the other side of the door, and the menus on its surface didn't budge either. Khan felt that explaining his situation wouldn't grant him a meeting, so he used a different approach.

"I have a bottle of "Imperial's nectar" with me," Khan revealed while keeping his hand on the entrance.

"How old is it?" Captain Goldmon's voice suddenly came out of the door.

Khan had to read the labels on the bottles to find the answer. "It says twelve years."

A series of mechanical noises came out of the door as soon as Khan finished saying the word "twelve", and the entrance slid open right after. Captain Goldmon's figure unfolded in Khan's eyes, and he remained surprised to see his superior wearing a simple plaid pajama.

"Did you buy only one bottle?" Captain Goldmon scoffed after inspecting Khan. "That won't grant you much time."

The Captain turned to walk inside the house, and Khan followed him since the entrance remained open. The door closed after he stepped into the vast living room, and he performed a quick inspection before placing the bottle on the first table he saw.

The room's size didn't surprise Khan. It was only expected for a captain to have a better habitation, but its emptiness felt a bit unnatural. Khan only saw a couch, a couple of armchairs, and a table, which left a lot of unoccupied space.

"Don't you have casual clothes?" Captain Goldmon shouted while returning to the living room with two glasses and his cane. "I thought you didn't have classes today."

"I don't have clothes except for these uniforms," Khan revealed.

"Why didn't you say something when we were in Reebfell?" Captain Goldmon asked as he approached the table, sat, and inspected the bottle.

"Do I need to buy clothes?" Khan asked as he reached the armchair on the opposite side of the table.

The question made the Captain inspect Khan in confusion. Khan appeared completely clueless, and the Captain understood that his background was to blame for that issue.

"Leave it," Captain Goldmon stated while opening the bottle. "You might have to wear formal clothes during some big events, but you can stay like this if you don't mind the uniforms."

"Why would anyone mind the uniforms?" Khan questioned while pulling the fabric on his neck. "They are a bit tight, but they don't have holes, and the Global Army always gives me new ones if I tear them."

"I told you to leave it," The Captain snorted. "I wouldn't know how to explain it to someone with your background anyway."

Captain Goldmon poured the booze in the two glasses and pushed one of them toward Khan before he could refuse. The soldier noticed his faint hesitation, so he explained his actions. "It's always better to drink with someone. So, tell me why you are here."

"The families of my students have complained about my teaching methods," Khan went directly to the point as he took out his phone and handed it to the Captain to show the various threats. "I honestly don't know how to handle them, sir."

Captain Goldmon only glanced at the messages on Khan's phone before wearing a frown and voicing a question. "I assume you asked Lieutenant Abaze for my address, am I right?"

"That's correct," Khan admitted.

"Let me get this straight," Captain Goldmon cleared his throat, took a sip from his glass, and continued. "You seem to go along with Professor Teldom, and you even contacted Lieutenant Abaze, but you still decided to come to see me, right?"

"Yes," Khan replied.

"So, you picked an old man over two beautiful women," Captain Goldmon scoffed. "There's definitely something wrong with you, young man."

"Sir, Lieutenant Abaze is too old for me," Khan tried to play along while savoring the booze, "And my relationship with Professor Teldom isn't like that."

"Only because you don't want it to be like that," Captain Goldmon grunted.

Khan pretended not to hear that comment and focused on the booze. The drink wasn't as good as what the Captain had bought in Reebfell, but it was still good stuff.

"What do you want from me then?" Captain Goldmon eventually asked.

"Your advice," Khan explained. "I have no idea how to handle these complaints. I don't even know if they can affect my career."

"Of course they can," Captain Goldmon laughed. "Some of these names are really influential, but I still can't understand my role in the matter."

"What do you mean?" Khan asked. "You are an experienced soldier, sir. I'm sure I can learn a lot from you."

"Probably," Captain Goldmon declared. "I might even put in a good word for you, but that would still require you to change your training method. Are you willing to do that?"

Khan went over the matter for a few seconds before shaking his head. He didn't know how to teach his subject without his harsh approach, and he really wanted his students to learn something.

"See?" Captain Goldmon continued. "Did you expect the families behind your students to just go along with a young man like you putting their descendants in danger? Complaining is their job."

"What should I do?" Khan asked since the Captain's words weren't helping him.

"Nothing," Captain Goldmon responded. "What can you even do? Our subjects aren't mandatory. We can't force them on the recruits. You can only do your best to make them understand how important they are."

Khan nodded. That made perfect sense, but an issue remained, and he questioned the Captain about it. "What should I do about these complaints then?"

"Ignore them," Captain Goldmon said. "Nothing good can come from arguing with angry parents or representatives."

"That's it?" Khan asked. "Won't this have consequences on my career?"

"What? Did you expect that having the recruits' future in your hands won't lead to consequences?" Captain Goldmon snorted.

Khan understood that part very well. It was the very reason behind his dedication to the job. He didn't want other innocent recruits to experience what he had gone through. He desired them to be ready for the worst so that they wouldn't have nightmares about corpses and blood.

"I'll tell you what will happen," Captain Goldmon sighed when he saw that Khan didn't speak anymore. "These complaints will probably reach the Headmaster, who will be forced to plan a meeting between you and these representatives.. You won't be able to skip it, but you can also use it to explain your reasons."

Chapter 302 - Mindset

"My reasons?" Khan sighed as he tried to imagine a hypothetical conversation with the angry representatives.

Khan could lie and pretend really well. It would take him almost no effort to play a role that the families' representatives could decide to let off the hook. He only had to ask Captain Goldmon what would work, and the matter would be over.

"Are you thinking of lying your way out of this?" Captain Goldmon asked in his rough tone.

"Is that even possible?" Khan wondered.

"Of course," Captain Goldmon sneered. "You aren't a bad liar. I've only seen too many of them to get tricked by a kid like you. Still, getting those families to close an eye would be easy with the right words and promises."

"Is there a 'but' coming?" Khan asked.

"But these meetings can be important for someone's career," Captain Goldmon continued. "It's a chance to create an image in the families' minds, and you have to decide how you want to appear."

'It feels like he is asking me what kind of man I want to be,' Khan commented in his mind as he drank and went over the matter.

"I never thought that a course without mandatory attendance could lead to this," Khan admitted.

"This reaction tells you how much they care about the subject," Captain Goldmon explained. "They wouldn't be so angry otherwise. The subject itself might even affect only part of the matter. Anyone would want their descendants to learn from the most talented soldiers available."

Khan had a general understanding of the situation after that short talk. His subject wasn't mandatory, but the families wanted their descendants to learn from him and earn eventual points for their profiles. His fame was the reason behind their anger.

'Professor Norwell was also pretty popular now that I think about it,' Khan recalled. 'I even won Onia's tournament at a younger age.'

"Do you need help with something else?" Captain Goldmon asked.

"No," Khan shook his head. "I only have to decide what to say at the meeting."

"Do you want my advice?" Captain Goldmon continued.

"No," Khan sighed. "Only I can decide that."

"Good boy," Captain Goldmon laughed. "Anyway, don't overthink it. There are always complaints when it comes to new approaches. Also, you can't please everyone and be your own man at the same time. I've known countless dicks who have climbed the political ladder through achievements alone."

Khan nodded while emptying his cup. He realized that clashing with the families was inevitable, especially when trying to teach something so harsh. Yet, he didn't want to keep his focus on himself. The Slums had taught him to be selfish, but the possibility of seeing his career suffer a bit was nothing compared to preventing his students from experiencing his hardships.

It felt almost liberating to think selflessly. Khan could stop worrying about his problems and focus on the good he could do. He was turning his traumas and negative experiences into something positive for his students, and he liked those sensations.

"Do you need anything else?" Captain Goldmon snorted while adjusting his position on his armchair.

Khan shook his head again and left his glass on the table. He was about to stand up, but the Captain stopped him with a simple offer. "Do you want to finish the bottle with this old man?"

Khan didn't refuse, and the Captain quickly filled his glass. The two didn't start any conversation. They remained in silence as their powerful bodies and the booze fought to take control of their minds. When the bottle ended, Khan stood up and performed a military salute before leaving the house.

The curfew had already passed, so Khan could enjoy the solitary walk back to his flat in complete silence. His mind felt clearer than ever, even if the booze was trying to affect his balance. He knew exactly what he had to do during the meeting.

.
. .
.

Khan trained, woke up, and dived into his packed schedule again before preparing himself for his second lesson. He wouldn't rely on the Tainted ape that time, but the location for his class didn't change.

The recruits heaved a sigh of relief when they entered the hangar and noticed the absence of the cage. Part of them had believed that Khan had lied to make sure that they attended the second lesson, but that worry turned out to be pointless.

Khan was sitting with his back on the distant wall. He was meditating, and he didn't open his eyes until the flow of recruits stopped. To his surprise, everyone had chosen to attend his second lesson, even if many were wearing hesitant expressions.

The six recruits who had dared to face the Tainted ape were still carrying signs of their injuries. Their uniforms hid most of their bandages, but some wounds were impossible to cover. The young woman with two blades had a metallic structure around her elbow. One of the men had something similar around his right knee, while another had a patch on his left eye.

"I'm glad to see all of you here," Khan exclaimed while standing up and wearing an honest smile. "I hope I'll see more of you joining the exercise this time."

"What will it be, sir?" John, the recruit who had been the first to face the Tainted ape, asked.

"I want to ask you a few things before diving into the lesson," Khan revealed. "First of all, I know that many of you lack the ability to keep up with my exercises. Yet, would you be willing to attend my classes even if you couldn't actually join them?"

The question confused the recruits. Khan's lessons could only occupy two hours, and the previous had lasted far less than that. Choosing to spend that little time in the hangar wasn't an issue, but it could still be annoying for such young soldiers.

"Why would anyone in that condition attend, sir?" Elsie, the woman with two blades and a broken arm, asked.

"Because recruits weaker than you have survived Istrone's rebellion," Khan explained. "They weren't strong, and they didn't even have special talents. Yet, they have managed to develop the right mindset quickly, so they have preserved their lives and have even helped warn the space station."

"Are you trying to say that we can make a difference even if we are weak, sir?" Laurel, one of the recruits who faced the Tainted ape, asked.

"Well, what you said is true, but I wasn't trying to make that point," Khan stated while moving his gaze among his confused students. "I want you to understand that the right mindset can be more important than strength."

Those words didn't convince the recruits, but Khan wasn't done. "Would any of you willingly fight a first-level warrior to death?"

The question made no sense even when the recruits tried to connect it to the previous topic. Many shook their heads, while others directly frowned.

"No one, of course," Khan announced. "Yet, I did kill second-level warriors. Do you want to know how?"

"Did you exploit the chaos of the battlefield?" Dwight, another recruit who faced the Tainted ape, questioned.

"Precisely," Khan declared. "However, I managed to do that because I knew that I could defeat a second-level warrior in the right circumstances. I went looking for the situation that would have allowed me to accomplish something so difficult."

Many understood what Khan meant. He wasn't trying to say that the weak could defeat the strong. The lesson was that nothing exceptional would happen if their minds didn't conceive those possibilities.

"All of you are different," Khan continued after letting the recruits absorb his words for a few seconds. "Some have good backgrounds, while others have incredible talent. You'll improve at a different pace, but your minds don't have those limits. If my experience can teach you something, I'll gladly share it even with those who don't want to join my dangerous exercises."

The selflessness in Khan's words was impossible to miss. He didn't care about talent or prowess. He only wanted those recruits to be ready for the worst, and his intentions reached them.

"I think you enjoyed asking me stuff last time," Khan laughed. "I think we can have those rounds of questions after every lesson. Do you like the idea?"

Everyone nodded. The recruits' feelings toward Khan's teaching methods had nothing to do with their curiosity, so no one dared to refuse that offer.

"Good, let's move to another question then," Khan exclaimed. "This is mostly for those who have faced the Tainted ape, but the others can answer too. Did you notice anything different in your other lessons? Did something change after what you have experienced in my class?"

The question sounded vague, but Khan had done that on purpose. He wanted to avoid eventual liars or recruits making up stuff to gain points in his mind.

To Khan's surprise, the first to raise his hand was a young man who didn't belong to the group of six. Khan nodded at him, and the recruit gulped before voicing his thoughts. "I have been too violent with my sparring partner during yesterday's lesson. I didn't even realize it until the Professor interrupted me."

Khan nodded before glancing at the other recruits and reiterating his question. "Did anyone else experience something similar? It doesn't have to be the exact thing. Even a slight change that you are noticing only now can work."

"History of mana felt pointless yesterday," Elsie revealed without bothering to raise her arm. "I usually like that subject."

"What else?" Khan asked.

"I tried to use mana inside a training hall for the first time,"

"I had nightmares about the Tainted ape,"

"I couldn't sleep until it was already deep into the night,"

"I didn't laugh when a friend cracked the usual joke,"

"My appetite has gone down since your lesson, sir,"

"I was more focused during yesterday's combat."

Khan nodded whenever a recruit said something. Many of those lines had no connection with what he wanted to say, but he didn't want to shatter the general confidence that had filled those young men and women, so he never interrupted them.

"Okay, okay, let's stop here," Khan eventually ordered. "The question was mostly for me. I wanted to see if my lesson had the desired effects, and I think some of you are experiencing them."

"What effects, sir?" John asked.

"The battlefield changes you," Khan sighed. "Those changes aren't good most of the time, and they have some common elements. It's normal for soldiers who have seen war to struggle once they get back in peaceful environments. I experienced the same problem, and I don't think I'll ever go back to how I was."

Khan fell silent for a few seconds before continuing. "I can't teach you what I know without causing similar changes. I would typically refrain from tampering with your innocence and enthusiasm, but giving you the chance to survive a crisis has the priority."

"I'm sorry if you stop enjoying what you currently like because of me. I suggest you don't follow my subject if you care about that part of yourself because I'll try to shatter it with everything I have. Still, it's better to lose it here, in the safety of the training camp and among friends than on the battlefield."

Khan moved his eyes among the recruits to make sure that everyone had received the message. He couldn't stop eventual departures, but he could be as clear as possible so that his students would know what they would miss or join.

"Well, I don't have more questions for now," Khan exclaimed as he walked toward the center of the hangar. "The lesson will start now."

"What will we do today, sir?" Keith, one of the recruits who faced the Tainted ape, asked.

"That's simple," Khan chuckled. "Form a line and come at me. You can take as much time as you need to prepare. I'll obviously hold back before pointing out eventual flaws in your approach once the exchange is over."

Elsie's eyes lit up, and she quickly drew one of her swords before jumping forward to be the first in the line. Khan couldn't help but smile at the sight of her enthusiasm, but he still felt the need to add something.

"None of you can land an attack on me," Khan explained. "The point of the lesson is to develop killing intent. Come at me as if you wanted to kill me. I might forget to hold back if I see that you don't take the task seriously."

Khan wore his cold expression near the end of his explanation, which surprised the recruits. They had begun to feel somewhat relaxed around him, but the tension that only a superior could generate returned now. Many students hesitated, but others jumped behind Elsie to create the line.

Chapter 303 - First

Khan didn't go too hard on the recruits. Hurting them wasn't the point of the lesson, and he also wanted to reassure them a bit after everything that had happened with the Tainted ape.

None of the recruits were first-level warriors, and their proficiency level was also lacking. Many failed to perform perfect executions of their martial arts even after spending an entire minute preparing for their attacks.

Khan had some hopes for the six recruits who had faced the Tainted ape, but they turned out to be too innocent to express proper killing intent. Deborah came close to attempting a deadly blow, but she got scared near the end of her technique, leading her mana to disperse before her open hand could land.

John, Laurel, and Keith used their mana correctly, but they tried to attack Khan's waist or shoulders. Dwight failed to perform a proper technique, while Elsie's enthusiasm was nothing more than a desire to test herself. She liked to fight, but that didn't make her a killer.

A few surprises appeared among the other recruits. Khan counterattacked with simple kicks that only flung his opponents away, so everyone mustered the courage to face him. A couple of boys aimed their techniques at his neck, head, or center of the chest, but Khan addressed their success to personal problems and lingering anger.

No one showed the intention to kill Khan or even did their best to succeed in the task. Yet, Khan still used that chance to give pointers or comment on their performance.

Khan couldn't actually tell the recruits how to improve their offensive. They used different martial arts, so their flaws were connected to improper executions or weaknesses of their styles.

Still, Khan never failed to scold the recruits whenever their attacks didn't aim at vital spots. He understood why they held back or felt worried about the potential consequences of their offensive, but that wasn't the point of the lesson.

Killing was hard. Khan knew that far too well. Yet, developing the resolve to go all-out even if that could lead to an enemy's death was doable, and he wanted to achieve that.

The sparring was so harmless that the recruits agreed to go for another round. The second cycle of exchanges went better. Most students tried to deliver killing blows, but their fears to hurt Khan often took over their executions.

Khan continued to dodge every attack easily, and the power behind his kicks increased after every exchange. Pain could help eliminate eventual hesitation and fear, but he saw the results of that approach only during the third sparring cycle.

"Okay, let's call it a day," Khan announced after the third cycle ended. "It's actually past the time assigned to my lessons, so we'll have to skip the round of questions. I'm sure you'll have your chance to probe into my life the next time."

A series of disappointed voices came out of the group of recruits. They had already gathered into a line to prepare for the fourth cycle of exchanges. It was clear that they didn't want the lesson to end yet, but Khan couldn't do much about it.

"Come on, it's only two days," Khan laughed. "We even have a full semester in front of us. You'll have other chances to get kicked by me."

A few laughs resounded, and the line broke quickly. The recruits weren't tired since they only had the chance to test their attacks three times. However, they couldn't deny that it was already pretty late. They risked skipping dinner if they wasted time.

"Will we fight you again in the next lesson?" John asked as the students prepared themselves to leave the hangar.

"No, that will probably happen next week," Khan revealed. "I have something else in mind for the next lesson. It shouldn't be dangerous, but that will mostly depend on you."

"Will we fight the Tainted ape again?" A recruit asked, and his question spread a wave of fear among her companions.

"There would be no point in that," Khan stated. "You needed to see the Tainted ape to experience true fear. Putting you against it now will only lead to injuries. You'll see it again when I feel that you can fight it properly."

Smiles and nods happened among the recruits. No one wanted to face the Tainted ape so soon. Even Elsie refrained from voicing comments about the matter.

"Professor Khan," Deborah called as the group was about to approach the entrance, "Will you eat in the canteen?"

"Of course," Khan casually exclaimed as he approached one of the walls to retrieve his phone.

"Some of us are going there now," Deborah continued. "Do you want to join us?"

Khan almost froze on his spot when he heard that question, but his movements remained smooth and natural. Still, he chose not to hide his hesitation when he turned to face the recruits. He wanted to build deep trust with his students, so he couldn't resort to lies and pretenses.

"I don't know how proper that would be," Khan replied. "I'm a professor and your direct superior."

"We could use this chance for the questions," Keith announced, and many recruits nodded in approval as curiosity filled their faces.

Khan felt cornered by that enthusiasm. He wanted to get close to the recruits, but he acknowledged the need for a certain division between them and him. However, he was going to the canteen anyway. Also, his students would also have the chance to deal with their round of questions during the meal.

"I guess it doesn't sound like a bad idea," Khan responded as some hesitation still filled his tone.

"Though I must warn you. I eat a lot, so I'd have to answer between a bite and the next."

The recruits laughed since they took Khan's line for a joke, and he smiled honestly in front of that general happiness. He liked seeing his students like that. He almost regretted that he had to create a crack in that innocence to deliver his message.

The recruits gathered around Khan as they began to walk toward the canteen. A few left since they had other matters to attend or wanted to shower before dinner, but many with similar plans changed their mind after learning that Khan would join them.

Needless to say, the questions started on the road, and Khan noticed how the general boldness of the recruits had intensified. The different environment was probably playing an important role in that change, but Khan liked to think that his relationship with his students had improved.

The questions covered random topics. Those recruits had only seen aliens through their phones, so they requested vivid descriptions. Surprised oohs echoed among them when they heard Khan speaking the Niqols' language, and Onia's tournament also aroused interest.

Khan learnt that some of his students had gotten their hands on the tournament's recordings. The recruits didn't snitch on their companions, but they revealed how everyone in the camp now had those videos.

That worked in Khan's favor, but it also increased the number of gossips around his name. The recruits didn't mention the most personal of them, but they still probed Khan about things that kept their curiosity on fire.

"No comment," Khan repeated while wearing a faint smile that tried to hide his sadness. "I don't mind telling you about the battlefields, aliens, and some funny experiences, but my personal life will remain a secret. You can give up on learning more about my time on Nitis."

"That's unfair!" Deborah complained. "Interspecies couples are so rare. Your experience might help many of us if we get stationed on alien planets."

"Why don't you try to apply the same dedication to my lessons instead of using it to get answers?" Khan joked.

Everyone laughed, even Deborah. The recruits could see Khan under a different light during the walk, and the event pleased them. Outside of the lessons, when Khan didn't need to give orders or use his experience to teach something, he revealed his true self, which was a seventeen-year-old man who had witnessed many things.

Khan also accepted that the situation was far from awful. Those students were his peers in terms of age, and he found himself comfortable among them. A few of them clearly had hidden motives behind their kindness and laughs, but many were simply trying to get to know him as if he were an ordinary recruit.

That was the social life that the six months in Ylaco's training had never managed to offer. Most of it was Khan's fault due to his packed schedule and general distrust of his peers, but the situation was different now. Khan saw what could have been back then, and he didn't know how to feel about the event.

The group eventually reached the canteen, and Khan stayed true to his words. The recruits remained speechless in front of the sheer quantity of food he could eat, and the random messages that reached his phone even occupied the short periods among his bites.

'How did you end up eating with your students?' Amber texted.

'I can hear you laughing from here,' Khan replied.

'That's because I am laughing really hard,' Amber responded.

'At least everything seems to go well,' Khan managed to write once he finished his fourth chicken wing.

'Oh, no, actually, you have my praises,' Amber texted. 'I never expected you to be so good at this.'

'Someone was underestimating me,' Khan teased.

'Shall I remind you that you have no teaching experience and that your whole life has been nothing but Slums and battlefields?' Amber commented.

'I thought I charmed you enough to gain your complete trust and devotion,' Khan continued with his teases.

'Okay, the devotion part got me,' Amber joked. 'You are funny, Professor Khan.'

'I am indeed a great man,' Khan texted.

'Don't get carried away, or I'll have to stop complimenting you,' Amber replied.

'Sure thing, ma'am,' Khan stated.

'Shut up,' Amber sent.

The conversation between the two ended there, but neither was to blame for that outcome. Khan had also exchanged messages with Cora during the walk, and she reached the canteen to see him.

"Hey, Khan," Cora smiled when she saw Khan turning while she was approaching his table.

The recruits had left the seats next to Khan empty out of respect for his position, so Cora could reach them. The students' curious eyes made her shy and forced her to keep her gaze on the floor during the walk, and Khan didn't help in the matter.

"She is Cora Ommo," Khan announced while Cora sat next to him. "I was lucky enough to have her on my crashing site on Istrone."

The students had naturally heard about Cora since they were from Reebfell. The list of survivors from the Istrone was short, so it wasn't hard to find her name in some reports. Still, the recruits never had the chance to identify her since she rarely spent her free time outside her dormitory or classes.

"He is exaggerating," Cora quickly overcame her shyness to correct Khan. "I was basically useless there. He did everything by himself."

The recruits saw the chance to gain a different perspective on Khan's feats and didn't let it slip. Cora only had to wait a few seconds to see countless questions flying at her.

"He has the bad habit of being modest," Cora explained after gaining a general understanding of what Khan had said to his students. "You should have seen him. He showed pure confidence from the crash to our rescue. I have countless bad memories about Istrone, and I hate everything that happened there, but I'm glad that I got the chance to watch him shine."

Cora wasn't a good liar. Her feelings appeared everywhere on her voice and face, but her words also carried a deep honesty. The students immediately understood that they could use her to learn more about Khan, and they didn't hesitate to exploit her.

"His first kill has happened there, right?" Elsie asked before her companions could voice other questions. "How was it?"

"I told you, I have been rather useless there," Cora responded. "Still, his battles were incredible. He never faltered, even when he failed to perform his martial art correctly."

"Yet, how did he have that confidence on his first battle?" Elsie insisted before moving her gaze on Khan. "Did you go for the killing blow without hesitation? Was the Kred difficult to take down?"

"I'd rather not describe that," Khan lied while wearing a fake smile.

"The Kred couldn't keep up with his movements," Cora described. "He was too fast and precise for them."

"So, did you go for its head?" Elsie added.

"I'm not too proud of my first kill," Khan continued with his pretense. "I'd rather speak about something else."

"Why is that?" Elsie asked. "Isn't this the point of your lessons, sir? Your first experience with death should be something valuable to share."

Everyone's eyes converged on Khan, and even Cora initially followed that trend. However, she suddenly recalled something, and her hand shot to squeeze Khan's arm.

Cora had an apologetic look on her face. Khan could see her trying to find the words that could get him out of that situation, but he had already made up his mind.

"Because she was ten," Khan revealed while Cora's grasp tightened.. "My first kill was a ten-year-old Kred."

Chapter 304 - Courage

The recruits had been forced to read about the Kred after Istrone's rebellion. They knew that those aliens reached physical maturity quickly. Yet, the theory was different from reality, especially when it used words that were so easy to misunderstand for humans.

The students didn't think about the Kred when they heard Khan's revelation. Their minds stopped at the word "ten", and their stomachs clenched as they absorbed it. Their knowledge quickly allowed them to connect that age to a fully-grown alien, but the bitter feeling inside them remained.

Khan wore a sad smile as he saw hesitation, emptiness, and stupor replacing the curiosity that filled the recruits' faces. A slight tremor ran through Cora's grasp as she tightened and relaxed it depending on her worries. That was the exact reaction he wanted from his students, but obtaining it didn't make him feel good.

"I'll leave now," Khan stated. "I hope to see you all the day after tomorrow."

The statement forced the recruits to snap out of their stupor, but only a few managed to look at Khan. Many continued to divert their gazes, while others remained deep into their thoughts as they tried to imagine how it felt to kill someone so young.

Khan stood up, and Cora followed him. She let go of his arm, but she remained at his side, and their shoulders often touched as they left the canteen and reached the camp's streets.

Cora remained silent. She felt guilty for having awakened bad memories, and her gaze wandered on the street. Still, her body moved toward Khan on its own, even if she tried to distance herself whenever their shoulders touched.

Meanwhile, Khan went over various thoughts. He still recalled the emotions that had tried to make a hole in his mental barrier when he learnt the Kred's young age. His first kill had been awful, but a long time had passed, and far more blood had fallen on his hands.

Khan could review Istrone's events with greater clarity now. He had long since accepted that the rebellion had left him with no alternatives, and he had even acknowledged the dark areas of his personality. Liiza had even allowed him to appreciate the murky depths of his character. He could be a monster if the situation required it, but he took no joy in that.

'I hope they understand it now,' Khan sighed while thinking about his students. 'I have probably done it. I have created a crack in their innocence. I should get a reward for my teaching skills.'

His thoughts had ended up in a mock. Khan didn't like what he had done, but his actions felt necessary, especially in his mind. He knew what his students could face, and they had probably understood that now.

'Why does the world look so dark?' Khan cursed in his mind. 'Why can't I find a light as bright as you?'

Cora stopped walking and forced Khan to snap out of his happy memories on Nitis. He turned only to find his friend looking at the ground and holding her right arm. Her grasp twitched, but she tried her best to make her fingers pierce her uniform.

"What is it?" Khan said in a helpless tone as he bent forward to make his head enter Cora's field of view.

"Why are you accompanying me home tonight?" Cora whispered.

"The curfew is close," Khan explained without straightening his back. "We don't want you to face troubles, do we?"

"But I messed up tonight," Cora complained. "You don't have to force-."

Cora couldn't finish her line because Khan hugged her. She didn't know how to react to that sudden gesture. Part of her felt guilty for enjoying something like that after what had happened. However, Cora couldn't find the strength to push Khan away anywhere, so she abandoned herself in his arms.

Khan didn't really think before hugging Cora. His mood had grown a bit sour after the recent events, but he knew that the slightest gesture would mean the world for Cora, so he went for it. Reasons, problems, and consequences failed to reach his mind in time to stop him.

"Come on, we went over this," Khan chuckled while caressing Cora's long blonde hair. "We are friends. Stop worrying about these small things."

"You are way too good with me," Cora whined while moving her head left and right in a desperate attempt to dive deeper into Khan's chest. "Why?"

"I'm always good," Khan joked, but Cora grabbed the sides of his uniform and tightened her grasp. She wouldn't let him go, not through emotionless words at least.

"It's hard to explain," Khan sighed as he accepted that he had to be honest. "You have already suffered even if you didn't deserve it. I don't want you to have it hard again."

"Am I only someone who needs your protection in your mind?" Cora questioned.

"You have stopped needing it near the end of Istrone's rebellion," Khan explained. "This is just me being selfish. I want to be good with you because I don't like to see you suffer."

A tremor ran through Cora before she froze completely. Khan could sense her heart beating faster, and a whisper eventually vibrated on his chest. "You have no idea how good you make me feel."

Cora finally lifted her head to watch the effect that her words had on Khan. She felt a bit pleased that he had remained speechless, and a satisfied smile even appeared on her face.

"You should be careful about what you say," Khan said while diverting his gaze from her large green eyes.

"Why? I'm speaking the truth, and you know it," Cora declared as her tone gained some confidence. "You have known since Istrone."

"Yes, I know it," Khan sighed. "But you also know how I feel toward you."

"Yes, I know," Cora whispered as her grasp on his uniform tightened.

"It's not you," Khan honestly explained. "You keep finding me in bad moments. I was barely myself on Istrone, and now-."

"Now you are still lost over the Niqols girl," Cora concluded, and Khan couldn't help but move his surprised gaze on her.

"How can you be sure of that?" Khan asked.

"Khan, I watch you," Cora responded. "I could see the layers of pain you kept hidden on Istrone. I saw how much it hurt to play the part of the cold hero. I might not have realized it back then, but I had a lot of time to think, and seeing you again without that mask made everything clear."

Khan gulped as he diverted his gaze again. He had initially believed that the change in his behavior had only surprised Cora, but it seemed that the event had far deeper repercussions.

"I think part of me always knew," Cora explained. "That's why I tried so hard to support you on Istrone. That's why I knew I couldn't claim a place in your heart when you were so worried about your friend. That's why I'm certain that only someone capable of shaking parts of you that no one else has ever seen could make you decide to love."

"I never said that I loved her," Khan replied.

"But I can see it here and now," Cora giggled as a single tear fell from her eyes. "It's the reason why you are trying to push me away. It's the reason why you look so sad whenever someone mentions Nitis. It's the reason you are sealing your heart so deeply under the layers of pain that you keep accumulating."

"Cora, I don't know what to say," Khan spoke to break her flow, but Cora seemed unstoppable now that her feelings had exploded.

"You know, I'm really timid," Cora smiled. "You might think that I fell for you due to how strong or reliable you are, but the truth is different. I love you because you give me courage that I never thought existed inside me. The same courage that has forced me to abandon my hesitation now."

"I can't give you what you want," Khan almost begged. "I don't want to see you suffer while you wait for something that might never come."

"You have no idea how happy I would be to make a single smile appear on your face," Cora chuckled sweetly. "My life would feel whole to know that I've granted you a single peaceful second. Just give me that chance. Don't cut me away out of fear of the pain I might experience. I can assure you that nothing would ever make me hate you."

Khan sensed his self-restraint crumbling. That situation felt similar to what he had gone through with Delia, but Cora's emotions made it far different.

Cora was warm. Her sweet voice could melt ice and make water boil. She wanted to give so much, but Khan had forced her feelings to slam on thick walls. Still, she had persisted until her emotions had exploded and had fallen on him.

'Why did I even hug her?' Khan cursed in his mind. 'Why did I let her get so close? Why do I keep desiring to feel good when I have already experienced true bliss? Why do I still feel bad whenever I think of someone else? Why did you leave me with this curse? Why am I about to trust her?'

"You messed up big time," Khan stated in a cold voice that made Cora's face freeze. She actually felt scared for a second, but everything disappeared when Khan trapped her in a deep kiss.

Cora gave Khan complete control of everything she had. She wrapped her arms around his neck and let him do whatever he wanted. His fingers tried to stab her lower back as he pulled closer to his waist. His tongue barged violently inside her mouth as if searching for the source of her sweetness.

Khan's kiss became almost suffocating for Cora, but she didn't care. She bent backward as he kept diving on her. Intense redness filled her cheeks when she felt something hard hitting on her waist, but her shyness couldn't reach her mind in that situation. She belonged to him, and she didn't mind if he broke her as he searched for his happiness.

Khan took a while to come back to his senses and leave Cora's mouth. She breathed roughly, but she still forced herself to wear a smile and fix her gaze on him. He noticed the faint trace of tears in her eyes, but they didn't seem to come from her sadness.

Cora's lack of experience in those matters was evident. She had tried to go along with Khan's kiss, but she had been clumsy, and he had been too aggressive for her to understand what to do.

"It's better if you return on your own tonight," Khan stated as his eyes ran over her figure. "I don't know what I might do."

"Y-you can do everything you l-," Cora mustered the entirety of her courage to say that line, and her cheeks even reached a new realm of redness during the process, but Khan kissed her before she could finish.

The second kiss was soft and sweet, something that made Cora melt and accept Khan's words. When he let go of her lips, she nodded and wore a sweet smile before turning to run through the street on her own.

Cora was basically escaping now that her shyness had returned, but Khan knew that her mind was going through complete happiness. He could sense it in the mana inside her body. Her energy was playing a cheerful tune that appeased even some of his most profound doubts.

'Fuck, I ended up doing it,' Khan cursed as his hand reached his lips.

Cora's taste was still there. Part of Khan minded that flavor, but another felt happy. He didn't know if that feeling came from the incredible moment he had given to Cora or from something inside him, but he decided not to think about it that night.

His mind could only go over a few deafening lines as he reviewed what had happened. Khan's thoughts almost shouted as they made him swear a simple promise. 'Cora can't be another Delia. I need to do this right.'

A message reached Khan while he was still immersed in his thoughts. He picked up his phone almost unconsciously, but his attention felt forced to move on the screen when he saw the words "Headmaster Pitcus" on top of the notification.

'The meeting with the families will happen tomorrow then,' Khan summarized after reading the message. 'I really can't take a breath. Luckily I know how I want to handle this part.'

Chapter 305 - Dumb

Khan reached his flat in no time. He wasn't in a hurry, but he felt restless, and it took him a while to understand the source of that feeling.

Initially, Khan blamed Cora and their kiss for his restlessness. After all, he had jumped into a situation where he didn't have feelings for his partner. He hoped to develop them to make sure that Cora got what she deserved, but part of him desired the opposite outcome.

Still, his hesitation and uncertainty weren't enough to make him feel like that. Khan even went over Headmaster Pitcus' message again to see if the imminent meetings with the families' representatives stirred something. Yet, he didn't experience anything out of the usual. He actually sensed confidence brimming inside him.

Khan could find the source of his restlessness only after eliminating those imminent problems. He had already realized that being selfless made him feel good, but the kiss with Cora revealed that a heavy price accompanied that approach. It was easy to forget about himself when he focused entirely on others.

That approach could work with men and women at the end of their careers or with no interests left. Khan could imagine versions of Lieutenant Dyester and Captain Goldmon completely focused on their underlings. Still, he was different. He was barely seventeen. He had many desires that his various traumas and peculiar situation had suppressed.

Those desires were the reason behind his violence during the kiss. They explained why Khan kept drinking whenever he had the chance, and they also revealed why he joked with Amber. He simply liked doing that.

Khan was far from tired, but he didn't want to spend the whole night immersed in his training programs. He had many books to study, but that wasn't the right time to memorize alien languages and customs.

Khan left his flat without even realizing that he had made up his mind. His feet led him in the areas with the training halls, and a sigh of relief escaped his mouth when he saw the metal door sliding open at the touch with his phone. Menus lit up under him, and he quickly tapped on a few labels to choose the exercise.

Thinking was too troublesome. Worrying about the messy desires and fears that filled his mind was too tiring. Khan set the alarm to his phone and decided to shut his thoughts to lose himself in long battles. An honest smile even appeared on his face when the training hall released the first puppet.

.
. .

"It was like this when I arrived," Khan swore while wearing the most honest face he could muster.

"Then why did you wait almost twenty hours to contact me?" Headmaster Pitcus sighed while adjusting his glasses to inspect the damage.

The training hall's state was as perfect as ever, but that only applied to its surfaces. The wall containing the workshop that built the puppets was open now, and Headmaster Pitcus could inspect the destroyed mechanical arms, drills, and tubes inside it.

"Why did you even attack the training dummy before it became ready to fight?" Headmaster Pitcus asked while straightening his position and showing his frown to Khan.

Khan didn't know what to say. He had remained inside the training hall since the previous night, halting his battles only when his body needed breaks. That had allowed him to dive deeper into his instinctive fighting style, but it had also led to unexpected consequences.

During real battles, Khan had always been forced to retain a basic level of control. He couldn't allow himself to react solely to the waves of mana since he had to differentiate between allies and enemies.

However, the training hall offered a safe environment where Khan could go all-out without worrying about eventual consequences, or so he thought. When he was completely immersed in the waves of mana, he had launched a chaos spear toward the workshops since he had sensed energy gathering in that spot.

The training halls were resilient, and Khan had even chosen one that could endure his element. Yet, only its surfaces had that resistant factor. The workshop inside the wall had nothing similar, and it was even quite frail compared to the overall structure.

Khan had realized what he had done only after he couldn't find other opponents around him. It had even taken him a while to recall how he had destroyed the workshop, but he didn't hesitate to contact Headmaster Pitcus afterward.

"I went on auto-pilot," Khan admitted. "It wasn't my intention to damage the camp."

"I hope it wasn't," Headmaster Pitcus chuckled.

"Aren't you angry, sir?" Khan asked.

"It's just a training hall," Headmaster Pitcus stated. "My superiors won't even ask for a refund when they hear that you have been the one to break it."

Khan heaved a sigh of relief. He probably didn't have enough money to pay for the damage, and he didn't want to be broke again so soon.

"Let's talk a bit about you instead," Headmaster Pitcus changed the topic while looking at Khan's bleeding hands. "Are you okay? It's common for soldiers to develop problems after wars. We have specialists here that might be able to help."

"Oh," Khan exclaimed as he glanced at his hands. "My hands are fine. My knife broke near the end, so I had to use these. Don't worry. It happens all the time."

"And you consider it fine?" Headmaster Pitcus asked.

"They really are okay," Khan explained while closing and opening his hands, but the process only enlarged his superficial injuries and made more blood fall out of them.

"Pay a visit to the medical bay when you get out of here," Headmaster Pitcus ordered while shaking his head. "And take a shower before heading for the meeting with the representatives. Remember to wear your military uniform. I'll be there to intervene if something goes wrong."

"Thank you, sir!" Khan replied while performing a military salute.

"Go to the medical bay already," Headmaster Pitcus scolded. "The meeting is in two hours. Being late won't help your cause."

Khan nodded and retrieved his broken knife and phone before leaving in a hurry. His blood fell on the device's screen when he browsed through the unanswered messages. He had replied to Cora and Amber during his short breaks, but he had still left them hanging for a few hours.

Needless to say, both Cora and Amber grew worried when they heard about his trip to the medical bay, but he reassured them quickly. Cora even asked if Khan needed her, but he explained how time wasn't on his side.

The nurses were more than enough to handle the shallow injuries on his hands. They applied lotions and bandages that didn't hinder the movements of his fingers before letting him go back to his flat.

The alarm that Khan had set the previous night rang while he was still in the middle of his shower. The event forced him to hurry even more and led to a long sprint across the camp's streets.

The meeting couldn't happen in the central areas of the camp due to the political repercussions that the presence of the families' representatives could cause to the professors. Khan would only end up at the center of more gossips if someone saw him attending a private meeting with those important figures, but the same would apply to any soldier.

Headmaster Pitcus had designated an underground structure near the train area for the meeting. Khan reached it in an instant through his sprints, but he still arrived only five minutes before the scheduled time.

The instructions on Headmaster Pitcus' message were extremely clear, so Khan found his destination easily. A large hall unfolded in his vision when the metal doors slid open, and a series of gazes immediately fell on him.

Khan performed a series of polite nods as he walked inside the hall. The layout of the room resembled the areas used by other subjects. He could see a desk on one side and a series of seats on the other with stairs running through them.

Headmaster Pitcus was already sitting behind the desk, and the same went for the figures on the seats. Khan saw more than twenty figures wearing cold faces as they inspected him from head to toe. The atmosphere was more than tense, but Khan didn't let it affect his thoughts.

"Greetings, esteemed guests," Khan exclaimed before reaching a spot in front of the desk and performing a military salute to the families' representatives.

His behavior was impeccable, but that wasn't enough to please the representatives. They only showed annoyance and scorn in front of his salute, and none of them dared to address it adequately.

Headmaster Pitcus cleared his throat and stood up to announce the beginning of the meeting. "Now that everyone is here, Lieutenant Khan will answer your questions. I hope that by the end of the meeting you'll feel reassured about his teaching methods."

"That sounds hard since Lieutenant Khan can't even manage to arrive before us," A middle-aged woman among the representatives complained.

"Does he believe that his duties are more important than ours?" A middle-aged man among the representatives asked.

"I wouldn't be surprised about that," Another representative added. "He is young, and his background didn't teach him anything about Earth's ruling class. How long did he even spend studying in Ylaco's training camp?"

"I'm sorry, Headmaster Pitcus," A fourth representative continued. "I respect your figure and dedication toward Reebfell's training camp, but I simply can't understand how Lieutenant Khan can be a good choice for this job."

Headmaster Pitcus wanted to respond, but Khan glanced at him and nodded. The soldier could only reveal a smile and sit back on his chair while announcing his intentions. "That's why we are having this meeting. You can redirect your doubts to Lieutenant Khan."

"Thank you, sir," Khan quickly said before turning toward the representatives. "Esteemed guests, I must admit that becoming a professor had never crossed my mind. Colonel Norrett offered me this position after winning Onia's tournament, and I found no reason to refuse, especially since I believe I have something worth teaching."

A series of snorts resounded among the representatives. They didn't dare to complain right after Khan mentioned Colonel Norrett, so they waited for him to continue and say something they could contradict.

"I know that my teaching methods are unusual," Khan continued, ignoring the snorts and suppressed curses that followed his statement. "Still, the same goes for my subject. I wouldn't know how to teach it without forcing my students to face calculated dangers."

"It is my understanding that you have forced your students to face a Tainted animal with genetic and bionic enhancements," One of the representatives exclaimed. "How can you consider that a calculated danger?"

"It was calculated because I was there, ready to intervene," Khan explained.

"Why did they suffer injuries then?" Another representative asked. "My boy told me that you didn't even let them visit the medical bay afterward."

"I did delay their trip to the medical bay to recreate the conditions of a battlefield," Khan declared.

"Are you crazy?!" A third representative shouted. "Do you think we would like our descendants to experience a battlefield when they aren't ready for it?"

"With all due respect," Khan responded, "I don't care about what you like. I never thought about you during my lessons. My whole focus must be on my students."

The statement left the representatives speechless for a few seconds, but Khan soon heard a storm of complaints flying toward his ears. They shouted, stood up, and slammed their palms on the small desks in front of them as they voiced their anger.

Some representatives took Khan's lines as an insult that didn't respect their position. Others started to view him as a sadistic man. A few directly started to ignore him and called Headmaster Pitcus with bold requests. Khan heard the words "fire him immediately" seven times in less than thirty seconds.

"Are you all dumb?" Khan eventually shouted, and the event surprised everyone so much that even Headmaster Pitcus stood up.

Chapter 306 - Meeting

Khan was definitely annoyed by those loud complaints. He felt that the families' representatives had forced that meeting only to belittle him, and many of them didn't even bother looking at him while they did that.

His mood wasn't even ideal. Khan had spent almost a day immersed in the complete freedom that only a battle against lifeless robots could give, so going back to the restrained political life in less than two hours had been irritating.

Khan had also just accepted that his selflessness wasn't a solution to his desires and urges. In theory, his state could lead to a reckless and irrational statement, but his answer to the loud complaints had been calculated.

Captain Goldmon's teachings resounded in Khan's mind as he inspected the stunned and speechless representatives. The political environment was full of liars who would stop at nothing to gain favors or trick Khan into fitting their plans. Moreover, all of them would be better than him at that game.

Entering the political game as a liar would only work against Khan since he would have to face opponents with more experience than him. He could get away with it for now since he could exploit his young age and feats. Yet, the time would come when he would lose those advantages.

Khan didn't know if he could learn everything he needed about the political game before his advantages ran out. Also, he wasn't sure he wanted to. The sole thought of spending his entire life pretending among liars attempted to kill every motivation that his desperation had generated throughout the years.

Building a political persona could work, but it went against Khan's desires. His character might even suit that approach due to his experience in the Slums, but he didn't like it. He could compromise if the situation needed it, but he wouldn't give up on himself to please more people.

Headmaster Pitcus was as speechless as the representatives, but his role forced him to be on Khan's side. Moreover, Khan didn't seem to have lost control. His face was calm, and his eyes studied the area coldly. There was a plan behind that expression, and Headmaster Pitcus decided to trust it for now.

"What did you say?!"

"Did you just insult us?!"

"Headmaster Pitcus, I expect you to fire him after such a grave offense!"

"This boy has no manners!"

"Where does he think he is?!"

Those were only some of the lines that the representatives shouted as soon as they snapped back to reality. Needless to say, they were far from pleased. They didn't even try to contain their voices. They shouted and slammed their hands on the small tables before them to highlight how pissed they were.

"Can you stay silent for a few seconds?" Khan shouted to make sure that his words reached the angry representatives. "And, please, stop trying to involve Headmaster Pitcus before hearing me out. I've shed blood for a year for the Global Army. I deserve some respect."

The representatives' initial instinct was to raise their voices, especially since Khan didn't even try to justify his previous words. Yet, the last part of his statement reminded them of his achievements.

His victory on Onia alone had brought great benefits to the Global Army and Earth as a whole, and he had also saved many lives during his other feats. However, the representatives had treated him like a kid right away.

Khan nodded when he saw tinges of shames appearing among the audience. He had the representatives' attention now, so he had to make his next words matter.

"You are all wealthier than me," Khan announced. "I'm sure you'll try to offer everything you can to your descendants. You'll keep them safe and provide the best resources on the market. You'll give them things that I can't even pronounce, and I can only rejoice knowing that."

Khan was complimenting the representatives, and they knew that. Some displeasure and annoyance still filled their faces, but those words bought Khan a few seconds and improved the general atmosphere.

"I'm also sure you'll find good positions for them," Khan continued. "They will gather merits in safe environments and climb the military ranks without ever facing any danger. I know all of this because that's what I'd do for my children or relatives if I had your wealth."

"Get to the point, young man," One of the representatives voiced.

"I have been with wealthy descendants," Khan revealed. "I've seen the difference that money and resources can make. Yet, they are dead while I'm here."

"Are you insulting our descendants now?" Another representative asked.

"Not at all," Khan promptly responded. "I could survive because that's what I did my entire life. I had to fight over food, clothes, and even houses. When the rebellion on Istrone happened, I could react faster and better than my peers because I already had the right instincts."

"We know what you are trying to say, Lieutenant Khan," A third representative, one of the calmest among the audience, revealed. "We even know what you are trying to accomplish with your lessons. Still, you sent six recruits to the medical bay with injuries that need weeks to heal completely."

"So?" Khan asked. "The next time my students find themselves with a broken arm or leg, they won't freeze. They won't panic. They won't cry in front of an enemy or in the middle of the battlefield because they already have the experience needed to react."

"That's still too much!" One of the angry representatives shouted, and approving voices resounded among the audience.

"How would you teach them that then?" Khan questioned. "I know that I'm young and that my teaching experience is non-existent, but I'm open to suggestions. I don't want to hurt my students, but I can't find a different method to prepare them for what the universe can throw at them. So, please, do tell me if you have better ideas. I'll be happy to apply them."

No one spoke, and some representatives even diverted their gazes when Khan looked at them. They all knew the sad truth about the matter. Only the battlefield could teach about the battlefield.

"My son will never see the battlefield," One of the angry women among the audience eventually exclaimed. "His future is already set. He will never come close to a fight, so I don't see why he should face your barbaric methods only to get more academic merits."

"Where will he go?" Khan asked calmly.

"He will enter an academy specialized in building magic items," The woman proudly announced. "Reebfell is an option, but we'll see if he can aim higher after spending two years in this camp."

The other representatives nodded, and some even whispered compliments to the woman. A political game had started, and everyone wanted a share, everyone except for Khan.

"Let's say that he does exceptionally well during these two years, and let's say that I'm not in the picture," Khan theorized. "Your descendant enters this superior academy and shows great talent for its courses. However, the Third Impact happens right above the building, so he dies because he freezes in front of a Nak."

"What do you kn-?!" The woman instinctively complained before closing her mouth with her hands. Her anger had almost made her forget Khan's history.

"The Second Impact has been a tragic event," Another representative declared. "However, you can't use it to prove your point."

"Why not?" Khan asked while moving his gaze among the audience. "Do you know when or where the next Impact will happen? Can you predict the next rebellion? What if the Global Army finds a stronger alien species and loses the war with it? Can you tell me with absolute certainty that no major crises will happen in the next years?"

No one answered. It was pointless since the representatives knew what Khan would say to reply. He didn't experience only one crisis. His luck had been horrible, and nothing could prevent his descendants from going through something similar.

"As I said before, I know that you'll do everything in your power to keep them safe," Khan continued, "But I also know that it might not be enough. You can complain all you want, but I will still try to prepare my students for the worst. At the end of the day, I only care that they have what they need to survive out there."

Khan wasn't being rude, but some representatives had the chance to complain about that. Yet, they remained silent since everything he had said made sense. It would have been different with another professor, but Khan's history added too much value to his words.

"Anyway," Khan added after letting his words resound in the representatives' minds for a few seconds, "My subject isn't mandatory. Tell your descendant not to attend it if you find it too dangerous. If something happens, they won't be on my conscience because I know that I'm doing everything in my power to prepare them."

Those final words acted as a death blow. Khan had made his position more than clear, and the representatives couldn't argue with that. Everything would be up to them now.

A few silent minutes passed before the representatives began to exchange whispers. Khan couldn't understand what they said, but the various nods and general calm that filled the audience told him that the meeting had gone relatively well.

A glance at Headmaster Pitcus also revealed that he approved what had happened. He nodded at Khan as soon as he met his eyes, and he even decided to take control of the situation after a few more minutes went by.

"I think there's nothing else to say," Headmaster Pitcus announced while stepping forward to reach Khan's left side. "We can end the meeting here. Please, let me escort you all to the station."

The representatives nodded and began to descend from the staircases as Headmaster Pitcus walked toward the entrance. Khan performed a military salute while remaining on his spot, and most of the audience nodded at him before going on their way. Still, a few decided to approach Khan to exchange some short lines.

"I appreciate everything you have done for the Global Army and humankind, Lieutenant Khan," A representative said while wearing a warm smile.

"The future of the Global Army seems to be in decent hands," Another representative commented in a dismissive tone.

"I'm sorry for the initial rudeness," A third representative whispered. "Part of us was only testing you, and I think I speak for all of them when I say that you have given an outstanding impression."

"Try to contain the number of broken bones, will you?" A fourth representative chuckled.

"I can't wait to meet you in friendlier situations," The fifth said.

"My Elsie is about your age," A middle-aged woman hinted. "Try to watch her closely. She might need a man like you in her life."

Khan wore a fake smile as those statements went by. That part turned out to be the worst phase of the meeting, but it ended quickly. When the last representative left the hall, Headmaster Pitcus nodded at Khan again before following those lofty figures.

'It's over,' Khan exclaimed in his mind as a sigh left his mouth. He soon realized that he didn't care about the meeting's outcome. He only felt glad that everything had come to an end.

'Maybe I'm not fit for the political environment,' Khan wondered as he waited in the hall to put some distance from the representatives. 'I never thought that telling the truth could be tiring.'

Khan spent silent minutes in the hall. He sent a few messages to tell Amber and Cora about the meeting and his first impressions, but his stomach eventually forced him to leave. He had yet to have dinner, so he went directly to the canteen.

A familiar scene unfolded in his vision when he left the canteen. Khan noticed a figure waiting for him on a bench in the distance. The phone's light illuminated Cora's face as she waited for a message from her loved one.

Cora almost dropped her phone when she heard steps disrupting the silence of the night, but a timid smile appeared on her face when she saw Khan walking toward her. Still, shyness soon replaced her happiness, which forced her to lower her gaze.

"Were you worried about me?" Khan chuckled as he stopped in front of Cora.

"I knew you would ace the meeting," Cora responded while shaking her head. "I only wanted to see if you were okay."

"My hands are fine," Khan stated while putting his hands in her line of sight. "I'll take off the bandages once I get to my flat."

Cora began to reach for his hands, but her face suddenly turned scarlet, and her arms froze. She felt too timid whenever she thought about the previous night. She didn't know how to face him.

Khan smiled in front of those cute reactions, but he still decided to act. His fingers reached Cora's chin and lifted her head while he bent forward. Cora let him guide her until she found his lips pressing on her mouth.

The kiss was sweet, soft, and slow. The violence that Khan had shown the previous night didn't appear, and Cora slowly grew used to that gesture.

"I have already accepted you," Khan whispered after making their lips separate. "Stop worrying so much."

Cora wanted to say something, but Khan interrupted her with a quick kiss on her lips. A cute pout appeared on her face as her face reddened even more, but Khan melted it with a short laugh.

"Let me take you home," Khan requested while straightening his back and showing her his open hand.

"I think you should just abandon the idea of relying on first-grade weapons," Amber explained as she and Khan walked through Reebfell's streets. "Even those resistant to your element don't have complete immunity. Go for a custom-made second-grade knife if you really need to buy something."

"Do I even have enough Credits for something so valuable?" Khan asked.

"The prices of the magic weapons have different brackets," Amber revealed. "You'll probably go broke if you buy the best second-grade knife on the market, but you might be fine with something made by a relatively inexperienced blacksmith."

"Won't that defeat the purpose behind my purchase?" Khan voiced his doubts.

"It depends on the shop," Amber stated. "Some brands are popular for their reliable products, even when they come from apprentice blacksmiths."

"You know so much, Professor Teldom," Khan joked.

"Can't you just be happy that I've decided to accompany you?" Amber complained even if a smile appeared on her face.

"I remember that you liked the idea of a trip to the city even more than me," Khan teased.

"Shut up," Amber snorted in her sweet tone.

Khan's knife had broken during his last time inside the training hall. His third lesson was also approaching, so he didn't hesitate to contact Amber after dropping Cora at her dormitory. The Professor had been more than happy to plan a morning trip to Reebfell, which had led to the current situation.

"Why aren't you with your girl anyway?" Amber asked after the two remained silent for a few seconds.

"Why did you wait until we got to Reebfell to ask me that?" Khan laughed. "Did you experience a sudden burst of jealousy?"

"Come on, Khan," Amber said in a serious tone. "I don't want her to worry about our relationship. You are way too famous. I might end up at the center of gossips in no time, and I don't want her to be surprised about them."

"Your career might also suffer now that I think about it," Khan sighed.

"I have an excellent reputation," Amber reassured. "Some gossips won't ruin it. I'm only worried to cause problems for you two."

"Why? Aren't we friends?" Khan asked while wearing a stern expression.

"That's not what I meant," Amber responded. "She might-."

"I know what you meant," Khan laughed. "I was only joking. Cora couldn't come because of her lessons, and you are better than her at this stuff anyway. I told her that I was coming to Reebfell with you."

Amber nodded. She wouldn't worry as long as Khan didn't start to lie to Cora when he hung out with her. She felt that he wasn't that kind of man, but she wanted to be sure about that anyway.

"Also," Khan continued, "I wouldn't stop talking and going out with you even if she asked me that. I understand jealousy, but that shouldn't prevent me from having female friends."

"Do you think she will get jealous?" Amber questioned.

"Do you wish to make her jealous?" Khan teased.

"Khan, come on," Amber complained. "Help me get rid of these worries. We can go back to the jokes afterward."

"She doesn't know much about relationships," Khan revealed. "She is also quite shy. I think she'll get jealous about almost everything initially, but time will give her some confidence."

"I didn't expect you to go for someone so innocent," Amber mocked. "Maybe there is a romantic heart under all the jokes and training."

"I didn't expect to kiss her either," Khan admitted, "But she is sweet and honest. I smile whenever I see her small efforts. I can trust her completely."

"You are so cute," Amber giggled.

"Her appearance also helped a lot," Khan exclaimed. "I mean, did you see her? I must be the luckiest guy in the world."

"You are a dirty-minded idiot!" Amber shouted and slapped Khan's shoulder as laughs mixed with her complaints. "You just said that she doesn't have any experience. I won't forgive you if you push her too hard."

"I should make a trip to the medical bay now that I think about it," Khan commented.

Amber remained silent for a second, but complaints left her mouth again when she understood what Khan meant. She couldn't be too explicit in the middle of the street, but she still found many vague synonyms for the word "condom".

"I get it, I get it," Khan laughed after Amber seemed set on ripping off his shoulder. "I have no intention of rushing her. I have to take this slowly to make sure that she is ready. Hurting her is the last thing I want."

Amber wore a satisfied smile, but she suddenly recalled something that soured her mood. She still remembered the faint whisper that Khan had voiced when they found Cora waiting for him after his first trip to Reebfell.

"What about your heart?" Amber asked in a worried tone. "What do you want?"

Khan didn't expect Amber to remember that line. It actually told him more about her character, which left him pleased. Amber really was a good person, so he decided to answer honestly.

"I think I'm starting to accept that I won't ever experience something so perfect again," Khan admitted. "I'll remember it forever, and I'll probably compare it to every other happy moment waiting for me in the future. Still, that shouldn't stop me from listening to my desires and fulfilling them."

"You aren't talking about something naughty again, right?" Amber asked. "Also, you are only seventeen. You have a whole life in front of you. It's basically proven that you'll experience something better one day. Who knows? Cora might be the one behind that greater happiness."

Amber didn't know anything about Liiza. Only Cora had managed to connect the dots and uncover something, but she was also in the dark about almost every detail.

Amber knew that Khan wasn't the type to exaggerate, but she addressed his extreme statement to his young age. She believed that he had experienced something that had felt perfect in his mind, but she also assumed that life would eventually grant him better emotions.

Instead, Khan had been completely confident in his statement due to the tattoo on his right shoulder. The Niqols never joked when it came to the mana, and Zalpa had even tried her best to make Khan and Liiza separate back then. However, his success in the test and his permanent mark confirmed the sad truth he had just voiced.

Still, Khan had been honest. He knew that his faint guilt and love would probably never vanish, but he couldn't stop living because of them. His constant indecision when it came to relationships also had to end. It was time to do his best to accomplish some form of happiness.

Of course, there was one thing that Khan could never even try to put in the back of his mind. That was the goal that no amount of happiness could ever make him forget. He had to find the Nak, or true peace would never arrive.

The interactions between Khan and Amber went back to normal after that serious conversation. The two mostly cracked jokes and spoke about random topics as they walked through Reebfell's streets.

Since Amber had accepted to accompany Khan, they decided to go over her needs first. She didn't have a proper goal in mind, but she didn't hold back from looking for new clothes or some rare book that even her family lacked.

Almost all the shops in Reebfell could send eventual purchases directly to the camp, so Amber didn't need to carry anything even if she bought a few things. Once she was done, she led Khan toward the part of the commercial district that handled magical weapons and items in general.

The change in the purpose of those buildings was evident. The structures there had transparent entrances, and some even lacked them since many blacksmiths liked to show their ability to the crowd.

Amber explained how that was a common practice for blacksmiths trying to make a name for themselves. They had to rent the stands inside those buildings, and the owners would give them a chance to become official members of their brand if they sold enough products.

Every brand had different requirements and prices for its stands. Some focused on weapons, others on general reliability, and a few even in unpredictability. Amber couldn't explain the matter too profoundly since that wasn't her field, but she knew that the creation of magic items could have different approaches due to the various schools and branches belonging to the subject.

The more Amber explained the more Khan's interest rose, but he wasn't the only one with that desire. Each stand had crowds, which mainly featured astonished kids with their parents. Khan

managed to steal peeks from time to time, but he could only glance at random scenes of men and women crouched in front of a glowing anvil.

"Don't get lost among the stands," Amber giggled when she saw the intense interest and curiosity in Khan's restless eyes. "These blacksmiths are only trying to get accepted to the actual shops. You need experts who have already proven their names."

Khan let Amber lead him toward areas without the crowds to enter one of the buildings in that part of the commercial district. The atmosphere immediately changed after entering the structure's perimeter. The loud mess of the stands vanished all of a sudden, and a peaceful vibe unfolded.

The stands were only a few meters away, and the building had no walls that divided them from the insides of its first floor. However, the noise coming from the crowds couldn't reach those areas and allowed the few customers there to inspect the various items exposed on a rectangular transparent case.

The mana radiated by those items attracted Khan's attention, but Amber dragged him away after letting him wander for a few minutes. The first floor of the building had more areas, and their destination was in one of the rooms encircled by walls.

Clinging noises began to echo through the air as soon as Khan and Amber crossed one of the few sliding doors on the first floor. Multiple blacksmiths bent over glowing anvils unfolded in the two's eyes, but Amber didn't let Khan spend too long inspecting the area. It turned out that she knew one of those experts, and the latter didn't hesitate to greet her as soon as she heard her steps.

"Miss Teldom!" A middle-aged man covered in sweat and wearing a simple black tanktop announced after Khan and Amber stopped in front of his anvil. "What a pleasure to see you here. You are as enchanting as ever."

"Your tongue has grown even sweeter, Master Cansend," Amber exclaimed while wearing a polite but bright smile.

'Fourth-level warrior,' Khan evaluated after sensing the mana inside the burly man.

Master Cansend had the appearance of a brute. His sweaty bald head reflected the light radiated by his azure anvil, and his long black beard had traces of dirt in its many curls. His dark gloves also had multiple spots and holes, but his behavior was impeccable.

"Is the sir here your fiancée?" Master Cansend asked while glancing at Khan.

"No, but he is a good friend," Amber explained. "I'm introducing him to the shop. He needs a custom-made magic weapon."

"You have come in the right place!" Master Cansend stated happily. "The blacksmiths in the "Divine Architects" build the most reliable magic weapons on the market. Tell me, what can I do for you?"

"I need a chaos-resistant second-grade knife," Khan quickly explained.

"Chaos-resistant?" Master Cansend repeated as his brown eyes sharpened. "Are you Lieutenant Khan, sir?"

"Yes, that's me," Khan directly admitted.

"Wow, I knew that you were young, but seeing you in person gives a completely different impression." Master Cansend exclaimed. "Thank you for your service. I can't wait to get to work on your knife."

"Master Cansend, Khan's finances aren't great," Amber intervened. "I'm afraid he won't be able to request your services today."

"Oh, that sounds about right," Master Cansend commented while placing his magic hammer on the glowing anvil and scratching his long beard. "Though I know someone who can help you. He is my apprentice, so I'll take full responsibility for eventual complaints or mistakes."

"I'm sure the "Divine Architects" will stay true to its name." Amber lowered her head as a sign of respect, and Khan imitated her.

"That's the main aspect behind our brand," Master Cansend declared before inspecting the anvils around him and releasing a shout. "Curtis, I have a client for you!"

Master Cansend's loud voice went against the gentle and polite image he had created with his impeccable behavior, but both Khan and Amber pretended that everything was normal. A tall, slender man in his twenties with messy black hair soon approached Master Cansend's anvil, and he performed a military salute at the sight of the two uniforms.

"How can I help you, sir and ma'am?" Curtis asked while removing his hair from his forehead to show his dark eyes.

"Lieutenant Khan needs a second-grade knife resistant to the chaos element," Master Cansend explained before Khan or Amber could say anything.

"A chaos-resistant knife?" Curtis repeated.. "I'm not as expensive as my Master, but that weapon will cost a lot anyway."

Chapter 308 - Discounts

"How expensive are we talking about?" Khan asked.

"Let's move to my anvil first," Curtis exclaimed, and Khan and Amber nodded at Master Cansend before following his apprentice.

Curtis led the two past a corner that hid a trapdoor and descended from the staircase connected to that opening. A vast underground hall with a far livelier atmosphere unfolded in Amber and Khan's eyes, and they could immediately see that everyone there was relatively young.

"Curtis, do you finally have a client?" A woman near the bottom of the hall shouted as soon as the trio left the staircase.

"Shut it, Betty," Curtis snorted as he stormed through the hall. "I'm with Lieutenant Khan here."

"That Khan?" Betty gasped as she and everyone else in the hall moved their eyes on Khan.

"She is richer than me," Khan commented while pointing at Amber, but the comment didn't affect her polite smile.

"Sir, thank you for your work out there!" An apprentice shouted.

"Thank you, sir!" Another apprentice followed, and many others voiced similar lines.

Khan had the chance to see how regular citizens viewed him from those reactions. He had often met superiors or soldiers at his same rank, but the various apprentices showed him how his fame was incredibly positive. He even noticed some reverence in a few gazes.

"I'm sorry that you ended up with Curtis as your blacksmith," Betty eventually stated.

"Betty!" Curtis scolded.

"Is he bad?" Khan asked.

"Not at all," Betty responded through a laugh, "But we like to tease him about his style."

'Style?' Khan wondered, but the answer to those doubts became evident when he reached Curtis' corner.

The underground hall was full of apprentices, and all of them had small cubicles with anvils at their center. The short tables that separated the various spaces had different materials and weapons in exposition, so Khan could quickly see some of Curtis' weapons.

The weapons were fine. Some were incomplete, but they didn't have any damage or crack. The issue was with their handles since Curtis tried to shape them like skulls.

"No one understands my genius," Curtis scoffed as he sat behind his anvil. "A battle starts even before clashing weapons. A mere sight at my creations will make the enemies cower in fear!"

"How can anyone see this design if I have my hand wrapped around it?" Khan honestly asked.

Curtis seemed to freeze, and the other apprentices also went silent for a second before exploding into loud laughs. Mocks quickly followed, but Curtis appeared able to ignore all of them.

Khan liked that lively atmosphere. He preferred it over the heavy political tension, but he still felt worried about the actual utility of those strange handles.

Nevertheless, Curtis' weapons subverted his expectations. Khan picked a sword on the table around the apprentice and noticed that its strange handle felt unnaturally comfortable. The holes for the skull's eyes and nose didn't hinder his grasp at all.

"Why do you even need to shape the handles like this?" Khan asked. "I'm not complaining, just curious."

"My genius can come out only when I'm free to work as I want," Curtis exclaimed. "It's as if my mana knows that I'm doing something I love."

Luckily for Curtis, Khan could completely understand that statement. The mana could react to feelings on its own if they carried enough intensity. It actually spoke for Curtis' talent that he could express such effects without even realizing it.

"The shop's regulations force me to warn you that this is my first time building something out of chaos-resistant materials," Curtis admitted once the laughs went quiet. "I worked on a few preparations with those metals for Master Cansend, but I never built a complete weapon with them before."

"How much will it cost?" Khan questioned.

"I can't be sure unless I see its specifics," Curtis explained.

Khan picked up his phone and browsed through the menus of the Divine Reaper's program. A few holograms came out of the device when he reached the part that described which knives suited the martial art, and Curtis studied them thoroughly.

"The current price of the chaos-resistant alloys isn't too high," Curtis commented. "Would you mind sacrificing some length to make the knife even cheaper?"

"I would mind," Khan responded. "I don't want to have problems with its range."

"Are you sure you need it to be a second-grade weapon?" Curtis asked. "I know I can make a first-grade knife that can last for a few years even under the influence of the chaos element. I'm sure you don't even launch spells all the time in battle, so that might help lower the price."

Curtis' understanding of battles was correct, but it didn't apply to Khan's situation. His mana anomaly gave the properties of the chaos element to his energy all the time, so its destructive power affected his weapons even during his martial arts.

Also, Khan didn't want to remain a first-level warrior for so long. He would need a better weapon anyway once his attunement with mana reached the next checkpoint, so he nodded without considering other options.

"These requirements don't help you," Curtis sighed. "I need to hammer down many layers to reach this level of sturdiness, which means more chaos-resistant alloys. The lowest I can go is nine thousand Credits."

Khan couldn't help but feel surprised about the price, but a glance toward Amber revealed that it was within her expectations. She even nodded to express her approval.

"My Master would have charged you three times that, at least," Curtis revealed. "I can't wait to gain his approval and start making crazy money like him."

"I suggest you don't speak like that in front of your customers once you move up," Amber chuckled.

Curtis' eyes widened, and an awkward smile appeared on his face as he glanced at Khan. However, the latter had barely heard his last comment.

'Nine thousand Credits,' Khan shouted in his mind, 'And the price will only go up once I start requesting better weapons. I guess I need to find a way to make money.'

"Khan, this is the best deal you'll find," Amber said when she saw that Khan remained silent.

"I'll take it," Khan exclaimed after snapping out of his thoughts. "How long will you need to make it?"

"I can order the alloys now," Curtis declared, "And the project will have my full attention once they arrive. I think I'll complete the knife in a couple of weeks."

"Do you need my payment now?" Khan asked.

"First, I need your main hand for the measurements," Curtis responded.

"Can you make it for both?" Khan questioned.

"Of course," Curtis announced before using one of his tools to measure Khan's palms and fingers.

Amber and Khan left Curtis to his work afterward, and Khan completed the payment on Master Cansend's anvil. Khan's finances decreased significantly, but he still felt no attachment toward money.

"I need to pay a visit to the 'Beasts' King' now," Khan revealed after the two left the shop and returned to Reebfell's streets. "You can go back to the camp if you want."

"Don't worry about that," Amber cheerfully replied. "I want to see how you pick your Tainted animals."

"You must really like hanging out with me," Khan teased.

"I do, actually," Amber grinned, "Especially now that I don't have to worry about breaking your heart."

"You would have totally fallen for me," Khan joked.

"As if!" Amber scoffed. "I want my man to be smart and knowledgeable."

"When did I become dumb?" Khan questioned.

"Shall I remind you who showed you how to withdraw Credits from the consoles?" Amber sneered.

"No one can look past my background," Khan sighed. "My poor heart will crumble among these biased rich people."

Amber laughed but didn't say anything, and the two soon went back to their random conversations. The part of the commercial district that handled Tainted animals wasn't close to their position, but they didn't mind walking.

The two eventually reached the "Beasts' King", and the same waiter from the last time welcomed them with a broad smile. He appeared ecstatic to see Khan returning after only a week.

"I hope the Tainted ape didn't cause problems," The waiter announced after the exchange of greetings.

"No, it was perfect," Khan responded. "It broke bones as easily as advertised."

The waiter didn't know how to react to that statement, especially since it probably involved wealthy recruits. The man limited himself to rub his hands as he waited to hear the reason behind that visit.

"I need a batch of Tainted animals this time," Khan quickly continued. "They don't need to be as strong as the ape, but I don't want to make it too easy for my students either."

"I have exactly what you are looking for," The waiter exclaimed before leading Khan and Amber toward one of the cages at the end of the first floor.

The cage contained five Tainted snakes that had gone through a series of bionic enhancements. Some of them had metallic attachments to their tails, others featured glowing fangs, and one even had a pair of small arms in the middle of its body.

They looked as proper Tainted animals, but Khan sensed how little mana they had inside their bodies. They were little more than ordinary beasts, which gave him a chance to exploit the weakness planted last time.

"How much would these cost?" Khan asked while keeping his poker face firm.

"I would normally sell these Tainted snakes for a few thousand Credits each," The waiter happily announced, "But I'll apply a special discount since it's already your second visit here. You can take all of them for three thousand and five hundred Credits."

"That's very generous of you," Khan exclaimed.

"Nonsense," The waiter chuckled. "We offer nothing but the best, especially to such promising heroes."

"Why would you charge so much then?" Khan asked as his tone became cold. "These snakes don't have even a tenth of the ape's mana, and I'm considering all of them."

The waiter's smile froze, and even his hands stopped moving. Amber didn't seem to know much about Tainted animals, so he had thought to overprice the snakes a bit, but Khan had seen right through that rip-off.

"It seems that the 'Beasts' King" is only interested in Credits," Khan sighed while wearing a disappointed face. "I can't believe it doesn't care about the soldiers' future."

"No, please, I didn't-," The waiter stuttered.

"Let's go, Professor Teldom," Khan interrupted while turning to move toward the exit. "It's clear that this shop doesn't have the Global Army's interests at heart."

Amber played along, but she had to walk past Khan and cover her mouth since an amused smile had appeared on her face. Still, that only worked in Khan's favor since the waiter saw the strongest among the two trying to leave the shop in a hurry.

"Please, wait!" The waiter called as he hurried after Khan and Amber. "I didn't know the snakes were part of a bad batch! The people on the upper floors must have made a mistake!"

Khan and Amber didn't stop, and the waiter even failed to enter their field of view. He started to panic, which forced him to resort to drastic measures.

"Why don't I give you the Tainted snakes for free while you make a different purchase?" The waiter shouted. "I'll obviously add a special discount to make up for this unforgivable mistake."

Khan slowly stopped, and Amber imitated him. He turned, but she voiced an excuse to leave the shop since she found herself unable to suppress her smile.

"What kind of discount?" Khan asked in a cold voice as soon as the waiter started to show some relief.

"I'll cut the price by fifty percent!" The waiter exclaimed.

"That's what you did with the Tainted ape," Khan shook his head. "It seems that the shop isn't as sorry as I thought."

Khan turned to leave again, but the waiter immediately started to increase the discount.. Khan pretended not to hear anything and stopped only when the words "eighty percent" resounded in the hall.

"How much did you rip him off for?" Amber laughed when Khan came out of the "Beasts' King".

"I'm innocent here," Khan lied. "He did everything on his own."

"How much?" Amber insisted as her smile broadened.

"I might have gotten ten Tainted animals for less than two thousand Credits," Khan admitted.

"You are a little devil," Amber giggled. "Why did you even go so hard on him when the Global Army would have refunded the purchase?"

"I might need this shop in the future," Khan revealed. "They won't try to trick me from now on. I might even gain access to discounts whenever I mention today's events."

"You are a smart little devil," Amber commented. "Though, why would you even need them for? Our students are recruits. I don't think they can face something stronger than Tainted animals."

Amber's question was reasonable, but she didn't know that some of Khan's techniques required blood and body parts. Mere Tainted animals wouldn't be enough for the [Blood Vortex] and the higher checkpoints of the [Blood Shield], so he would have to purchase monsters or stronger creatures to perform them.

The Global Army wouldn't refund purchases that had nothing to do with the students, and Khan's finances had already fallen significantly. Having a trustworthy shop that could provide what he needed at a low price felt almost necessary in his situation.

"I have my reasons," Khan stated, opting for words that weren't proper lies.

Amber respected the need for privacy, especially in someone so exceptional as Khan. Almost every soldier preferred to keep the details behind their arts and spells a secret, so she limited herself to nod and changed the topic.

"You know you could have waited to commission the weapon?" Amber asked as the two began to walk through the streets without a specific destination. "Who knows? The cost of the chaos-resistant alloys might have gone down in a few months. It would have helped save some Credits."

"How would I even keep track of that?" Khan questioned.

"I have someone in my family who handles that," Amber revealed. "I didn't suggest it earlier because you seemed set on buying it right away."

"Don't worry," Khan reassured. "I wanted to get my gear as soon as possible anyway."

"I thought you wanted to stay away from the training halls for a while after yesterday's mess," Amber teased.

Khan had revealed what had happened before the meeting. Amber had found the story funny, so she didn't mind using it to probe into his mindset.

"I feel naked without my knife," Khan exclaimed. "I can't use my full power without it."

"Why would you even use your full power?" Amber laughed. "Reebfell isn't a battlefield."

Khan didn't answer. He diverted his gaze and lost himself in the beautiful sceneries that filled his vision. He could see the greatness of human technology in every corner, but his senses instinctively

kept track of the mana released in the environment. Khan was in a safe place, but his mind was ready for battle.

"I guess the battlefield is part of me," Khan whispered, and Amber found herself speechless.

Amber often forgot that Khan had seen far more than her. He could laugh, joke, and talk normally, but he was also someone who had killed and had gone through awful struggles. His honesty toward her tried to hide the soldier behind his youthful face, but she inevitably saw it from time to time.

"Let's go eat something," Amber cheerfully announced to change the topic while grabbing Khan's arm.

Khan snapped back to reality and seized the opportunity to get back on teasing Amber. "Poor Cora. She had to pick such a popular guy."

"I won't pay for your food if you keep speaking nonsense," Amber giggled without letting Khan go.

"My arm is yours, ma'am," Khan exclaimed in a polite tone, and the two soon went back to harmless jokes and laugh.

.
. .

Reebfell made it very easy to kill time. The many shops placed in distant areas of the commercial district and its various attractions allowed Khan and Amber to spend entire hours simply looking at the showcased goods or chatting in front of tasty drinks.

Some might see that as a date, but Amber and Khan had reached a silent understanding on that topic. They simply did their best to enjoy themselves as friends without ever overthinking their behavior.

The sun had already started to set by the time the two returned to the training camp. Khan's phone had rung non-stop due to the many Tainted animals that the "Beasts' King" had sent, but he made the soldiers tasked with the matter place every cage in his hangar. There was no need to feed those creatures since they had to die for the sake of his lesson.

Khan only had a few hours to kill before his lesson, so he went straight for his flat after separating from Amber. His mood felt oddly fantastic. He had laughed with a friend, taken care of his knife, and set the foundation for a lasting relationship with a useful shop. It almost felt unreal that he had been in the middle of a battlefield just a week ago.

A shower followed a few mental exercises. Khan made sure to reach the hangar early, and he didn't hesitate to fall into his meditative state as he waited for his students to arrive.

The recruits were on time, but a dozen of them didn't show up. Khan knew that the meeting with the representatives had gone well, so he didn't blame himself for the event. He couldn't force such young men and women to attend his lessons.

A series of hesitant and worried faces unfolded in Khan's vision when he opened his eyes. The sight of the ten small cages in the back of the hangar had made the recruits recall the lesson with the Tainted ape, which naturally scared them.

"There is a difference between shattering your naivety and scarring you for life," Khan announced as he stood up and placed a hand on a cage nearby. "I've forced you to face opponents that you couldn't possibly defeat, but today's lesson will be different."

Khan stepped forward and approached his recruits. He had already decided who would fight the Tainted animals, but he wanted to see whether the current inspection would make him change his mind.

"Today's Tainted animals are weak," Khan eventually continued. "All of you can defeat them. I know that because I've tested your ability. However, I don't want to see a simple victory."

The recruits didn't completely understand the meaning behind Khan's words, and he didn't give them the time to think. He turned to approach the cages, and a name left his mouth during the walk. "Celine!"

That word surprised the recruits, but they all turned toward the young woman called by Khan. Celine was one of the weakest students in the class. Her attunement with mana wasn't great, and the same went for her proficiency level. Her instincts were also quite bad due to her timid character.

"You are doing poorly, which is fine," Khan explained as he jumped on one of the smallest cages. "Yet, you won't get anywhere until you gain some confidence. You'll be the first to kill a Tainted animal today. I hope you are ready."

"Sir, can I have the first round?" Elsie asked while Celine slowly stepped forward to leave the group.

"No, you wouldn't learn anything by fighting," Khan refused. "Your job today is to watch."

The statement confused the recruits even more, but none of them complained. The dinner two days ago had left some tension between them and Khan. He obviously didn't address it, but the students didn't feel like treating him in a friendly manner so soon.

Celine left the group, and the other recruits moved toward the open wall to give her space. Khan nodded as he inspected the scene. Celine was clearly worried, but she took a battle position and prepared her mana for the imminent fight.

"Ready?" Khan asked when he sensed that her mana was in the right places.

Celine nodded, and Khan touched a label on the cage. The structure still had a dark fabric over it, but a small shape started to press on it as soon as the entrance opened. It didn't take long before a reptilian head came out from under that cloth and voiced an angry hiss.

The recruits and Celine felt surprised once again at the sight of the Tainted snake. They didn't see many Tainted animals in their lives, but their entrance test had featured something far more threatening.

The Tainted snake was small, barely two-meter-long, and the short metallic arms growing from its body felt useless. It shot toward Celine as soon as it fixed its reptilian eyes on her figure, but its speed wasn't great.

Celine steeled her concentration quickly, and she threw a kick forward as soon as the snake tried to jump on her. The recruit failed to use her mana correctly, but her attack was precise and hit the creature at the center of its mouth.

The sheer physical strength contained in Celine's body was enough to send the snake flying away. The creature didn't suffer any injury, and its aggression made it shoot toward the recruit in no time, but she responded with another kick.

Celine kept failing to perform her martial art correctly, but she slowly grew used to those exchanges. She was faster and stronger than the snake, so her basic forms were enough to fend it off.

Then, one of her kicks eventually managed to deploy mana correctly. Celine's foot slammed right under the snake's head, and a chunk of its body exploded into pieces.

The creature flew away and struggled to control itself. A relatively thick chunk of flesh kept its head attached to the rest of its body, but it was clear that the damage was too severe. The snake had to thank its mutations for being able to survive such deep injuries.

Celine revealed an ecstatic smile when she saw that the Tainted snake was unable to move. She even jumped on her spot to express her happiness. She had defeated her opponent on her own, finally proving that she could also fight like her companions.

"What are you doing?" Khan's cold voice interrupted that happy moment.

Celine's figure tensed up, and she even performed a military salute before focusing on Khan. She didn't know why he was being so cold and detached, but she wouldn't allow her behavior to be blamable.

"Why did you stop fighting?" Khan asked while pointing at the injured snake. "Your opponent is alive. Kill it."

"Won't you need it for other lessons, sir?" Celine honestly asked.

"This is the lesson," Khan explained. "I told you. I don't want to see victories. None of these Tainted animals have to survive today."

Understanding finally dawned on the recruits. Khan wasn't only trying to improve their confidence. He also wanted them to grow used to the sight of blood. If they didn't hesitate to kill now, there was a high chance that they would do well on the battlefield.

Celine also understood the purpose of the lesson. She gulped and walked toward the Tainted snake, but its poor condition made her hesitate.

The snake couldn't move properly, but it struggled. It never stopped trying to adjust its position, which only made it curl and spin on itself. Each movement tainted the floor with its dark blood, and its hisses often accompanied those events.

"Celine, do it," Khan ordered, forcing Celine to snap out of her daze.

Celine didn't take pity in a mere Tainted animal, but the scene was too ugly for her. She raised a foot and slammed it down to crush the snake's head, but she missed her target since she closed her eyes at the last second.

Khan didn't say anything. Some recruits in the audience tried to laugh, but Khan silenced them through his cold glare. Celine wasn't doing well, but he wouldn't let anyone break her concentration.

Celine took a deep breath before raising her foot again. She didn't close her eyes, but she failed to use her mana correctly, so her attack didn't crush the snake's head. The creature survived and forced her to repeat her technique.

A third, fourth, and fifth kick stomp followed, but Celine always failed to use her mana correctly. She couldn't help but lose her concentration in the middle of that pitiful scene, and each failure only intensified her restlessness.

Celine wanted her battle to end, but the Tainted snake simply wouldn't die. She kicked the creature three more times, but she was barely trying to muster her mana at that point. Whimpers and soft pleads even left her mouth as she begged the beast to stop breathing.

The challenging aspect of the lesson became evident now. Defeating weak Tainted animals wasn't a problem for recruits with enhanced bodies and martial arts. It was actually relatively easy. However, the actual killing was hard.

Celine never performed her technique correctly, but the Tainted snake eventually died under her stomps. Her attacks continued even after the creature's head had turned into a bloody pulp, and she fell on the floor to cry once she noticed that her battle was finally over.

Khan reached Celine in an instant, and she didn't hold back from using his shoulder to cry as soon as he voiced reassuring words. He had to help her stand up and walk back to her companions, and one of her friends replaced him afterward.

"Killing isn't easy," Khan announced when he saw that Celine wiped off her tears, "And it shouldn't be. Learn to kill, but don't ignore the weight of a life.. It's a hard path, but I'm here to make it a bit easier."

Chapter 310 - Date

The recruits performed relatively well after the purpose of the lesson became clear. Some lucky ones managed to use their mana correctly right away, which led to quick kills, but most ended up in long battles that forced them to overcome their anxiety and disgust.

Khan didn't let the robots clean the hangar, so the floor grew dirtier after each battle. A few recruits had to attack while their opponents fed off the remains of the dead Tainted animals, which naturally affected their ability to focus.

The lesson succeeded in making the students experience part of the battlefield, and even those who didn't fight gained something out of it. Defeating those Tainted animals was far too easy for them, but the actual killing was hard, especially when they had already won, and that was enough to accomplish what Khan had in mind.

The lesson ended in friendly terms. The recruits' mood was awful, but Khan had shown kindness and care toward those who crumbled once their battles ended. The awkwardness and tension built

after the dinner together vanished, and the students even felt closer to him when they left the hangar.

The mood was too sour to ask for another dinner, and the disgusting scenes had also killed the students' hunger. Khan didn't mind that outcome, and he used the event to enjoy some valuable time with Cora.

"It's heartwarming to see you so serious about your students," Cora commented while Khan was busy wolfing his third plate.

"They have a lot to learn," Khan responded after gulping his bite. "Still, they are promising. I can see a few of them reaching good results by the end of the semester."

"I wonder how you come up with your lessons," Cora said as her warm smile remained on her face.

"I don't plan them," Khan revealed. "Maybe I should. I'm learning as I go."

"I think you are doing great," Cora stated. "I hear the rumors about you. Some soldiers in my year are actually jealous about their juniors."

"I can't possibly be so famous," Khan laughed as he ordered another plate from the interactive table.

"You definitely are," Cora also laughed, but her cheek reddened when she recalled something.

Khan noticed that reaction, and he didn't hesitate to exploit the chance. He bent toward her seat and took her arm to whisper in her ear before she could retreat. "Are they also jealous about you and me?"

"A bit," Cora whispered, and a kiss landed on her mouth when she raised her head.

"We are in the middle of the canteen," Cora complained when their lips separated. "Everyone can see us."

"I don't care," Khan said before kissing her again.

Khan soon left her to focus on his new plate, and Cora could only lower her head after noticing that a few curious gazes had converged on her. She pretended to adjust her long hair while she waited for her redness to disappear, but Khan saw the happy smile that she tried to hide.

Khan didn't take long to finish his meal, and the two could soon leave the canteen. Khan took Cora's hand once they gained some privacy, and she began to walk slowly to enjoy her return to the dormitory.

"You know," Khan voiced to interrupt the silence between them, "You don't have to go back to your dormitory. You can always sleep in my flat."

Cora almost froze when she heard those words. She had obviously thought about that opportunity, but she also knew what it would involve.

"I was kidding," Khan chuckled while leaving a kiss on her head. "We'll get there eventually, but don't feel forced."

"I-if it's you-," Cora stammered.

"Hey," Khan interrupted Cora by pulling her hand and forcing her to face him. "It's fine. Don't even try to see it as a problem."

"Khan," Cora whispered as her hesitation melted. She pushed her head forward and delivered one of her rare kisses that Khan happily welcomed.

It wasn't late, but the two had reached a relatively isolated part of the camp during their walk, and Khan could sense that they were alone. The privacy allowed him to linger longer than usual in the kiss, and his free hand also reached Cora's waist to pull her closer.

Cora clung her free hand to Khan's uniform. She had grown more used to their kisses, but her body tensed up when he began to caress her waist. The event made him decide to separate, but his lips dived on her again when she tried to voice a weak "sorry".

Cora pouted when the second kiss ended, but Khan only laughed at that scene. He even scolded her gently as he left her waist to caress her cheek. "I told you that it's fine. Stop blaming yourself."

"Fine," Cora whispered before placing her head on his chest and enveloping him in a sweet hug.

"Oh, right," Khan exclaimed as he caressed Cora's hair. "Amber said that I should take you out for a date on the weekend. Are you free tomorrow?"

"A date?" Cora asked. "Are you sure? I don't want to get in the way of your training."

"I won't sleep to compensate for it," Khan joked, but Cora promptly left his chest to glare at him.

"I'm kidding," Khan sighed. "I wouldn't have slept anyway, but spending time with you would force me to take a break. You would actually help me."

Cora didn't seem convinced, but she liked the idea of a date, so she limited herself to repeating her previous question. "Are you sure?"

"I wouldn't have asked otherwise," Khan reassured while pushing Cora's head back on his chest.

"Then I'm free tomorrow," Cora whispered.

.
. .
.

Khan had no idea how to plan a date. His only real experience with a girlfriend came from Liiza, and the two had never needed to prepare anything. Everything had felt natural with her as long as they were together, but that didn't apply to Cora.

Luckily for Khan, Amber was an excellent friend, and she didn't hold back from helping him plan a proper schedule for his date with Cora. She even sounded happy to make that young romance bloom.

The date started in Reebfell's commercial district. Khan and Cora spent hours walking hand in hand through the vast streets as they inspected various shops. At first, she felt shy to be among so many people with Khan, but she quickly grew used to her situation and managed to enjoy it.

Khan liked to see Cora's smile. He couldn't explain how she had remained so pure after Istrone's events, and that spoke greatly for her character. She was cheerful, sweet, and lovely beyond reason.

Cora made sure that Khan also had his part of the fun. She accompanied him through many areas that didn't match her interests, and her smile widened whenever she saw Khan losing himself in the descriptions of some items.

The commercial district was so vast that Khan felt to have seen only a tenth of it during his third visit in the city. He discovered many shops that didn't appear on the train's offer, but he failed to find something interesting.

Reebfell's commercial district literally had everything, but only from the human perspective. Khan wanted to see if he could find something related to specific alien arts or knowledge, but his search led nowhere. He had already purchased some of the best books in the field.

The matter felt slightly disappointing, especially since Khan knew how useful some alien arts could be. The humans disregarded most of the knowledge carried by those species since their approach was more accessible, but Khan didn't want to remain so limited.

Still, the trip through the commercial district taught Khan that he couldn't find that knowledge there. He even failed to find alternatives to the "Beasts' King". A few shops sold exotic materials, but none involved blood or body parts from powerful creatures.

The disappointment was only temporary. After all, Cora was the main reason behind that trip, and she managed to claim the entirety of Khan's attention most of the time. She was beyond happy, and her feelings seemed able to dig holes in Khan's usually dark mood.

The walk in the commercial district was only the first part of the date. Amber named an amusement park that Khan and Cora visited right before lunchtime. They had to retake the train to reach that area, but everything turned out to be relatively straightforward, even for Khan.

The amusement park blew Khan's expectations. That was his first time seeing such tall and strange attractions. He and Cora could also gain access to special discounts due to his position as a lieutenant and a professor, so the ticket for the various rides and games ended up being pretty cheap.

The afternoon went by in no time as Khan and Cora laughed, joked, and had fun in the various attractions. The amusement park was too big to see everything in those few hours, but they didn't mind missing out on a few rides, especially since they gave them the chance to come back there during future dates.

When the sun began to set and the attractions started to close down, Khan and Cora approached a building containing a series of fake spaceships attached to the floor through metal arms. Amber had suggested visiting that game, so he had saved some time before the inevitable return to the training camp.

Khan didn't understand the reason behind Amber's suggestion. The fake spaceships initially made him curious, but his interest vanished when he saw kids on them.

"Why did she even tell me to come here?" Khan wondered. "We can't sit together on these rides."

"I think I understand what she had in mind," Cora exclaimed while pulling Khan across the area to reach a waiter standing behind the fake spaceships.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," Cora called the waiter, "Is the special ride still open? I hope we are not too late."

"You are lucky!" The waiter happily announced. "We have enough time for one last ride. Do you want to give it a try?"

"It's not for me," Cora giggled while letting go of Khan's hand to pat his shoulder.

"What is happening?" Khan asked when he understood that both Cora and Amber knew something.

"This attraction earned an award in the past," Cora explained. "They have one of the most advanced flight simulations, at least when it comes to non-military equipment. Many families bring their descendants here to see if they have any talent in the field."

'Sneaky Amber,' Khan commented in his mind. 'I have talked about becoming a pilot only vaguely.'

"We have only improved since the award!" The waiter revealed. "The Global Army would seize our program if we improve it any further."

"How does it work?" Khan asked as he stepped forward. "I know nothing about spaceships."

"The simulation is only about reflexes. You don't need any knowledge about spaceships or similar vehicles." The waiter explained as she led Khan and Cora in a second area of the building.

The second area was rather dark, and most of its illumination came from a circular platform with a single seat at its center and a vast hologram hovering before it. The hall had stages all around that structure, but Khan only noticed a few people there.

"They are recruiters," The waiter whispered while wearing a beaming smile when she saw Khan inspecting the stages. "They keep an eye for young talents and enlist them in special branches of the Global Army."

Khan nodded and did his best to appear amazed. Still, his senses told him that none of the soldiers on the stages was paying attention to the central structure. Many were even napping.

"So, what do I have to do?" Khan asked once the waiter told Cora to remain behind and led him on the platform.

"Sit here and strap in," The waiter ordered as she picked up her phone. "I'm inserting the simulation for first-level warriors. The holograms' speed will increase as you keep dodging asteroids, and you only have three lives. Good luck!"

"Asteroids?!" Khan called, but the metal arm under the seat suddenly pushed it in the air and brought him closer to the holograms.

A metallic branch came out of the bottom of the seat and transformed into a straight handle. Khan instinctively grabbed it, but the holograms in front of him expanded and transformed during the process.

The holograms quickly depicted a dark environment that Khan knew well. He saw the depths of space with its many glowing dots shining in the distance. However, a rain of dark objects covered that view, and a low noise suddenly came out of those images.

"That was unlucky," The waiter shouted from the floor. "The asteroids are randomly generated, and one of them appeared before you as soon as the simulation started. Don't worry. It won't happen again."

"How do I ride this thing?!" Khan shouted while pointing at the handle.

"Push to dive and pull to ri-," The waiter couldn't end her line since the holograms released a high-pitched noise and announced the start of another simulation.

The waiter turned out to be right. The simulation didn't immediately place Khan in front of asteroids. He had the time to test the handle a bit and see how sharp the fake spaceship's turns were, but he slammed on one of those big objects during the process.

"Only one life left!" The waiter happily announced. She was actually making it hard for Khan on purpose since it was late and the attraction had to close down, but he didn't answer now.

'Snow was better at this,' Khan commented in his mind as he focused entirely on the holograms. He knew how the fake spaceship turned now, so he didn't have to think about the handle anymore.

The simulation started for the third time, and Khan began to dodge asteroids. They were slow at first, but their speed gradually increased.

Nevertheless, Khan's ability with the handle also increased as he kept dodging those large objects. His martial art forced him to attack and defend at high speed, and his period on Nitis had only deepened his expertise in that field. His reflexes were beyond sharp, and his instincts were incredible.

Regular pilots would never experience what Khan had gone through. The spaceships were safe compared to the Aduns. Those creatures couldn't reach the same speed, but Khan had flown on them with only his legs as footholds.

The level of confidence that Khan had reached when it came to high-speed combat and flight was breathtaking, and he showed it during the simulation. The fake spaceship felt clunky, but he made it work and dodged all the asteroids coming in his direction.

The asteroids' speed increased, but Khan's reflexes kept up. Soon, minutes passed, but he had yet to come close to losing his last life. The simulation even stopped accelerating after half an hour.

Cora didn't mind waiting. Khan was smiling during the simulation, so she would be happy even if he spent entire days up there. However, her curiosity made her question the waiter after the asteroids' speed stopped increasing. "What is happening? Won't the game force him to lose now?"

"This is a flight simulation that borders military standards," The waiter explained without hiding the amazement in her tone. "The asteroids are already about to cross the limits of what a first-level warrior can see. Now the simulation is testing his endurance."

"I'd like a drink then," Cora requested.

"What do you mean?" The waiter asked.

"He will be up there for a while," Cora declared.

The waiter didn't immediately believe Cora. She had seen many talented kids and soldiers losing their cool after spending too long in the field of asteroids. However, her mouth opened in astonishment as the minutes passed and Khan had yet to make a mistake.

The situation got so bad that the waiter's boss had to come to check what was happening. She was another middle-aged woman, but her professional clothes revealed how her job wasn't to handle clients.

Khan didn't care about what was happening under him. He was enjoying spending those minutes dodging asteroids at high speed. He couldn't feel the wind on his face, but the scene still reminded him of his time on Snow's back.

Yet, everything suddenly went dark, and a scoreboard replaced the field of asteroids. Khan didn't understand what was happening until the seat began to descend and brought him back on the floor.

"I'm mortified, sir," The waiter's boss stated as soon as Khan focused on her. "The park needs us to close to shut down. I've already spoken with my superiors. We are happy to offer a free ticket to both of you for interrupting your game."

"Oh," Khan exclaimed in a disappointed tone before wearing a smile when he saw Cora's happy face half-hidden behind a big cup. "Don't worry. We'll come earlier next time."

The waiter and her boss voiced more polite lines, but Khan mostly ignored them as he reached Cora and took her hand. He didn't realize how late it was, so he planned to leave right away, but the two women eventually forced him to turn.

"Sir, sir!" The waiter called as she chased after Khan and Cora. "I need you to leave a name for the scoreboard."

"Why would I leave a name?" Khan asked.

"You broke one of the records," The waiter explained. "It doesn't have to be a real name, but the shop has a vast community who would be happy to see the scoreboard change from time to time."

"So, is it just for the sake of the game?" Khan continued as he tried to understand the purpose behind that practice.

"Exactly!" The waiter stated, even if she felt slightly confused in front of Khan's lack of understanding.

"Use 'Snow' then," Khan responded before turning to leave the attraction with Cora.