

Chaos' Heir 331

Chapter 331 - Methods

Khan kept care of Martha until she calmed down. She didn't take long to stop her tears, and their hug broke when they sat next to a wall.

"Sorry for being such a mess," Martha whispered as she left Khan's shoulder and wiped her eyes.

"I told you that it's fine," Khan reassured as he patted her head. "You shouldn't hold back, not with me at least."

"I didn't want to depend on others after everything that happened," Martha admitted while fixing her gaze on a random spot in front of her. "Though it feels nice to stop wearing a mask after so long."

"Masks are heavy," Khan sighed as he recalled his period in Ylaco's training camp.

"I'm glad that you don't lie as often as before," Martha stated as she tilted her head to shake off Khan's hand. "I can't say the same for your dumb side."

"I thought you liked that I made you laugh," Khan teased.

"Don't dig up the past now," Martha pouted. "You should focus on making your girlfriend laugh."

"I can handle multiple women," Khan bragged.

"You are an idiot," Martha glared at Khan, but she ended up laughing when she saw his proud smirk.

"Okay!" Khan exclaimed as he left the wall and crouched in front of Martha. "We can't waste time. I think I know how to deal with your problems."

"Are you afraid that I might have asked you things about the other planets?" Martha joked, but her expression froze when Khan took her hands and made her palms point upward.

"Training first," Khan announced. "I'll share some stories later if you really want to hear them."

Khan was using his playful tone, but Martha heard the lingering resolve in his voice. He was taking the matter seriously, so she nodded and suppressed the slight embarrassment caused by his gesture.

"Your problems aren't actual issues," Khan continued while focusing on the mana inside Martha. "The medical procedure allowed you to ignore part of the time lost while you were asleep. Sure, you can't use your power well, but you remain a first-level warrior."

"I'll probably have to spend many months relearning how to use my mana," Martha contradicted. "I'll waste what the procedure allowed me to save."

"That would be true if you stuck with the human methods," Khan declared.

"What do you mean?" Martha asked.

"The human methods are straightforward and simple," Khan explained while raising his eyes to meet Martha's gaze. "They are easy to learn since they only involve repeating the same exercise countless times. However, you can't even approach that training right now."

Martha wanted to voice a snarky comment, but she held back since she felt that Khan might be onto something. After all, it was clear that his solution involved alien techniques.

"The Niqols approach everything related to mana very differently from humans," Khan continued as he raised one of Martha's hands and pointed her palm toward him. "Keep it still. I'll show you."

Martha followed the order and put some strength in her arm. Khan nodded when he sensed her muscles tensing up before focusing on his mana.

"With the right amount of control," Khan announced as red-purple mana covered his hand, "The Niqols can turn a punch into a caress and a light touch into a slap."

Khan demonstrated his explanation right away. His mana grew darker as he reached for Martha's raised hand slowly. He merely touched her palm with a finger, but her whole arm shot back after the impact.

"What?!" Martha couldn't help but exclaim as she looked at her palm and saw that a faint bruise had appeared at its center.

"Show me your hand again," Khan ordered without giving her the time to think.

Martha followed the order, and Khan punched her palm as soon as it went back in its previous position. However, Khan's mana had turned paler during the process, and the attack failed to push Martha's hand back.

Martha had seen that Khan didn't hold back. He had delivered a regular punch on her palm, but the attack had felt like a faint caress that couldn't make her budge.

The scenes made no sense in her mind. Martha wasn't stupid, but Khan's actions escaped her knowledge. Mana could do wonders, but she had clearly seen him delivering a mere soft touch and a proper punch.

"How did you do that?" Martha asked when she managed to snap out of her stupor.

"The Niqols divide the training with mana into three categories," Khan explained while sitting on the floor and showing his right palm.

Red-purple mana came out of Khan's palm and began to change form. Even its shades went from dark to light as he altered its nature before following with an explanation. "This is an application of the manipulation field. It allows to modify the purpose of mana and transform normal movements into something entirely different."

Khan stopped changing the nature of his mana and amassed it into a series of small spheres that began to move across his hand. Of course, an explanation followed. "This is an exercise of the control field. We'll focus on this for the time being."

"What's the third field?" Martha asked in an excited tone.

"It's about the sensitivity to mana," Khan revealed. "You can train your mind to react to that energy. It's quite useful, and it can replace your senses in most situations."

Martha nodded a few times. She had actually read something about Khan's senses, and now she had received an explanation. Moreover, she could see how a dive into the Niqols' training methods would be more beneficial than her traditional exercises.

"I think you should ignore everything except for the exercises involving the control field for now," Khan declared. "You don't need more mana for now, and you might develop bad habits if we start sparring right away. Focus on reclaiming control over your body for a while. I'll tell you when to move to the next step."

Khan didn't hesitate to share his knowledge about the control field and the exercises involved in the topic. He had followed many lessons on Nitis, and his ability had also reached a decent level, so his explanations carried many details that helped Martha keep track of his words.

Meanwhile, Martha noticed how Khan changed again during his explanation. She could almost sense his love for those exercises and teachings.

"I think I want to hear about Nitis first," Martha exclaimed while Khan was in the middle of his explanation.

The statement made Khan fall silent. He initially thought Martha wanted to know about Liiza, but her earnest expression told him that her interest was genuine.

"Nitis wasn't always nice," Khan smirked. "I have many dark stories about that planet."

"That's okay," Martha stated. "I want to understand why you grew so fond of it."

Khan tapped the floor with his hand to check the hour on one of the hall's menus. It was still early, and Luke had yet to say anything about the dinner.

"I'll share something once you are done with your exercises," Khan exclaimed while closing the menus.

"I planned to prioritize them in the first place," Martha rebuked.

"Start with the first exercise then," Khan ordered. "Don't try to succeed on the first try. Focus on getting used to the training. I'll step in if you need help."

The training session began after that order. Martha had never been the type to slack off, and her situation was bad enough to fill her mind with firm resolve. Still, Khan had given her a path now, and she went all-out with it due to her trust in him.

Khan couldn't do much, but he still did his best to help. Martha couldn't even summon her mana freely during the initial phases of the exercise, so he had to take her hands to push her energy out of her body.

The process was nowhere near easy. Affecting someone's else mana was an arduous task. Khan had to alter the nature of his energy to turn it into something dense enough to push out what Martha managed to gather in her hands.

Nevertheless, Martha began to show some progress after a few minutes. Khan also revealed nothing but patience, which led to silent training. The two focused entirely on the exercise, and the distance created by the coma shrunk until they forgot that one and a half years had even passed.

A few messages reached Khan's phone during the training, but he checked them only when Martha grew too tired to continue. Apparently, Luke had booked a table in a fancy place in the city, and he had even set an hour for the meeting.

Khan forwarded the message to Cora and Amber before discovering that Luke had sent something different to Martha. Her text mentioned a habitation for their stay at Reebfell's camp.

"Does Luke want to move here permanently?" Khan asked after reading the message Luke had sent to Martha.

"I don't know what he has in mind," Martha revealed while wiping the sweat from her forehead, "But it probably involves you."

"You also reached that conclusion," Khan exclaimed while sitting next to Martha and laying his back on the wall.

"The mana treatment was crazy expensive," Martha uttered. "Luke wouldn't spend so much out of mere friendship."

Martha was a promising recruit, but she wasn't amazing. Her time in the coma would have usually flattened her value as a soldier. Spending so many Credits on her would make sense if they came from her family, but Luke had no deep connection to her.

Instead, Khan's fame had turned him into one of the most desirable assets at his level. The descendants from wealthy families and the soldiers aiming to increase their political weight would pay a hefty sum to add him to their squads, but they struggled to find some leverage.

That didn't apply to Luke. Martha and Khan had been pretty close during their time in Ylaco's training camp, and everyone knew about that, especially Luke. The latter knew that he had a chance to tie Khan to his plans as long as he saved Martha.

The ploy was subtle due to how easily Luke could mask it as an act of goodwill, but Khan had never abandoned his paranoia, and Martha knew how politics worked. Finding Luke's true intentions was only a matter of connecting dots for them.

"I'm fine now," Martha broke the silence that had fallen between the two. "I only need you to write a training schedule for me, and I'll be on my way. Don't get involved with me any more than this."

"Give it up already," Khan snorted. "I'm not leaving you alone while you are in this state."

"But," Martha tried to complain, but Khan suddenly revealed a confident smirk that made her fall silent.

"Besides," Khan continued, "I guess I should hear him out at least. His offer might be interesting."

"Do you want to use Luke for your goals?" Martha asked.

"Isn't that how politics work?" Khan shrugged his shoulders.

"I really want to hear your stories," Martha declared without hiding her surprise in front of that mature and intelligent behavior.

"We have a few hours before the dinner," Khan commented while checking the menus on the floor. "I need to clean myself up and change, but I can share a few stories before that."

"He also cleans himself up now," Martha mocked.

"I'm the cleanest man in the entire camp," Khan claimed.

"I don't believe that at all," Martha sneered.

"I do take showers regularly," Khan stated.

"You only had to get a girlfriend to reach that point," Martha joked.

"I would have been pretty clean even without Cora," Khan announced.

Martha fixed her gaze on Khan. She didn't believe those words for even a second, and Khan understood the feelings carried by that gesture.

"Fine, I would have been a bit smelly," Khan admitted, and Martha exploded into a laugh.

"Come on," Martha giggled. "Tell me about Nitis. I want to hear both the good and the bad."

"It might get pretty grim," Khan revealed as his memories brought him back to a village by a lake.

"Start with the good then," Martha insisted.

"The good," Khan repeated while crossing his legs and wearing a longing smile as more memories surged in his mind. "I guess the first good thing involved Liiza and a certain eagle...."

Chapter 332 - Dinner

Martha's expression went through multiple changes as Khan's stories piled on. She initially wore an honest smile seeing the love that Khan radiated whenever he spoke about Liiza, Snow, and the Niqols who had grown close to him. Yet, everything vanished when his tale reached grim parts.

Nitis had been a hellish experience in many ways, but Khan didn't want to lie to Martha. Even holding back some details would make him feel bad. She wasn't George, but she remained a close friend that deserved his honesty.

Of course, Khan didn't reveal everything. He lacked time to do that, while other memories were too private to share with someone who had almost become his girlfriend. Yet, he didn't omit the gory details, and Martha didn't know how to take them.

The village near the lake, the arrival of the sunlight, the long escape, and the final battle against the rebels depicted a bloodied picture of Khan's time on Nitis. Martha couldn't believe that he had gone through all that and still loved that planet dearly.

Khan wasn't expressing his emotions on purpose, but he couldn't keep them back whenever Nitis was involved. Moreover, Martha could see right through him, and she even understood how he had managed to remain sane during those months.

The answer was simple but significant. Khan had someone on Nitis who could make him willing to survive hell. Martha had seen love, and she even believed to have come close to experiencing it, but Khan was showing emotions that went far beyond the limits of her experience.

Martha could voice many snarky comments, jokes, or even mock Khan due to how fondly he spoke about Liiza while in a relationship with another woman. However, she couldn't find the strength to open her mouth.

Martha fell in a daze whenever Khan talked about his happy time with Liiza. The intimate moments experienced on the snowy mountain, the cave at the marsh's edges, and the hidden castle were the most joyful part of his life. Something even told him that nothing could dethrone them from that spot.

The intensity of the affection that Khan leaked out put Martha in a pensive mood. She had always liked Man-Khan, but those new faces brought that feeling to a new level. She even felt a bit annoyed that she wasn't the target of that love.

That annoyance never lasted for too long since Khan always had new gory details to add to his stories. Martha could forget how attracted she felt toward him and go back to the disbelief generated by the hellish events.

"That was a lot to take," Martha announced when Khan interrupted his tale due to the late hour. "It sure put my situation into perspective. I'm not too unlucky in the end."

"And that was only one planet," Khan laughed.

"Were the others as bad as Nitis?" Martha asked.

"Ecoruta definitely wasn't good," Khan stated, "But Onia was nice. As for Istrone, you probably know enough to get an idea."

"I do indeed," Martha sighed. "Though I feel a bit better. Even with all my misfortunes, I'm still alive. I only need to get in charge of my mana."

"Look at you, rejoicing at others' tragedies," Khan mocked.

"I'm happy that you can joke about it," Martha declared as she laid her head on Khan's shoulder.

Khan smiled at the sight of Martha's relaxed expression. She probably could be so calm only because he was there, but that was a good starting point toward accepting her trauma.

"I guess I've grown," Khan sighed.

"You sure did," Martha commented.

The two remained in that position for a few minutes, enjoying the training hall's silence and the overall privacy. The matters with Luke and other issues would return once they went out, but the dark walls were keeping them safe for now.

Khan and Martha couldn't stay like this forever, and they eventually stood up to leave the training hall. They didn't say much along the way. Their main conversation was a short banter over Khan's desire to accompany Martha to her habitation, and she lost that discussion.

The habitation that Luke had rented for Martha wasn't fancy, but it remained a flat that she could claim as her own. The event didn't please her too much due to her existing debt, but she quickly confirmed that the refund from Istrone's crisis would cover those expenses.

Martha's flat wasn't close to Khan's habitation, but it wasn't far either. He could go back home, shower, and change quickly, especially since Cora was somewhere with Amber at that time.

Then, when Khan was about to leave his flat to reach the train area, Luke sent another message. The text changed his plans since Luke stated that they would go to dinner through his spaceship.

The train was far from uncomfortable, but Khan found no reason to refuse Luke's offer. Cora and Amber even sent Khan messages to express their excitement about the matter, so he moved toward the landing area after leaving his flat.

Khan realized that he had gravely underestimated the dinner when he reached the landing area and found his friends. Luke, Bruce, Cora, Amber, and Martha had donned elegant but comfortable clothes that reeked of Credits, and the mood was even overly polite.

Meanwhile, Khan was wearing his usual military uniform since he didn't have other options when it came to clothes. He had also approached the dinner quite calmly only to find a tense atmosphere waiting for him.

"Did you even change since this morning?" Bruce commented as a short laugh left his mouth while Khan approached the group.

"Khan doesn't buy clothes," Amber declared. "Cora and I mentioned the issue a few times, but he always runs away when we are close to planning a shopping trip."

"I don't run away," Khan sneered. "My schedule is simply packed."

"Cora will deny that," Amber contradicted Khan while wrapping her arms around Cora's shoulders.

"Amber," Cora called in a scolding tone.

"Be on my side this time around," Amber pleaded while nearing Cora's ear to whisper words that everyone in the area heard. "Don't you want to see him all dressed up for once?"

Cora wanted to reject those words, but her eyebrows arched when she thought about that image. By the time Khan reached her, most of her had already sided with Amber.

"You two are spending far too much time together," Khan shook his head.

"You can't keep her in your flat forever," Amber teased before realizing that her comment wasn't proper in that situation.

Luke, Bruce, and Martha were basically strangers to Amber. She knew that they were Khan's friends, but she didn't want to give a wrong impression right away.

Bruce and Luke wore awkward smiles as they exchanged a meaningful glance, while Martha appeared interested in Amber. She didn't enjoy her comment, but she liked her earnest character.

Khan used that chance to get a good look at his friends. Bruce was wearing a neat black pullover under an elegant blue jacket, while Luke had a white shirt under a dark-blue waistcoat.

As for the women, Amber had a brown jacket and a darker shirt that slightly exposed her cleavage. Martha was wearing black trousers and a tight, elegant sweater, while Cora had a nice, squared, grey dress that ended in a skirt. She had a belt-like item around her waist that highlighted her perfect body, and she was also using black tights to cover her legs.

Khan's gaze fell on those tights almost immediately. He had to admit that Cora was a few leagues above Amber and Martha in terms of beauty, especially in that outfit. The dinner almost became an annoying hindrance in his mind since it prevented him from remaining alone with Cora right away.

"I told you that he would have liked it," Amber whispered in Cora's ear again.

"How do I look?" Cora asked in her sweet tone while grabbing the edges of her skirt and bending her legs slightly to perform an elegant bow.

"You are beautiful," Khan honestly admitted as he grabbed Cora's waist and pulled her closer.

Amber let Cora go, and the couple exchanged a quick kiss before taking each other's hands. The previously overly polite atmosphere had disappeared by then, but a silent awkwardness had replaced it.

Luckily for the group, Luke's ability to handle social matters went far beyond his age. He cleared his throat and clapped his hands to attract everyone's attention before voicing a question. "Shall we get on the ship? The place won't cancel my reservation, but I like to be on time."

No one disagreed with Luke, and the group quickly moved toward the platform with his ship. The vehicle's entrance was already open, and the pilot had also been waiting for everyone to arrive.

"Khan told me that he will take care of your rehabilitation," Amber announced while approaching Martha's side as the group entered the spaceship.

"You did?" Martha asked while glancing at Khan, and the latter nodded. He had roughly summarized the situation during his texts to Cora and Amber.

"I hope I'm not causing any problem," Martha exclaimed while glancing at Cora.

"Not at all," Cora warmly replied. "You are important to Khan. It wouldn't be right to stop him. Also, I like seeing his altruistic side."

Cora and Khan couldn't help but exchange a glance. He even caressed her cheek with his free hand. Everyone on the scene could see that the two shared actual feelings, but Martha noticed how Khan's expressions didn't reach the intensity from their talk in the training hall.

"These two," Amber sighed before turning toward Martha. "Khan has a sharp tongue, but he is quite good as a professor. I'm sure he will know how to help you."

"I'm already feeling better after today's training session," Martha revealed while watching her hands. "Besides, I've had a taste of his sharp tongue. I know how to handle it."

"Ooh" Amber exclaimed as she got closer to Martha. "We'll have a lot to talk about then. I'm starting to lose my ground against him lately."

"I can share my tricks and come up with new ones together," Martha smiled.

"Deal!" Amber immediately accepted.

"Don't join forces against him already," Cora complained, even if she had to cover her mouth to suppress faint giggles.

"Hey, your help is necessary," Amber declared. "You are our main weapon against him."

"Amber!" Cora called, but Khan left her hand and caressed her cheek again before whispering to her ear. "Just go and have fun."

Cora smiled and kissed Khan's cheek before sitting next to the two women. The spaceship's insides weren't ample, so their voices were pretty clear, but Khan ignored them as he turned to face Bruce and Luke.

The two men appeared speechless at how easily Khan handled women. They knew that he had become famous, but they didn't expect him to be so smooth.

"Do you mind showing me around?" Khan asked before Luke could sit.

"Of course," Luke exclaimed. "Bruce, make sure to keep our guests entertained."

"I wouldn't dare to do otherwise," Bruce stated as he sat on a seat behind him.

"Please, come," Luke invited as he stepped toward the ship's front. "This spaceship is rather small, but it's perfect for traveling among cities."

"This is an E-2, right?" Khan asked as he followed Luke and inspected the vehicle.

"You know your stuff about ships!" Luke declared in surprise while turning to face Khan. "Are you interested in purchasing one? My family has good connections with multiple sellers. I'm sure I can help with the purchase."

"I'm only studying spaceships for now," Khan honestly revealed. "I've cut a deal with a few recruiters to be partially inside the pilot training."

"Only you could make those arrogant soldiers bow their heads," Luke laughed.

"The recruiters have been polite during the meeting," Khan explained.

"Because they wanted you to join their program," Luke laughed again. "Pilots generally have a bad reputation. Many abuse their privileged position inside the Global Army, but everyone gives them a free pass since their job is very dangerous."

"So I've heard," Khan responded.

"Anyway, I can show you the pilot's cabin," Luke continued. "It's a bit small in this model, but you might appreciate taking a look at the real deal."

Khan limited himself to nod as Luke turned to approach the cabin. A metal door blocked the path, but Luke opened it by pressing his hand on its dark surface.

Two comfortable seats, a series of screens, many buttons, and two handles unfolded in Khan's view when the door slid open. He also saw the pilot on one of the chairs, but he couldn't identify his facial features due to his large helmet.

"Don't worry about us," Luke announced before the pilot could say anything about that invasion.

"We are only looking around."

The pilot didn't dare to oppose Luke's orders and continued to focus on the commands. The soldier pressed a few labels and buttons, and the ship set off slowly enough not to cause any reaction in its insides.

Khan paid special attention to the commands used by the pilot. He knew the function for some of them, but that wasn't enough to make him understand everything. He could probably succeed in turning one of those vehicles on, but flying them was a whole different story.

"You can get closer," Luke reassured. "He won't go too fast since the city is close. There are even restrictions in place there, so the flight should be pretty smooth."

Khan took that offer almost immediately and inspected the cabin without touching anything. He even made sure not to walk in front of the pilot, and his knowledge slowly expanded as he gained some familiarity with that equipment.

Khan didn't remain in the cabin for too long, and he soon found himself sitting next to Bruce and Luke. The three women were sharing gossip in front of them, but they only smiled when some comments reached their ears.

The spaceship didn't take long to reach its destination, and Khan even got the chance to see it flying among Reebfell's tall structures before ending on a landing spot growing from the middle of a building.

Everything that came after was mostly filled with Luke's voice. The man went through many explanations while the group moved toward the dark window that separated the platform from the building's insides.

The explanations merely involved the place's history and fame, but its layout immediately told everyone that they were inside a fancy environment. The dark window slid open and revealed a series of descending staircases, tables, private rooms, and dining areas on the lower floors.

Everything was beyond elegant. The staircases had soft carpets on their steps and decorations on their railings. Soft yellow light shone from different spots and filled the area with a cozy atmosphere. Each chair had thick padding, and the table's legs carried intricate carvings or specific images.

A waiter reached Khan's group as soon as the dark window closed, and Luke took care of that. It only took them a few seconds to enter one of the private rooms isolated from the rest of the structure through a sliding, interactive brown door.

The insides of the room were even better than the restaurant as a whole. Proper armchairs enveloped a table that had multiple options. The group could even cook there if they wished to.

The dinner began after everyone sat, and Khan quickly became the main topic of the conversation. His fame had yet to come into play by that point, but Luke and Bruce had lived a relatively plain life. It was only normal for them to become interested in Khan's stories.

The focus on Khan ended once the food arrived. He had ordered an expensive steak because Luke had already handled the bill, and its taste was simply superb.

"I don't think I've ever eaten something so good," Khan announced once he was done with his steak.

"You still eat quickly," Luke laughed while taking sips from his soup through his spoon.

"I'm surprised he doesn't order another one," Martha commented.

"Did he eat a lot in Ylaco too?" Amber curiously asked.

"He put the supply of spicy chicken at risk," Martha joked, and Cora and Amber inevitably laughed since they had seen something similar happening in Reebfell.

"We have so much to talk about," Amber said in a resolute tone as she took Martha's hands.

"Don't leave me out," Cora giggled.

"Okay, let's hit the bathrooms," Amber suggested. "We can take some time away from prying ears while we wait for the dessert."

"That sounds like a plan," Martha quickly agreed.

"I'll see you later," Cora whispered as she stood up and followed the two women outside the room.

Khan took a sip from his drink as he watched the door closing on its own. It was only men at the table now, but the situations strangely grew tenser, and Khan was to blame for that.

"Is everything okay?" Bruce asked since he sensed that something was off.

"I'm only overwhelmed with thoughts," Khan explained as his cold mood affected his mana and intensified the tense atmosphere. "I know both of you are rich, but that treatment was too much for someone outside your family."

"Martha is a friend," Luke announced while showing one of his best smiles.

"She sure is," Khan added, "Yet, I believe you had more than that simple reason in mind."

Khan took another sip and decided to look at the two men. Both of them had dropped their smiles by then, but they still hesitated to speak.

Still, Luke eventually revealed the nature of his trip. "It wasn't random, but it wasn't completely selfish either. I know you probably won't believe me, but I really did want to see her get better."

"What's the offer?" Khan asked.

"Well," Bruce exclaimed before Luke took control of the conversation. "My family has businesses almost everywhere, even in the lawless zone.. That's where I need to go to fix some matters, and I need the best team available."

Chapter 333 - Excitement

Khan didn't expect Luke to mention the lawless zone, but he didn't let anything appear on his face. He continued to look coldly at the two men as he browsed through his knowledge.

Khan had studied a lot during his time in Reebfell's camp, and he had even encountered the term "lawless zone" a few times. There were actually many of them throughout the known universe, and each of them featured different environments.

The Global Army was powerful, and the humans as a whole were a respected species. However, their reach had limits, so they had to close an eye on areas that were too complicated to control or seize.

Those areas were either not worthy of the Global Army's efforts or entangled in a complex political array. Still, Khan found them interesting, especially now that his desire to get some action was getting stronger than ever.

"Which lawless zone?" Khan asked before hiding his mouth behind his drink.

"Milia 222," Luke promptly replied.

"I've heard about it," Khan admitted. "Is it the place with asteroids?"

"That's correct," Luke said as his eyes lit up. The sole fact that Khan knew about the place reaffirmed his belief that he had made the right decision with Martha.

Khan had read a bit about Milia 222 while researching lawless zones. Its layout was even peculiar enough to keep his attention glued on the topic for a while.

Milia 222 wasn't a planet. It was a series of colonies built on seven giant asteroids hovering slightly outside a solar system far away from Earth. It was a cold place, where life was harsh and full of limits, but it had multiple valuable features.

Milia 222's environment made it unworthy of huge investments, but its asteroids' location could change drastically. The light control from authorities only helped turn that place into the perfect home for illegal businesses.

Moreover, the humans weren't the only ones on those asteroids. Khan had actually read that Milia 222 had five different species living there without counting the various visitors on short trips.

Those features and diverse population obviously made Khan beyond interested in Milia 222. Yet, he didn't want to show any of that or give in so easily. No matter how good the offer was, Luke had still decided to use Martha against him.

"What business does your family have there?" Khan asked.

"I'm afraid I can't say that," Luke stated as he wore his poker face.

"Illegal then," Khan exclaimed while placing his cup on the table. "When did you plan to rope me in?"

"We would have never forced you-," Bruce announced, but Luke interrupted his line by raising a hand and shaking his head.

Bruce heaved a sigh and stood up to reach the corner of the room. A few menus appeared on the wall after he tapped his fingers on it, and a drawer soon slid out of its smooth surface.

A small hole also opened right above the drawer, and Khan could notice a fan inside it. That was his first time seeing something similar, but Bruce explained its functions by drawing a cigarette from his jacket's pocket and lighting it up with his finger.

"Istrone?" Khan asked.

"We all had to find compromises to keep on living after Istrone," Bruce responded while pointing at Khan's glass. "Isn't the same for you?"

Khan looked at the smoke coming out of the cigarette flowing inside the hole. Nothing reached the table, and the room even released a pleasant scent to cover the smell caused by Bruce's action.

Khan didn't answer and turned to look at Luke. The man still owed him an explanation, but it seemed that he wouldn't have to work too hard to get it.

"I planned to remain in Reebfell for a few months, maybe even half a year," Luke revealed. "I would have gotten closer to you to understand whether you wanted to leave or not before mentioning the mission. Of course, I would have used my money to make your life easier in the meantime."

"What would have happened if I refused anyway?" Khan continued without flickering.

"I would have used Martha," Luke declared. "She is a proud woman. She won't remain here knowing that I have an important mission to attend."

"And I would have followed her to make sure that she didn't end up seriously injured again," Khan completed the explanation.

"Exactly," Luke exclaimed. "Though I didn't expect you to have a girlfriend. That was a setback."

Khan continued to eye Luke coldly. He had more doubts, but he let the tension caused by the silence build up for a few seconds before voicing his next question. "Why me? Don't you have access to evolved soldiers? They should be more suited for such an unstable place."

"The arrival of an evolved soldier on Milia 222 would attract a lot of attention," Luke declared.

"The same goes for other known or strong soldiers. Instead, I can disguise the mission as a holiday trip with friends if I bring you guys and a few guards."

"What about the soldiers who are already there?" Khan questioned.

"I don't trust them," Luke revealed. "They have spent too long in that lawless area, and I can't allow people swayed by Credits to get close to this mission."

"I don't like the sound of that," Khan scoffed. "What would happen to Martha or me if we get too close then? Would you drop us in space to make sure that the Global Army doesn't find our bodies?"

"I would never do that," Luke exclaimed while raising his voice.

Khan inspected the various reactions that ran through Luke's face. The latter was good at pretending. He had even gone through teachers in that field, but Khan still wanted to see if he could find traces of lies.

The inspection didn't lead anywhere. Luke appeared really offended by that claim, which made sense considering his character. Besides, Khan had saved his life on Istrone, so the foundation for honest cooperation existed.

Khan also knew that Luke wasn't cruel or cold. The man had the mind of a businessman due to the education imparted by his family, but he was only nineteen and with limited experience.

Scenes from Istrone appeared in Khan's vision as he went over the issue. He had gotten a good impression of Luke during the rebellion. The man was talented, wealthy, and generally good-natured. His character wasn't bad at all.

The idea of killing Martha and Khan if they saw too much had probably never crossed Luke's mind. Khan's power was also something that Luke wanted to use in the long run. He had nothing to gain from disposing of his friends.

"I'm expensive," Khan eventually stated. "And I want upfront payment."

Luke and Bruce felt startled for an instant. They weren't sure whether they had heard Khan correctly. It had sounded as if he had already agreed to join the mission.

"Will you join me?" Luke asked in disbelief.

"Probably," Khan declared, "But I can't leave right away. I have students to attend, things to prepare, and other stuff."

"Of course!" Luke exclaimed. "Take all the time you need. I also need to prepare for the trip there and pick other members for the team."

"Don't act as if I've already accepted," Khan scolded. "Don't even think for a second that I'll join your future platoon or something. The disguise as a trip won't work either. I want merits added to my profile."

"That can be arranged," Luke replied. "The upfront payment isn't a problem either."

"Wait until I bring up the topic again then," Khan stated.

"What do you mean?" Luke asked, but the door suddenly opened and revealed the three smiling women that had come to dinner with them.

"Did something happen?" Amber asked when she noticed that the atmosphere at the table had changed during the trip to the bathroom.

"Luke was annoying me with political stuff," Khan laughed as he crossed his arms behind his neck. "I must have told him to stop four times already."

Luke understood Khan's intentions and joined him in the lie. "I can't help myself. Khan needs to learn how the political environment works, and he has to do it quickly. After all, I don't expect his fame to disappear."

"Oh, Khan only pretends to be bad at politics," Amber teased while returning to her seat. "His students' families have forced him into a meeting once, but he kept his position just fine."

"I want to hear that story," Martha announced as she shot an interested glance at Khan.

"Don't omit details," Cora whispered after sitting next to Khan.

The dinner went on peacefully afterward. The laughs returned, and no one spoke about Milia 222 anymore. Yet, Khan shot meaningful looks at Luke and Bruce from time to time. He didn't want them to forget that he was keeping an eye on them.

The group eventually flew back to the training camp and said their goodbyes. It was far past the curfew, but Luke, Bruce, and Martha were basically guests, so they didn't have to abide by those regulations. As for Cora, she was with Khan, so she could also ignore those limitations.

"Your friends from Ylaco are nice," Cora commented when she and Khan remained alone in the camp's streets.

"Don't trust Luke and Bruce too much," Khan warned. "Their character isn't bad, but they have their families' agendas too. Try to remember that."

"Did something happen while we were away?" Cora asked.

"It did," Khan admitted, "But I don't want to tell you more tonight."

Cora revealed a strange smile, but she soon nodded and leaned on Khan's shoulder. She had vaguely understood what was about to come, but she didn't want to face that conversation yet.

The couple returned to Khan's flat and made the best of the rest of the night. Khan eventually found himself staring at Cora while she slept on his bare chest. He couldn't find any flaw on her face, but

his thoughts often left the room and flew far away, toward a series of asteroids that felt beyond appealing.

Khan heaved a sigh before leaving a kiss on Cora's head and slipping out of bed without waking her up. He picked up some trousers and a bag before crossing the entrance and sprinting through what had become a familiar path by then.

The night was cold, but that temperature felt cozy for Khan. The nostalgia in his mind only intensified when he reached a spot without synthetic mana and began to prepare to perform the [Blood Vortex].

Khan had grown used to the procedure by then, but he felt different that night. He worked faster, his control over the mana was steadier, and even his movements were more precise.

'It's as if my body knows that I'm about to go back to space,' Khan sighed after completing the lines. 'I can't believe I'm feeling so excited.'

Cora's face appeared in Khan's vision as mana began to pass through the lines drawn on his body. He didn't know how long the trip would last, but he felt that his decision to leave would be meaningful.

Reebfell's camp was giving Khan everything he could possibly desire, but he still felt ready to leave right away. That spoke clearly about his character, but he didn't find anything wrong about it.

'Milia 222,' Khan exclaimed in his mind. 'I have so much to prepare, and I can't let Martha arrive there in her current state. I can't leave Cora alone either, and Amber is impossible to ignore. Luke can also give me a lot during this period. I guess I'm saying goodbye to sleep.'

The next months would probably be a busy mess, but an excited smile appeared on Khan's face when he thought about them. He couldn't wait for the mission to start. He wanted to be in a dangerous place and interact with aliens. He desired to use all the power flowing through his body.

'Milia 222, I hope you give me an excuse to draw my knife,' Khan thought before moving the entirety of his focus on the [Blood Vortex].. He almost begged the technique to work faster so that he could become a second-level warrior soon.

Chapter 334 - Fight

Time became the most precious resource in Khan's life. He had a lot on his plate, and his days only grew busier once he entered his third academic year.

Khan had to oversee Martha's exercises and improvements, take care of his training schedule, remain a good boyfriend, hang out with Amber, and check on Luke and Bruce. That alone was too much for a single person, but everything got worse once the lessons resumed.

Khan even had to prepare for Milia 222, which involved multiple steps. Learning more about the asteroids' colonies was obvious, but the presence of different species also pushed him to deepen his studies on alien languages and customs.

Giving each activity its deserved time was simply impossible. Khan had to mix things up when he could. He studied while overseeing Martha's exercises, trained after putting Cora to bed, and dealt with everything else in the breaks between those moments.

Khan forgot the meaning of the word "sleep". He never spent more than a few hours each week inside his nightmare, but his mind endured. He was too excited to stop anyway, especially when each second mattered.

Strangely, Khan managed to deal with everything for a couple of weeks. His appearance didn't worsen either since the [Blood Vortex] granted him far more mana than usual. He was always in a hurry, but that was it.

Still, a few problems were nearby, and they eventually hit Khan's lifestyle. The new year had brought a new batch of students, which led to a meeting with worried parents and representatives. The event went well, but the issues didn't stop there.

Headmaster Pitcus was an old fox. He had retired from the political life, but he could smell when someone had a personal agenda at work. Luke's prolonged stay in Reebfell's camp was also a clue that he couldn't ignore, so connecting the dots turned out to be pretty easy.

Luke had kept the real motive behind his visit hidden, but Headmaster Pitcus could understand that the matter involved Khan. The connection was almost obvious when he considered the relationship between the two young soldiers. He felt sure that an offer was in place, so he had to take countermeasures.

Headmaster Pitcus could pressure his superiors to raise Khan's salary, but that would force him to do the same for Amber, Lieutenant Abaze, and Captain Goldmon. The request wouldn't sound insane due to the innovative nature of their subjects, but the Headmaster had a better idea in mind.

Trying to match an offer from someone as wealthy as Luke was stupid. Headmaster Pitcus had to prepare for the possibility of losing one of his professors in the middle of the academic, so he asked Khan to write more reports.

That wasn't too much of a problem for Khan. He cared about his students, and he wouldn't hold back when his efforts could save young lives. Yet, Headmaster Pitcus pushed his requests one step forward and asked Khan to review interviews from potential replacements.

Khan knew that the Headmaster had understood something, but he never mentioned the issue. Headmaster Pitcus never talked about the matter either since Khan kept cooperating willingly, so the two prepared a replacement for the subject even before the news of the departure became official.

The new tasks finally forced Khan to rethink his schedule. He couldn't keep up with all of that even if he stopped sleeping forever. He had to sacrifice something, but that didn't improve his situation.

Khan couldn't sacrifice his training or studies since his life might depend on them after reaching Milia 222. His lessons and Headmaster Pitcus' tasks were also unavoidable, leaving only his social array in the target.

Spending time with Cora was necessary, and the same went for Martha. Khan had to ignore Luke and Bruce to save some time, and he even felt forced to limit his moments with Amber to a few short trips to the city.

On the surface, it seemed that Khan was doing it. His life wasn't falling apart. Everything was actually going pretty well from a very basic perspective.

However, those close to Khan noticed the changes inevitably caused by his lack of time. The relaxed and peaceful trips to the city didn't happen as often as before. Cora never woke up with Khan next to her, and many of Amber's texts remained unanswered.

It didn't take a genius to understand that something was going on. Khan had even silently admitted that to Cora, and Amber was her best friend, so the two talked about it.

Cora probably was the most understanding and permissive person in the world, but the lack of proper answers on Khan's side began to weigh on her mind. Moreover, he was too busy to notice or address the changes in her behavior, which only worsened the situation.

It didn't help that Khan eventually spilled the bean with Martha since he wanted her to be ready for the incoming mission. The two began to spend more time together to study and learn about Milia 222's situation and prepare if Luke really tried to get rid of them.

The breaking point had to arrive. The event was simply inevitable, but Khan only saw it coming when it was too late to do anything about it.

One night during the second month of the third academic year, Khan returned to his flat in a hurry. He had just gotten out of his lesson, and he was pretty excited about the incoming weekend since it would grant him more time.

Cora was in her usual spot on the couch. It had become a habit for her to wait for Khan's return, and he often liked approaching her right away to move things to the bed as soon as possible.

Yet, Cora turned away her face when Khan hugged her from behind and tried to kiss her cheek. He didn't mind that his lips ended up on her hair, but he understood that the gesture hid something deeper.

"What is it?" Khan questioned without breaking the hug.

"Khan," Cora whispered before taking a deep breath to muster her courage, "I think it's time we talked."

"Talk?" Khan asked while breaking the hug to walk to the other side of the couch. "Is everything okay?"

"I don't know," Cora said while turning her face to avoid eye contact.

"I'm not following you," Khan exclaimed before crouching in front of Cora and placing a hand on her leg. "What is it? Did something happen?"

"Nothing happened," Cora stated as she crossed her arms. "I just don't know what's going on, and it worries me."

"I still don't know what you are talking about," Khan declared.

Khan wasn't being dense, but he was acting rather dismissive. He was instinctively counting the seconds wasted during that interaction. He wanted to pay attention to Cora, but he believed it was better to spend that time on the bed if the matter wasn't serious.

Khan's flawed perception of the situation came from his honest behavior. He had never lied to Cora. She was aware that he was up to something, so he didn't consider that as a problem.

Usually, Khan would have understood that he was relying too much on Cora's permissive side. However, his restless state fused with his overly packed schedule had made him lose track of the passage of time.

Cora would have been fine if the situation went on for a couple of weeks or even a bit more. Still, Khan didn't realize that almost two months had passed since his routine became so messy. He had unknowingly pushed Cora to the limit.

"You are spending more and more time with Martha," Cora continued.

"I told you that she needs me more than ever," Khan replied. "I thought you were fine with that."

"I am fine with that," Cora announced. "It's not only that. It's everything happening in this period."

Now that Cora had mentioned Martha, Khan began to realize that his confidence was misplaced. He understood the nature of the issue, and he addressed it. "I know that I've been swamped lately, but I've always made sure to prioritize our time together. I'm sorry if you felt ignored."

"No, you have been great," Cora promptly responded and finally met Khan's eyes, but she quickly diverted her gaze again.

"Cora, talk to me," Khan sighed. "I can squeeze more time out of my days and spend it with you if that's what you want."

"It's not that," Cora repeated. "I simply feel that you are slipping away. I don't remember the last time I woke up next to you. You have always worked hard, but now the situation has gotten far worse. When was the last time you had some decent sleep?"

Khan had basically promised himself never to lie to Cora, so he tried to calculate the answer for her. Yet, the situation appeared far from good, and his expression showed those results.

"You had to think about it to realize how bad all of this is," Cora commented when she noticed that expression. "What is happening? What did Luke tell you?"

Khan heaved another sigh before standing up. He had never found the right moment to talk about Milia 222 with Cora, but he realized that maybe that never existed in the first place. The mission was a tricky topic matter how he put it.

"Are you planning to leave?" Cora asked since Khan remained silent.

The question prolonged Khan's silence. It didn't surprise him that Cora had understood what was happening, but hearing the topic coming out of her mouth added a sad and tense feeling to the matter.

"Luke offered me a spot in an interesting mission," Khan admitted. "I have yet to accept officially, but I'm planning to do it soon."

Silence fell in the flat again. Cora didn't know what to say now that Khan had confirmed her guess, and they both took some time to sort out their thoughts.

"Is it necessary?" Cora eventually asked.

"Well, it can help my career," Khan explained, "And I find the destination interesting. It might give me things that I can't find on Earth."

"So, the life that you are having here isn't enough," Cora exclaimed.

"Wait, wait, I've never said that," Khan stated as he bent toward Cora to place a hand on her cheek. "Life here is wonderful. Anyone would kill to take my place."

"Why are you leaving then?" Cora asked while raising her gaze to meet Khan's eyes.

Khan retracted his hand and took a step back. He glanced at the floor before recalling his call with George. The event made him look at Cora again and state his position clearly. "I'm happy here, but I can't stay. This has nothing to do with you or Amber or the job. It's something that I must do."

"Why is that?" Cora asked again while standing up. "It's not because of your career since your job here is going great. You are even training freely and getting plenty of assistance from the Global Army. I can only think that Martha is the reason."

"She is part of the reason," Khan admitted, "But not because of what you think. I care about her, but you are my girlfriend."

"Khan," Cora called in a pleading tone while approaching Khan to cling to his uniform, "Can't you give me a proper answer? I don't want to fight, but I can't remain silent anymore, and you are making this so hard."

Khan couldn't bear to see Cora in that state. He was being unfair. Protecting her from the truth wasn't the right thing to do, so he voiced the most straightforward explanation he could think of. "I'm a warrior. I want to go out there and fight."

"Are you willing to trade what you have here, what we have here for the chance to draw your knife?" Cora questioned as her grip on Khan's uniform tightened.

"Yes," Khan declared in the firmest tone he could muster.

Cora stared deep into Khan's eyes and knew that he wasn't lying. The realization destroyed every lingering hope she had that she could fix the situation. Khan had made up his mind, and nothing could stop him now.

"Cora," Khan called as Cora left his uniform and turned to take a few steps through the room. She didn't go far, and she grabbed her right arm when she stopped.

"I'll come with you," Cora announced.

"It will be dangerous," Khan replied.

"So?" Cora asked while turning to face Khan. "Didn't I prove myself to you? Do you want me to attend your lessons?"

"I didn't-," Khan tried to explain, but Cora interrupted him with another question. "Did you try to stop Martha too?"

Khan found himself in front of a tricky question again. He knew that he couldn't defuse the fight, but that didn't matter since he had no intention to lie.

"She is forced to go," Khan explained. "I can only do my best to prepare her."

"Why didn't you make me join these preparations?" Cora questioned. "Did you decide by yourself that I wouldn't come?"

"You wouldn't like it there," Khan declared.

"No one likes to go to dangerous places!" Cora shouted. "But, I wouldn't hesitate to go if that meant being with you. Was that so hard to imagine?"

"I knew you would have tried to come with me," Khan revealed.

"So, you didn't want me to come," Cora exclaimed. "Why?"

"Because that's not your place," Khan stated. "You don't like fighting. You love it here. You are even about to join special courses. I don't want you to put your career and life at risk only to follow me."

"That's not your choice to make," Cora complained. "It's not up to you to decide if I want to risk everything for the man I love."

"What about my feelings then?" Khan asked. "What happens when you get injured in a mission that you joined only because of me? Do you think I would enjoy that?"

"Do you trust me so little?" Cora questioned.

"I trust you completely," Khan stated. "I simply know that you aren't a warrior. You loathe fighting. You dread everything that happened on Istrone. I won't force you to come to a place that's even more dangerous than that cursed planet. That's not love."

"Love," Cora repeated. "You know, you have never said that to me. Do you love me?"

"I-," Khan was about to answer immediately, but he held himself back at the last second. When he thought about the topic, he could only come up with one answer. "I don't know."

Cora saw the vulnerability on Khan's face. She felt the need to comfort him, but she suppressed that urge since she still had questions.

"Would you have let Martha come if she had a choice?" Cora asked.

"I don't want to see her getting injured again," Khan declared.

"What if she had never gone through Istrone's events?" Cora wondered.

"In that case, probably," Khan admitted.

"What about Liiza?" Cora asked, and Khan's gaze shot up to meet her eyes as soon as he heard that name.

"You are still so sensitive to that topic," Cora sighed. "I see you glancing at that tattoo from time to time. I see you making faces that I can't bring up whenever someone mentions Nitis."

"And what about it?" Khan replied as some annoyance accumulated in his mind. "Are you going to use what you know about me to win an argument?"

"No," Cora said in disbelief. "I'm just bitter. I don't know what to do. All I want is to be enough for you, but, apparently, I'm unable to beat the memory of your ex."

"It's not your fault," Khan declared as he took a step forward before stopping as soon as Cora raised her hands.

"You keep saying that," Cora whined, "But I still don't understand. What did I do wrong? Why can't you acknowledge me yet?"

"What do you want me to say?" Khan almost gave in. "Should I ask you to join all my dangerous missions? I won't stop. I will never remain on Earth. Do you want to spend the next years following me on different battlefields throughout the universe?"

"I'd do it out of my love for you," Cora sniffed.

"Love isn't enough!" Khan shouted. "You can work as hard as you can and deal with everything the world throws at you, but that won't be enough. It doesn't matter how much you kill to protect it, how much you get your hands dirty. There are things that you can't overcome."

"Kill?" Cora wondered. "Who were you talking to right now?"

"Leave it," Khan voiced an annoyed comment. "I don't want you to live a life that you would hate just because of me. I wouldn't forgive myself."

"Why can't you let me try?" Cora pleaded.

"You have no idea what can happen out there," Khan declared. "Do you think Istrone was bad? The things I've seen would make that crisis look like a simple exercise in the training hall. I don't want you to experience all that!"

"Khan?" Cora called while taking a step back.

"What now?" Khan asked before noticing that Cora had stopped looking at his face to focus on his hands.

Khan's eyes widened when he lowered his gaze to inspect his hands.. Purple-red mana had started to come out of his fingers and palms on its own, and he felt unable to stop it.

Chapter 335 - Worries

'What is happening?!' Khan shouted in his mind as he took a step back while continuing to inspect his hands.

The event escaped Khan's understanding, and the fact that he didn't sense it only worsened his reactions. The irritation caused by the argument with Cora vanished, and honest worry about what was happening replaced it.

"Khan?" Cora called without hiding the faint fear in her voice.

Khan didn't answer and tried to summon the entirety of his expertise to put the mana back into his body. However, he failed to take control of the energy leaking out of his hands.

'What is happening?!' Khan repeated inside his mind.

Controlling and manipulating mana had become some of Khan's best abilities. His confidence in those fields was beyond firm, so the event left him stunned. He couldn't help but panic a bit when he thought about all the possible reasons that could have led to that issue.

Khan diverted his attention from his hands only when Cora slowly retreated to approach the wall behind her. She trusted Khan completely, but she was also truly scared about what was happening.

Cora wasn't to blame for her reactions. In her eyes, Khan had summoned his mana during a fight. She didn't believe that he would turn violent for even a second, but she couldn't control the fear filling her mind.

Khan wanted to raise his hand and reassure Cora, but he suppressed that urge. He didn't know what that gesture would trigger, but something else became evident. He was too dangerous in that state.

"Khan!" Cora voiced in a worried tone when Khan shot toward the entrance. Tears fell from her eyes, but they didn't stop him from leaving the flat.

Cora wanted to follow after Khan, but her legs gave in. She sat on the floor as her back slid on the metal wall. Her sobs became impossible to suppress, and some anger even surged in her mind.

That feeling had nothing to do with the argument. Cora was angry at herself for freezing in that situation. She couldn't even muster the strength to go after Khan. She had literally proven Khan's point.

Meanwhile, Khan sprinted as fast as possible through the camp's streets. Recruits still roamed around since the night was still early, but he avoided all the crowded areas.

The situation made no sense. Khan could perform his martial art with his usual perfect control. He could move the mana inside his body freely as he had always done. However, part of his energy seeped out of his skin anyway, and he couldn't put it back.

Khan's condition even worsened since the mana grew more violent. The energy didn't stop at his hands anymore. It turned into short purple-red flares that shot out of random spots of his body before dispersing in the air.

The issue usually wouldn't be too problematic. After all, simple waves of mana couldn't do much harm. Yet, Khan's energy never stopped carrying the properties of the chaos element, which made it dangerous for anyone in his surroundings.

'Why is this happening?' Khan panicked a bit as he continued to sprint toward isolated areas. 'What caused this? Is the mana anomaly getting worse? Is it something connected to the [Blood Vortex]?'

Khan was aware of his condition, but that only confused him. He could identify multiple sources to his current problem, but he never managed to point his finger at one of them.

The mutations caused by the Second Impact could always cause problems, and Khan's issues didn't stop there. The [Blood Vortex] remained an alien training method that might cause problems when abused by humans. He also had the [Blood Shield] inside him, which didn't help his inspection.

A few recruits and soldiers noticed Khan, but he never gave them the chance to stop him. He ran faster than ever and stopped only when he reached the empty areas past the camp's edges.

Khan sat cross-legged on the ground and closed his eyes to focus on suppressing those reactions. The sprint seemed to have helped since the flares stopped happening so frequently. His mana had also started to abandon his hands, but he didn't dare to move yet.

The stealthy properties of those reactions worried Khan deeply. He failed to sense his mana when it escaped his control. He couldn't find countermeasures or prevent bad outcomes in that situation.

Those properties prevented Khan from finding the source of the problem or solutions. He couldn't do anything specific to suppress his mana. It seemed that his body was turning against him. The power that he had accumulated through many hardships was making him dangerous for those he loved.

The violent reactions eventually quieted down on their own. Khan's mana also stopped escaping his control and leaving his body. The event seemed to have ended, but he remained seated to inspect his condition for a bit longer.

More ideas appeared in Khan's mind as he reviewed the issue. His emotional state might have caused those unwanted reactions, and the same went for his overall tiredness. Cora was correct when she pointed out his lack of sleep.

'What do I even do now?' Khan wondered after he failed to identify the source of the problem again.

Khan was trying his best to find options, but everything crumbled in front of his inability to locate the issue's core. He could only end up with two alternatives. One saw him isolating himself, while the other involved a doctor.

Of course, the idea of isolating himself was unreasonable. Khan had thought about it only because he didn't want a doctor to find out about the mana anomaly. Still, he couldn't risk losing control over his energy again. He even had too much on his plate to cut every connection with his friends, students, and superiors.

Khan realized that the curfew was upon him when he checked his phone. A few worried messages from Amber and Cora had also reached his device during those hours, but he ignored them for now.

Khan took a deep breath to calm himself down before standing up and straightening his clothes. A few holes had appeared on his uniform due to the flares of mana, but he didn't really care about his appearance. He was only wasting time to delay the inevitable meeting.

That process couldn't last long, so Khan eventually started his march toward the center of the camp. He walked slowly on purpose since he didn't want to meet anyone on his path, and some hesitation filled his mind when he arrived in front of the medical bay.

Khan checked his body once again. Everything seemed perfect, but he feared what could happen if his mana went rogue while inside the medical bay. His career could be at risk, and he might even hurt someone.

Everything inside Khan wanted him to go away, but he knew that he wouldn't solve anything like that. He had to see a doctor, even if that meant exposing his condition.

The curfew had long since passed during the slow walk. The doctor in the medical bay wasn't in his office, but one of the nurses allowed him inside anyway.

Khan felt glad that he could remain alone during the wait. The waiting room was almost empty, but nurses could still walk by, and Khan wanted to limit his interactions with others as much as possible for now.

The doctor took almost an hour to arrive. He was a tall, slender, middle-aged man with short grey hair and an unkempt beard. It was clear that he didn't like that sudden call, but he still did his best to be polite during his introduction.

"Lieutenant Khan!" The doctor exclaimed when the office's door closed behind him. "It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Doctor Boris Blackburn. I hope you don't mind my casual clothes. I was about to reach my bed when the nurse called."

The doctor stretched an arm to shake Khan's hand, but he took a step back to avoid it. Boris frowned, but Khan made sure to explain his gesture. "My mana is going out of control. I don't know when the next violent reaction will happen."

"Oh," Doctor Blackburn gasped. "We better do a check-up right away then."

"Thank you, sir," Khan replied and followed the doctor with his eyes.

Doctor Blackburn activated a few menus on his interactive desk before grabbing a scanner and approaching Khan. The latter hesitated to let someone get close to him, but Boris wore a gentle smile before reassuring him. "I'm not wearing my stars, but I remain a second-level warrior. You aren't dangerous to me."

Khan could contradict the doctor, but he decided to remain silent. He closed his eyes and did his best to retain control over his mana while Boris pointed the scanner at his nape and other parts of his body.

Holograms soon came out of the interactive desk and began to list some of the features found during the scan. Everything seemed relatively superficial for now, but Khan peeked at those words from time to time to make sure that nothing problematic appeared.

'My attunement with mana is at fifty-nine percent,' Khan commented in his mind when that detail appeared on the holograms.

The scan didn't last long. Doctor Blackburn went back to the interactive desk to tinker with some menus once he was done. Khan couldn't read what he was doing, but he waited in silence for the process to end.

"Oh!" Doctor Blackburn exclaimed after a few minutes. "It seems that a complete scan won't be necessary."

"What's the problem, sir?" Khan asked.

"Your attunement with mana has risen sharply since your last check-up," Doctor Blackburn pointed out. "I don't see any injection of synthetic mana. Are you using alternative methods?"

"Yes, sir," Khan admitted. "Do you need its specifics?"

"Not at all," Doctor Blackburn stated. "I only wanted to make sure that your sudden growth wasn't a spontaneous event."

"Sir?" Khan called since an explanation had yet to arrive.

"Right, how unpolite of me," Doctor Blackburn uttered through a chuckle. "You must be worried. It's nothing serious. Your body is simply failing to adapt to your sudden growth."

"What?" Khan questioned.

"Using alternative training methods doesn't prevent the arrival of similar problems," Doctor Blackburn explained. "I've seen a few soldiers in the same situation after obtaining multiple injections of synthetic mana in a short period. They didn't give their bodies the time to adapt to their new power."

"But my growth shouldn't be too sharp," Khan complained.

"Are you kidding?" Doctor Blackburn laughed. "Increasing the attunement with mana gets harder and slower with each point gained. Yet, your growth has actually accelerated in the last period. You are as talented as your fame claims."

Khan didn't want to spend time exchanging polite words. He was still worried, so another question quickly left his mouth. "How do I fix it?"

"There are meds for your condition," The doctor responded, "But they are for conditions far worse than yours. I won't hesitate to prescribe them if more problems appear, but I can only tell you to rest for now."

"Only rest?" Khan asked.

"Exactly," Doctor Blackburn announced. "Give your body a break. Let your flesh absorb the mana that you stuff into it. I even suggest you turn this into a habit since you might break at this pace."

Khan lowered his head as his worries dispersed. Nothing serious had happened, and he didn't even hurt anyone. He could relax and try to suppress the awful feelings caused by the lack of control over his own power.

"I'll contact the Headmaster and explain the situation," Doctor Blackburn continued. "You aren't dangerous, but it's better if you aren't around recruits for the time being."

"I understand," Khan nodded again.

"I think one week will be enough," Doctor Blackburn added. "Make sure to rest properly during this time, and stop adding mana to your body. Just relax and enjoy the break."

"I'll do my best, sir," Khan reassured.

"Excellent!" Doctor Blackburn exclaimed. "Now, if you don't mind, I have an appointment with the bed. Do you need anything else?"

"No," Khan replied. "Thank you, sir."

"I'm just doing my job," Doctor Blackburn chuckled, and Khan didn't hesitate to voice polite goodbyes. He even performed a military salute before hurrying out of the medical bay.

Now that the worry had disappeared, Khan could focus on a happy aspect of the situation. A faint smile inevitably appeared on his face when he recalled the writings on the holograms.

'Fifty-nine percent,' Khan thought as his hands closed into fists. He was only one point away from becoming a second-level warrior.

Chapter 336 - Tears

Resting wasn't Khan's strong point, but he couldn't ignore Doctor Blackburn's orders. A week wasn't too long in the end, and he only had to refrain from doing particular exercises.

Meditating and relying on the [Blood Vortex] were off the table, and the same went for his time with Martha. Khan was too dangerous in his current state, so he made sure to explain the situation to Cora, Amber, and Martha before booking a training hall for an entire week.

Cora would have understood if Khan requested to have the flat all for himself, especially after their fight. However, Khan believed that Amber or Cora would have still checked on him, and he wanted to avoid that while his mana remained unstable.

Only Headmaster Pitcus knew where Khan spent that week since he had access to the camp's logs. The lack of activities recorded by the training hall also reassured him. It seemed that Khan had really decided to rest, but the truth was far different.

Khan found himself reviewing his fight with Cora multiple times during that week, but the process often left him sighing. The discussion had made their position clear, and it also hinted at the absence of solutions.

Khan and Cora weren't to blame. They were simply two different people who had reached a crossroads in their lives. Cora wanted to remain on Earth, while Khan wished to resume his journey across the universe.

The only conclusion that came out of those reviews was that Cora deserved the truth. She would probably blame herself for her inability to match Khan's desires, and he wanted to prevent that.

Other than reflecting on the fight, Khan did his best to work on other projects. He had his phone, so he could write reports about his subject and prepare his replacement. He could also continue to study Milia 222 and other topics.

Nevertheless, Khan's main focus was on the "simulated mental battle". He had yet to master that technique, but he didn't hesitate to dive deep into it now that he had free time.

The "simulated mental battle" was a complicated technique. It required complete concentration and control, and even Khan fell short in those fields.

Still, the focus on the technique allowed Khan to achieve some initial success. The main benefit of the "simulated mental battle" came from the absence of external resources required to activate it. It was a portable training hall that could award greater results if performed at the highest levels.

Khan managed to immerse himself in an empty area and materialize a few enemies. He wanted to prioritize the Ef'i since they were some of the strongest opponents he met throughout his life, but he failed to make them move properly.

The Ef'i's tail was a limb that Khan couldn't imagine correctly, especially when it came to its movements. That affected the overall effectiveness of the "simulated mental battle" and forced him to use a simpler type of enemy.

The choice fell on the Stal. Those big aliens had an extremely simple fighting style, so Khan eventually succeeded in imagining a fight against one of them. Still, he failed to make his body experience the entirety of the battle, so the results remained inferior to an actual training hall.

The week went by quickly due to those many projects. Cora, Amber, and Martha sent messages every day to make sure that Khan was doing better, and he always reassured them.

Khan didn't lie in those messages. He had lost control of his mana a few times during the week, but those unwanted reactions stopped happening afterward. He was doing better, and he could sense those changes when he inspected his body.

Even if Khan wasn't meditating, the mana inside his body continued to affect his flesh. Still, the absence of a forceful approach made the whole process smooth and gentle.

Khan could sense his flesh accepting the mana and growing according to its nature. The process made him experience a lack of stress that he had never noticed in the past. His body was finally relaxing, and Khan became able to feel the benefits behind that action.

When the week ended, Khan decided to take a few more days off. The Headmaster didn't refuse his request, even if he misunderstood the reasons behind it.

Headmaster Pitcus believed that Khan wanted to rest a bit longer, but the truth was far different. Khan didn't forget that his attunement with mana had reached fifty-nine percent. He only had to take a small step to become a second-level warrior, and he planned to do that during the break.

The [Blood Vortex] would push Khan into the next level, but he wanted to avoid using abrupt methods that might cause problems. He limited himself to meditating during the additional break, and a change eventually happened.

The transformation wasn't as radical as the other one. Khan didn't lose control of his body or physical strength, but he experienced the change anyway.

Everything about Khan became stronger as the mana radiated by his flesh intensified. He could feel a new wave of power filling his insides and granting him a new level of power that he didn't hesitate to test in the training hall.

The change turned out to be more significant than Khan expected. His sheer physical strength had increased, and the same went for all his basic features. He was faster, and his endurance had reached a new level.

Moreover, his mana flowed more smoothly than ever as he fought against the puppets generated by the training program. Khan's attacks and senses had increased sharply. He felt utterly confident in battling against second-level warriors now.

'I finally did it,' Khan exclaimed in his mind when the training program ended and he found no sweat on his skin.

The breakthrough had been a success. Khan had become a second-level warrior, and an ocean of options had opened in front of him now.

Khan performed a few tests before confirming that his resistance to the [Blood Shield]'s drawbacks had increased greatly. He could rely on the alien technique more often now, and he also had the chance to improve it.

His spells had grown stronger, but he wanted to deepen his knowledge in the field. In theory, Khan could have access to attacks worthy of his new level and even add a star to his left shoulder, but he had to study a bit to see what could work.

The improvement of his senses allowed him to work harder on the "simulated mental battle". Khan felt more flexible when approaching the technique, which led to significant benefits and smoother training.

Overall, Khan had improved his foundation and laid the basis for significant enhancement. He only needed time to research those additions and work on them.

A mere message to Luke would grant Khan everything he desired. The man couldn't wait to hear the formal agreement to the mission of Milia 222, but Khan had to do something else first.

It was already past the curfew. Khan had spent a total of one week and three days inside the training hall. The third month of his third academic year had begun, and the time to spill the beans with Cora had arrived.

Khan sent a message to Cora before leaving the training hall and strolling through the camp's streets. He didn't feel surprised when he saw the familiar figure of his girlfriend sitting in front of his flat. He could also see how anxious she was from a quick look at her face.

The fight had been a significant event, but Cora didn't mind it for now. She jumped on her feet and ran toward Khan as soon as she noticed him, and the two exchanged a long, tight hug that culminated into a few kisses.

Khan found himself caressing Cora's hair while she hid her face in his chest. The memories of the peaceful time spent together surged in his mind as he inspected her. He knew that he felt something toward Cora, but those emotions remained inferior to what he had experienced with Liiza.

"Let's go inside," Khan eventually whispered. "I want to talk with you about something."

"Can't it wait a little longer?" Cora asked.

"Is something the matter?" Khan questioned.

"I'm afraid that there won't be any going back after tonight's talk," Cora revealed, and Khan didn't know what to say to reassure her.

Khan let Cora remain on his chest for a few more minutes, but the two eventually entered the flat and sat on opposite sides of the couch. They both stayed silent for a while as they sorted out their thoughts, but Cora turned out to be the first to speak.

"I'm sorry for freezing," Cora stated. "Everything you said is true. I'm not a warrior."

"That's not a bad thing," Khan reassured in a loving tone while approaching Cora and taking her hands. "You are many incredible things, so don't ever feel bad for being bad at something so messy and cruel."

"But being bad at it makes me a hindrance in missions," Cora complained. "It makes me unable to follow you."

"That's just bad luck," Khan sighed. "We both knew that our characters were different, and I don't regret a single second of our relationship."

"Is breaking up necessary?" Cora sniffed. "I can't follow you, but I can wait. I don't care if it's entire years. I will still be here, ready to take you into my arms whenever you return."

"Cora," Khan called before gulping and explaining his situation.

Cora almost couldn't believe what she was hearing. Khan revealed everything about the nightmares, the unclear relationship with his father, and Nitis' events.

Cora could only remain silent as tears fell from her eyes. The more Khan revealed, the more she understood that he would never stop exploring the universe. His adventurous character and the need to find answers about his condition made him unsuitable for a peaceful life on Earth.

Khan could accept a long-distance relationship, but Cora knew that she would only slow him down if he forced him into that situation. He had far bigger problems to handle, and she didn't want to be a hindrance in the path toward the solutions.

The more Khan talked, the more the break-up felt inevitable. Cora couldn't hold back her tears even if she tried her best to make it easy on Khan. The two soon fell into a hug, but neither of them dared to kiss or do anything else.

"Do you mind if we remain together until you leave?" Cora asked after the story ended.

"Not at all," Khan stated. "I'll do everything I can to make you happy until I'm gone."

"Don't force yourself," Cora sniffed. "You haven't done anything wrong."

"I could have refused you," Khan admitted.

"I prefer it this way," Cora declared. "You made me really happy. I wouldn't have been able to accept your departure if we didn't spend this time together."

Khan knew that Cora's lines carried a hidden meaning. She wasn't speaking about the departure. She was saying that she wouldn't have been able to forget him if that relationship had never happened.

"What do you want to do now?" Khan questioned through a sigh.

"Let's pretend that everything is normal," Cora pleaded.. "I don't want to waste time in tears while you are still here."

Chapter 337 - Demonstration

Khan's days went back to being extremely busy, but an important event preceded the return to that routine.

A simple check-up in the medical bay the morning after the talk with Cora was enough to award Khan with a second star on his right shoulder. Then, a few bystanders noticed the change in his uniform during his walk back to the flat and spread the news.

By the end of the morning, everyone in the camp had learnt that Khan had become a second-level warrior. Doctor Blackburn had even updated his profile, so anyone could check that the matter was true.

Khan was only at the beginning of his third academic year, but he had already become a second-level warrior. Moreover, he had accomplished all of that without synthetic mana or a long period of isolation.

The achievement only added value to Khan's figure. His fame skyrocketed once again and offers rained on his phone. Many of them were more valuable than his current position as a professor, but he ignored them since he had already set his gaze on something way more interesting.

Except for the rekindled fame, Khan's routine went back to the packed series of activities that had preceded the fight with Cora. He studied, attended Martha's training, and grew used to his new level to prepare for the imminent mission.

A few things didn't go back to how they were. Khan refrained from abusing the [Blood Vortex] right after the breakthrough. He didn't want to risk ending up in his previous condition, so he focused on learning to listen to his body while immersing himself in regular meditations.

Khan wanted to recognize eventual symptoms of stress or similar issues before they became a problem. He even purchased a technique that allowed him to assess the state of his flesh and muscles. Learning it with his level of control took less than an hour, and he made sure to use it every day afterward.

Of course, the purchase didn't happen through Khan's Credits. He had officially accepted Luke's offer after becoming a second-level warrior, and the latter had been more than happy to take care of every expense that followed that decision.

Khan didn't hold back. He used Luke's money to purchase even more books and time inside the training halls meant for Martha's training. Also, he bought a series of manuals and studies connected to the chaos element to gain a clear idea of his prospects.

The chaos element had many issues and a few positive aspects. Mastering it was a big problem for most soldiers, and the matter only became worse at the higher levels.

However, Khan had long since distanced himself from the human approach. It was safe to say that he had never succeeded in following the instructions left behind by other chaos wielders, so it was on him to forge a path that suited him.

Khan wanted to earn a second star on his left shoulder before the mission to Milia 222, and his state as a second-level warrior granted him access to the spells that could provide that achievement. Still, they were expensive and rare due to the complexity of his element, and his different approach didn't help.

Luke had great connections with basically every shop, so Khan could easily find tomes connected to his situation. He even managed to get his hands on detailed lists that described the various spells developed by the Global Army. Yet, he learnt something interesting during the research.

Most spells had fixed power due to the precise methods required to cast them. However, the chaos element was an exception. The unclear approach to its abilities allowed the chaos wielders to tinker with the amount of mana poured in each attack, which obviously led to different results.

Khan discovered that many chaos wielders preferred to limit the number of spells in their arsenal and develop stronger versions instead of replacing them. It was easier to improve an existing attack than learn a new one in their case, and Khan followed their example.

A long series of tests followed that discovery. Khan didn't abandon the idea of getting new spells, but he preferred to pursue his personal path for now, which involved improving his current arsenal.

His decision also involved his future. After extensive study, Khan believed that he would almost completely abandon the human path at some point. The Niqols' approach suited him far more, so he had to stop relying on the Global Army when he could.

Reebfell's camp had training areas meant solely for spells. They didn't feature any workshops or programs. They only had big targets that evaluated the power of each attack and placed them into a specific bracket.

Khan immersed himself in that testing phase. He had to find a new balance among his emotions to cast stronger but stable spells. The process wasn't easy, but his relentless efforts in the Niqols' methods granted an advantage that anyone would envy.

That advantage quickly led to results. Khan had never lacked mana, and the new level of control achieved after becoming a second-level warrior allowed him to improve the power of his spells relatively easily.

The Wave spell was the easiest to improve, at least when it came to its raw, spherical form. The attack was a violent expression of Khan's desperation, so pouring more power inside it wasn't an issue.

The problem began when Khan had to restrain his mana through a mixture of sheer ability and emotions. Luckily for him, his training showed great results that quickly led him to complete the testing phase.

"I didn't expect you to contact me so soon," Headmaster Pitcus announced when he entered the training hall. "Only two months have passed since you gained your second star. Are you sure you aren't overworking yourself again?"

"I paid far more attention to my health after the last problem," Khan reassured. "Thank you for the concern, sir."

Becoming a second-level mage required a demonstration in front of a superior or someone with the right qualifications. Headmaster Pitcus met those requirements, so Khan didn't hesitate to call him when he felt ready to show his progress.

It was the night of the fifth day of the week. The academic year had already entered its fifth month, and Khan had been a perfect professor in the past period.

Khan's students were more than ready for the incoming tests, so Headmaster Pitcus didn't say anything when he received the message. He actually felt curious to see what Khan had achieved so soon after the breakthrough.

"How many spells do I have to show?" Khan asked as he turned toward the large, rectangular metal target on the other end of the training hall.

"Why don't you start by showing me what you have?" Headmaster Pitcus gently said while crossing his arms behind his back.

Khan nodded and took a step forward before joining his hands. Mana accumulated in his palms and gave birth to a spear when he separated them. Then, he threw the weapon forward, which hit the exact center of the distant target.

An explosion followed the impact, and a gale flowed through the training hall. The bun on Headmaster Pitcus' hair remained firm, and his eyes never twitched as he kept them fixed on the target.

"The power of the chaos element is incredible as always," Headmaster Pitcus commented before moving his eyes on the screen next to the target. "Yet, you have yet to enter the realm of the second-level mages."

The screen depicted the number "1", stating how the chaos spear was still within the limits of first-level mages. Still, that result didn't surprise Khan.

"I held back on purpose to show the difference between the two versions," Khan explained before joining his hands again.

A massive surge of mana that made the Headmaster's eyebrows twitch came out of Khan's body and gathered in his palms. Khan waited for a few seconds before separating his hands slowly.

The same purple-red spear came to life, but the Headmaster noticed the differences from the previous spell. The weapon was way brighter than before, and tremors ran through its edges.

Headmaster Pitcus hid his faint surprise and decided to test Khan's concentration through a question. "That doesn't seem stable at all."

"That's the nature of the chaos element," Khan calmly replied without losing control of the spear. He even glanced at the Headmaster to warn him. "I would take a step back if I were you, sir."

"I'm fine where I am," Headmaster Pitcus gently chuckled.

Khan limited himself to nod again and turn toward the target. He took a deep breath before raising the spear and launching it toward the large metal slab in the distance.

The throw wasn't as precise as the previous. It landed in the top-right corner of the target, but the explosion that followed the impact prevented Headmaster Pitcus from voicing a comment.

A violent gale followed the bright purple-red pillar that covered the target. Headmaster Pitcus had to raise a hand to keep his glasses still, but the bun opened, and his hair ended up fluttering in the wind.

The training hall took a few seconds to return quiet, and the Headmaster didn't feel surprised at all when he saw the number "2" appear on the screen next to the target. No first-level mage could ever launch such a strong spell.

Khan closed his eyes for an instant before reopening again. The emotional burden required to cast spells at that level was heavy, and an attentive soldier might notice something. Still, Headmaster Pitcus didn't see anything since his gaze was glued to the target.

"Your aim is a bit off," Headmaster Pitcus commented as he pulled his hair to restore the bun.

"I'm working on that, sir," Khan stated. "Luckily, the other spells don't require that level of control."

"So, you do have other spells," Headmaster Pitcus teased. "Do you wish to keep them hidden?"

"I wouldn't mind revealing them to you, sir," Khan lied.

"I expected that answer," Headmaster Pitcus chuckled. "Do not worry. What you showed me is enough to award your second star. I'll update your profile and have new uniforms delivered to your flat."

"Thank you, sir!" Khan shouted while turning and performing a military salute.

Headmaster Pitcus began to leave the training hall, but a sudden thought made him stop. He glanced at Khan and voiced vague words that he didn't fail to understand. "About that matter, wait until the end of the semester. It would only hurt your students otherwise."

Khan knew that the Headmaster was talking about his replacement, and he even understood the reasons behind that request. His face also revealed enough, so Headmaster Pitcus left the training hall before hearing an answer.

Khan waited for the metal door to close before heaving a sigh of relief. He crouched and took out his phone to check the date. The time to leave had almost arrived. Less than two months separated him from that event.

'Almost there,' Khan exclaimed in his mind as he automatically came up with a schedule for the following months. Still, his thoughts eventually reached sad areas.

The departure from Reebfell would mark his break-up with Cora. Khan knew that the event was inevitable, but some sadness still appeared in his mind, especially when he reviewed what had changed in his relationship during the last period.

Cora and Khan had decided to enjoy their remaining time together, and she was doing her best to behave normally. However, Khan had noticed the sad and pensive stares that she threw at him from time to time.

Those gestures weren't only connected to the inevitable separation. Cora could now see Khan in his entirety, and she felt sad whenever she thought about what he had decided to reveal.

Cora was very empathetic. Sadness overwhelmed her whenever she thought about Khan's experiences. She almost felt guilty to have kept him on Earth for so long when he needed to find solutions to his nightmares.

The stories about Nitis had also filled Cora with terror and a tinge of disgust. Knowing that Khan had been an important pawn in those events had also unsettled her.

Cora respected and loved Khan more than anyone else in the world, but learning everything about him allowed her to accept the truth. They lived in different worlds that had been lucky enough to meet during those months. She could probably steal more time, but that would only hurt him.

That lingering sadness had spread to Amber since she was Cora's only confidant. Cora didn't reveal Khan's secrets, but Amber understood how serious the matter was from her tears and helplessness.

That created a vaguely tense environment that Khan, Amber, and Cora decided to ignore. Addressing the problem wouldn't lead anywhere due to the lack of solutions, so they silently accepted that their time together was coming to an end. Khan knew the role he had to play, but he still felt sad whenever he thought about it.

'The last year has been quite lucky,' Khan chuckled as he reviewed his time in Reebfell's camp. He could sense the faint conflict inside him. Part of him didn't want to abandon that peace, but the opposing feeling was too intense to ignore.

Khan sent a message to Luke and straightened his position. The date for the departure was set, and restlessness filled his mind as he thought about the incoming mission. The universe was calling Khan, and he wouldn't make it wait.

Chapter 338 - Departure

Time flowed quickly without putting Khan in front of any significant event. He studied, trained, and completed his duties as a professor until the date of the departure arrived.

Khan woke up early in the morning alone in his bed, but the event didn't surprise him. Cora had chosen to sleep in Amber's room that night since she knew that she wouldn't have been able to hold back her tears, and Khan didn't stop her.

The luggage had been ready for days by then. Khan only had to bring his second-grade knife and the items required by the [Blood Vortex] with him, and a bag was more than enough for them.

Khan jumped out of bed, took a shower, and changed into a clean military uniform. Luke had promised to take care of the clothes, drinks, and food, so Khan didn't need to add anything else to his luggage. He was ready to leave.

'I've spent almost one year here,' Khan thought when he was about to approach the entrance.

As Khan inspected every corner of his flat, memories surged in his mind. Cora's scent filled the area, but he also found traces of Amber's passage. The reinforced room even had faint marks left by his long meditations and training sessions.

One year wasn't a long period, but Khan acknowledged how that flat had grown on him. It still belonged to the camp, but he saw it as a home that reeked of memories and emotions.

The cave in Nitis' marsh inevitably showed itself and forced Khan to compare it with the flat. He knew which place had been more meaningful to him, but he liked that his mind placed both of them under the same category. He felt finally sure that he had tried his best in Reebfell.

Khan remained still only for a few seconds before tightening his grip on the bag and crossing the entrance. He had far harsher goodbyes. He wouldn't hesitate to face what waited for him that day.

A surprising sight unfolded in Khan's vision when he left the flat. Captain Goldmon, Lieutenant Abaze, and some of his students had gathered right outside his habitation and revealed broad smiles when they noticed him.

"Don't look so surprised," Lieutenant Abaze gently announced. "You have done a good job here. Did you really think that your students would let you go without saying goodbye?"

The news of Khan's departure had become public while the recruits were busy with the semestral tests. Khan had also prepared them for the arrival of a replacement, but the crowded hangar where he had his lessons wasn't the right place for proper goodbyes.

Moreover, many recruits simply didn't get close enough to Khan, and the arrival of his second stars only put more distance between them. However, some students still decided to contact Lieutenant Abaze and Captain Goldmon to plan that meeting. Even a few ex-students like Elsie and Ashley had decided to join it.

"I'm not sure I deserve all of this," Khan honestly admitted. "Changing professor in the middle of the year might cause problems. I'm sorry my departure had to come at such strange timing."

"Stop whining," Captain Goldmon snorted as he tapped his cane on the street. "I've reviewed your reports. Even an idiot could teach with something so detailed. Hurry up and leave so that I can go back to my duties."

"Captain, manners," Lieutenant Abaze reminded.

"It's a free day," Captain Goldmon replied. "My manners exist only during working hours."

The students felt a bit awkward to hear that conversation, but Elsie took the matter into her own hands to move the attention back on Khan. She stepped forward and performed a military salute before shouting. "Thank you, Professor Khan!"

The other recruits followed her example, and a series of "Thank you, Professor Khan" resounded in the area. The scene inevitably made Khan smile. Nothing proved that he had done an excellent job better than that.

"I should be the one to thank you," Khan happily exclaimed. "I've learnt a lot from being your professor. I hope you'll find my teachings useful in the future."

Khan exchanged glances with all his students before realizing that time was flowing quickly. His grip on the bag tightened again as he heaved a sigh and gave one last order. "Be safe."

"Yes, sir!" The students shouted and kept their military salutes firm until Khan walked past them.

"Professor Khan!" Elsie suddenly called and forced Khan to turn.

"What is it, Elsie?" Khan gently asked.

"I'll also join missions in the future," Elsie exclaimed.

"I expected as much," Khan stated. "Maybe we'll find ourselves in the same mission one day."

"I hope so, sir!" Elsie responded.

"Professor Khan is as popular as always," Lieutenant Abaze chuckled.

Khan nodded at Lieutenant Abaze before showing another warm smile at his students and turning to go on his way. No one followed him, but he sensed the group's gazes on him until he was too distant to see clearly.

The unexpected meeting put Khan in a happy mood that carried tinges of nostalgia. He knew he would miss his lessons, but that didn't slow him down at all.

The walk toward the teleport was long, but Khan was early, so he didn't mind walking slowly to savor every scene that the camp had to offer. He knew he would have fond memories of Reebfell.

A message reached his phone during the walk, and Khan felt surprised to see that it came from Headmaster Pitcus. The text was short and straightforward, but it added another good memory.

'Good luck on Milia 222,' Khan read on his screen before putting the phone back in his pocket.

Luke had kept his promise. He had dropped the idea of disguising the mission on Milia 222 as a simple holiday trip and had turned it into something official.

The mission obviously had nothing to do with the Global Army, but Luke had played his cards well. He had spread the news that the matter involved his family, and he had even listed Khan and Martha as hired soldiers.

The contents of the deal with Khan and Martha were private, but the sole fact that Luke had hired them to handle his family matters spoke for their value. Moreover, he promised to hand reports about their performance to the Global Army to add them to their profiles.

Khan couldn't complain in that situation, and the upfront payment had also been generous. His finances had basically doubled, bringing him close to a total of sixty thousand Credits. When Khan added the expenses handled by Luke in that period, he felt pretty lucky to have found such a good opportunity.

It was too early to find recruits and soldiers roaming through the camp, so Khan's walk was uneventful until he reached the teleport. The group he saw there didn't surprise him, but those familiar faces put him in a strange mood anyway.

Luke and Martha smiled at Khan, and Bruce tried to do the same, but a yawn interrupted his gesture. Meanwhile, Cora and Amber did their best to show happy expressions, but Khan noticed the sadness in their eyes.

'She has cried,' Khan thought when he saw Cora's face.

Luke, Martha, and Bruce wanted to speak, but they chose to remain silent when they noticed that Cora had attracted the entirety of Khan's attention. They knew that they needed some privacy, so they took steps back to leave the two alone.

Amber did the same, but she remained closer than the others. Meanwhile, Khan reached Cora, and the two fell in each other's arms without saying a single word.

Khan forced himself to imprint everything he felt on his memory. He didn't want to forget Cora's warmth, the softness of her hair, the strength behind her hug, and everything else about her. That woman had been so good to him, and recalling her was the least he could do.

A sniff forced Khan to break the hug and lift Cora's face. Tears had already started to fall from her eyes, but she appeared as beautiful as ever. She was actually blaming herself for losing control of her actions.

"Will you be okay?" Khan whispered.

"Don't worry about me," Cora managed to smile while she reached Khan's cheeks. "You are the one going in a dangerous place."

"I'm still worried about you," Khan softly responded.

"Don't be," Cora scolded. "You have pampered me a lot, and I still have Amber. Just make sure to focus on yourself. I want you to be happy."

"I'll do my best," Khan reassured.

"No," Cora shook her head. "You must succeed. All I want is for you to succeed-."

A sob interrupted Cora's line and forced her to hide her face in Khan's chest. She began to cry loudly, and Amber intervened before Khan could try to reassure her any further.

"Be safe out there," Amber whispered while stealing Cora from Khan's arms and securing her in a hug. "I don't want to hear any bad news about you."

"You know me," Khan teased, but his faint smile vanished when his eyes fell on Cora.

"You should leave now," Amber stated while glancing at Cora. "I'll take care of her."

"Thank you, Amber," Khan exclaimed while wrapping an arm around Amber's neck and making sure that he didn't touch Cora. "You are the best."

"Don't forget to call," Amber whispered before leaving a quick kiss on Khan's cheek. "Go now, and good luck."

Khan left Amber, and the two exchanged a nod. Then, Khan hurried toward the building with the teleport, and his three companions followed him silently.

The building's entrance slid open as the four crossed it, but Cora cried a loud "Khan!" that suppressed the noise caused by the door. Martha, Luke, and Bruce glanced at Khan, but he showed a cold face as he proceeded forward.

The soldiers inside the building performed the usual check-ups, but the four remained silent through the whole corridor. Khan didn't say anything when he learnt that his attunement with mana had almost reached sixty-one percent. He only wanted to get to the teleport, and his companions understood his feelings.

The oval structure eventually appeared in front of the group, and the four jumped on it in no time. They had yet to say a word, but Khan noticed how Martha tried to grab his hand before retracting it at the last second.

Khan grabbed Martha's hand before it could return on her side, and the two exchanged a meaningful stare. He revealed a sad smile, and she said a silent "thank you" through her lips.

'I have gone back in time,' Khan joked in his mind as the synthetic mana filled the structure.

The scene was far too similar to what he had experienced before Istrone's mission, but a lot had changed since then. He had the power to protect his friends now, and he wouldn't hesitate to use it.

Then, the teleport activated, and the scenery in the group's vision began to transform. The mission on Milia 222 had officially started.

Chapter 339 - Alien-lover

Khan was obviously the first to recover from the teleport's effects. He had barely felt anything due to the new power that ran through his body, and the scenery didn't surprise him.

Milia 222 was hard to reach, and its peculiar environment prevented the presence of teleports. The shortest path toward that location always involved a space station, so Khan knew he would be in front of grey surfaces illuminated by white light after leaving Reebfell.

Still, Khan didn't expect the teleport area to be so crowded, especially in a space station. Except for the usual scientists in white medical coats, he noticed a small group of young soldiers led by an old, slightly familiar face.

"Welcome to Neo Station!" The elderly man exclaimed when he noticed that Luke's gaze had regained its focus.

Martha let go of Khan's hand as soon as she noticed that they weren't alone. Instead, Khan performed a quick inspection of the group before focusing on the elderly man.

"Ivor, am I right, sir?" Khan asked while jumping off the oval platform.

"Oh, I didn't expect you to remember me," Master Ivor exclaimed while stretching his arm forward. "I'm sorry that the last time I was too worried about Luke to express my gratitude properly. Thank you for everything you have done on Istrone and for the Global Army in general, Lieutenant Khan."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Khan shook Master Ivor's hand while showing one of his politest smiles. "I should be the one thanking you for training Luke so well. He has been a crucial ally on Istrone."

"You are too kind," Master Ivor replied. "I've only done my job as one of the Cobsend family's Masters. I'm unworthy of the praises of the most talented soldier in the Global Army."

Khan limited himself to smile as he let go of Master Ivor's hand. His gesture stated that he didn't deny that title, and no one could blame him. The two stars on both his shoulders were more than enough to prove that point.

Khan had met Master Ivor after teleporting back on Ylaco. Their interaction had been short, but he could see that the elderly man didn't age at all in those years. Even his grey goatee had remained the same.

Nevertheless, Khan wasn't a simple recruit anymore. Master Ivor wasn't wearing any military uniform, but Khan could understand his level easily. The soldier carried enough mana to be a third-level warrior.

'Luckily, I'm not the strongest,' Khan heaved a sigh of relief in his mind as his attention went on the other soldiers.

Master Ivor's group featured six young soldiers that Khan didn't recognize. Four were first-level warriors, while the other two were as strong as Khan. They were also wearing casual clothes, but their power couldn't escape Khan's senses.

Moreover, Khan noticed how a faint noble aura surrounded all of them. He had seen something similar with Bruce, so he could guess that those young soldiers were quite wealthy. It was also safe to assume that they had tight connections to the Cobsend family since they were part of the mission.

'So, this is Neo Station,' Khan commented in his mind as his gaze tried to find peculiarities in the circular room.

Neo Station was rather famous among the space stations since it was an important node in the vast array of commercial and travel routes. Its domain involved many private destinations or locations that lacked teleports. It even acted as a resting area for many travelers or pilots.

Neo Station's peculiarities didn't end there. The space station wasn't as militarized as the others but focused on offering various entertaining activities.

Khan knew that he would teleport there, so he had studied Neo Station a bit. The structure featured casinos, restaurants, and much more, with some activities meant only for really wealthy travelers.

A space station with so many riches would generally fall in the target of thieves or other criminal factions belonging to different species. However, its peculiar location in the universe allowed it to have its hands in many illegal businesses that protected it from most dangers.

Khan would have never learnt so much without Luke's help. A sharp eye would have understood that Neo Station was the home of a few illegal activities, even from regular reports. Still, Khan had needed Luke's connections to purchase comprehensive tomes that explained those matters.

Khan obviously didn't understand everything. Actually, many details were impossible to learn from outside the space station. Still, what he had found gave him a broad idea of the environment, which was more than enough.

Luke, Bruce, and Martha jumped down the platform and exchanged polite greetings before a soldier escorted the whole group outside the circular room. Master Ivor took over at that point and led everyone across a few narrow corridors until a vast hangar unfolded in everyone's vision.

'The true face of Neo Station should be a few floors above us,' Khan guessed since he didn't see anything peculiar on his way.

Khan disregarded the matter and focused on the spaceship after entering the vast hangar. He could immediately find differences from the other space stations there. Only a few vehicles had military purposes, while the others were private rides focused on luxury rather than firepower.

That alone gave Khan an idea of the type of people that filled Neo Station. Many of them had to be important members of wealthy families. He also noticed a few ships that didn't belong to human technology, which hinted at the presence of aliens.

'I've really left Earth, haven't I?' Khan sighed in his mind as he let the different environment overwhelm his senses.

The air was stale and reeked of metal and synthetic mana. The floor carried the unmistakable scent of cleaning products and similar items. The engines of the various vehicles assaulted Khan with their different mana signature, and everyone in the hangar appeared in a hurry.

The scene was cold, almost robotic, but it reminded Khan of the severe and stiff environment of the army. He was far away from the warmth and comfort of the training camp. He was back in the chaotic and unpredictable universe.

'I really can't give up on this,' Khan said to himself. 'This faint tension is addicting.'

Even a peaceful and protected space station rekindled the instincts that Khan had developed through his many tragic experiences. The life in the camp had never dulled those habits, but they exploded with new power now that he had entered an unknown environment.

The results of his training naturally fused with his habits and gave birth to a new level of alertness. Khan could finally express the entirety of himself, and he couldn't describe how much he had missed that feeling.

'I'm sorry, Cora,' Khan thought as he closed his eyes to bathe in his sensations. 'This is what I am.'

"Khan?" Luke called from the head of the group, and Khan opened his eyes to find everyone looking at him.

"Sorry," Khan exclaimed. "I was trying to list all the spaceships that I recognized."

"Don't worry!" Luke reassured. "That's why I called you in the first place. I'm sure you will like the vehicle rented for the trip."

The group accelerated a bit until Luke pointed at a huge ship in the distance. The vehicle was way too big for such a small group, and the amount of synthetic mana stored inside it left Khan speechless.

The spaceship had a cylindrical shape that featured two huge circular engines placed at its sides. Its tip was round and featured metal protections that could slide away to reveal reinforced windows. Dark, mirror-like panels also covered the entirety of the structure and gave it a strange appearance.

'Isn't this too flashy for our mission?' Khan wondered.

"You probably won't recognize it," Luke explained. "Only a few space stations have this model. Buying it is also pointless due to the amount of fuel it consumes. Even my family doesn't have one of these."

"Isn't this too much for a simple trip?" Khan expressed his doubts.

"I wanted to go for a cheaper model," Luke revealed, "But my father intervened. He even scolded me for bothering about money when the descendants of important allies are involved."

"Luke, be sure to express my gratitude to your father," One of the women in the group announced. "This ship is majestic."

'They aren't members of the Cobsend family then,' Khan concluded.

Khan still felt worried about eventual pirates or rogue companies during the trip, but the fact that the ship belonged to Neo Station reassured him. If the reports were correct, everything would be fine.

"You are free to settle inside," Luke stated. "The pilots will take a few hours to arrive, so you can pick different cabins and get used to the ship in the meantime."

The group followed Luke's suggestion and approached the vehicle. A large door rose and created an entrance on its side, and everyone could immediately get an idea of the luxury that expected them.

Khan's expression remained firm even if his mind failed to assess the level of wealth required to create something like that. A metal staircase stretched from the entrance and welcomed the group inside a brownish environment with comfortable seats and soft surfaces.

Leather and other precious materials filled Khan's sight. The entrance led to a vast corridor that allowed the passage of three grown men. A series of seats and a few tables magnetically connected to the floor occupied some slightly larger areas, and Khan even noticed an interactive canteen in the distance.

That was only one of the spaceship's areas. Luke guided the group throughout the vehicle and described its various environments. The cabins were small and had limited water, but the recreative spaces were comfortable and vast.

Those who had created the spaceship were masters in managing the limited space those vehicles inevitably featured. They had compressed multiple flats into something far smaller without making it appear cramped. Khan was honestly in awe of that level of perfection.

"It's a pity that this model has beds inside the walls," Luke uttered when the tour was almost over. "I guess the engineers believed that the travelers wouldn't spend long on them."

"Luke, please," Bruce called. "This ship is incredible. We might not meet each other in entire days due to how big it is."

"Well, privacy is a big issue when it comes to interplanetary travels," Luke stated. "This ship should solve it."

'It destroys the issue,' Khan corrected in his mind as his eyes continued to wander among the various features of the vehicle.

"Right, Khan," Luke eventually voiced, "The ship is built with materials resistant to the chaos element, so you can train freely. Though I'd avoid launching spells inside the training room."

"Does it have a training room too?" Khan asked without hiding his surprise.

"Yes, it's on the back of the ship," Luke revealed. "It's small, but its number of programs exceeds those found in normal training halls. Still, I'm afraid that some of them have nothing to do with the martial arts."

Bruce and the others revealed knowing smirks, and Khan took a while to understand what Luke meant. The training halls could generate holograms, so some programs involved porn and similar activities.

Khan found it funny that Martha was the only one to remain lost, and he didn't miss that chance to approach her ear to whisper the explanation. "Sex stuff."

Martha's eyes lit up in understanding, but she pouted when she noticed Khan's satisfied expression. "You sure are having fun."

"Just a bit," Khan replied. "It reminds me of the old days, even if we have switched roles."

"Enjoy it while you can," Martha scoffed before rolling her eyes and speaking in a serious tone. "Are you okay?"

"I will be," Khan dismissively replied before resuming the tour.

The group chose random rooms when the tour was over. Some directly went to sleep, but Khan decided to explore the spaceship a bit more after dropping his bag. As for Martha, she was already inside the training room.

"Khan!" Luke called while Khan roamed through the spaceship.

"You have outdone yourself," Khan commented as he waited for Luke to reach him.

"I didn't do anything," Luke dismissed the compliment. "This is all my father's work. However, this is mine."

Luke took a small casket from the insides of his military uniform and handed it to Khan. The latter inspected it without opening, and a question inevitably left his mouth. "What is it?"

"Open it," Luke chuckled.

Khan opened the casket and found a small white disk inside it. The item resembled the training programs that Khan had obtained during his life, but he couldn't understand the purpose of what stood in his hands.

"Go in your room and test it," Luke suggested. "I'm sure you will like it."

"Sure," Khan nodded and left for his room.

The habitation didn't have much, and it was pretty cramped, so Khan crouched to enter the bed inside the wall before tinkering with his phone.

The device absorbed the disk, and a new label immediately appeared in the menu with the magic items. Khan's eyes widened in surprise when he read the new program, and his fingers pressed it before he could even go over the matter.

"Flight simulator initiated," A female mechanical voice came out of the phone. "Please, pick a vehicle to start the simulation."

'How did he pull this off?!' Khan shouted in his mind as he rolled out of bed to sit on the floor. 'This is military-grade equipment available only in special structures meant for pilots!'

Khan had only worked on the theory after his deal with the recruiters. He was progressing steadily, but he had never gotten his hands to a proper simulator, let alone one with so many options.

Khan picked one of the names that he recognized from the holograms that had come out of his phone. Those images quickly transformed into a vast console that featured multiple keys, levers, and a few screens.

'This is like a real pilot's seat!' Khan exclaimed.

Khan didn't hesitate to test the console, but the holograms turned red when he touched the main handle. New images also came out of his phone and took the shape of instructions.

'Remove the security brake first,' Khan read on the holograms and understood his mistake.

That experience was completely different from reading books. Khan could put to use everything he had learnt and build on that foundation with a program that followed his every step. Needless to say, he lost track of time as he tested the various features of the simulator.

"Attention to all passengers," A male voice eventually resounded inside Khan's room and forced him to interrupt the simulation. "We are about to leave Neo Station. Reach the main rooms or activate your monitors if you want to witness the departure."

Khan didn't hesitate to tinker with the menus in the room and activate the monitors. The vast hangar appeared on the screen, but the spaceship eventually set off and left toward the blackness of space.

When the ship left the hangar, the cameras changed their target and moved to the space station. Neo Station soon became visible in its entirety, and Khan finally noticed its peculiar features.

Neo Station was massive, and its upper part featured a large ring that rotated around its main structure. Ads shone on that spinning machine, and Khan could even see people walking behind them through the zoom of the monitor.

'So much wealth,' Khan couldn't help but think as Neo Station shrunk until it transformed into a mere bright dot in the blackness of the universe.

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Milia 222 was at only nine days of flight from Neo Station, and the group spent that time enjoying the absurd luxury that the spaceship offered. Even Khan indulged in the good food and booze of the interactive canteen, but his main focus remained on his new simulator.

Chances to interact with the other group members happened, and Khan didn't miss them. He introduced himself to everyone, but those interactions never went past a few polite words.

No one wanted to socialize during the short travel, and everyone seemed busy handling different matters. The width of the spaceship also offered a lot of privacy, so the atmosphere remained quite silent.

Only a few meaningful meetings happened. Luke called them to give overviews of Milia 222 and explain part of the mission. The second asteroid was their destination, but they would still have to land on the first and proceed from there.

Khan tried his best to gain an impression of his companions, but only three of them showed something more than politeness.

Master Ivor appeared a generally kind person with a lot of experience and an excellent social sense. He often left his companions alone to let them enjoy their youthful conversations, and he showed nothing but respect toward Khan.

Amanda Eerly was the woman who had expressed her gratitude toward Luke's father. She was one of the four first-level warriors, and she came from Bruce's family, but she didn't share any blood with him.

Her physical features also suggested a lack of kinship. Amanda had long brown hair and green eyes, but she shared Bruce's noble aura. Also, she had an evident romantic interest in Luke.

Monica Solodrey was one of the second-level warriors, and she had been the first to introduce herself to Khan. Her skin was dark, and her long black hair created large, elegant curls. Her eyes were icy-blue, and her refined manners reminded Khan about Lieutenant Abaze.

Monica and Khan didn't say much to each other during the flight. She was always busy reading the news or checking her phone, but she was the only one who lifted her eyes and showed gentle smiles whenever Khan arrived.

Khan didn't know if Monica was hitting on him or if her behavior hid a political agenda. Yet, he didn't ponder too much on the matter since he kept himself busy with Martha's training and his own exercises.

Khan also wasn't in the mood to flirt with girls right now. The break-up with Cora was still vivid in his mind, and the cold nights spent alone in his bed reminded him of what he had decided to abandon.

Of course, Khan could raise the temperature in his room, but he kept it low. That cold was perfect for his mood and mind. It reminded him why the break-up happened in the first place, and it added fuel to the excitement toward the mission.

"Attention to all passengers," The pilot's voice eventually resounded again through the spaceship. "We are approaching Milia 222. You can witness the landing through your screens."

Khan was with Martha in one of the areas with the interactive canteens. He was inspecting her progress with the Niqols' methods, but they interrupted the training and activated the screens to watch the scene.

Milia 222 resembled a small chain of stars in the distance, but it showed its true face as the spaceship got close. The seven asteroids eventually became clear, and the same went for their layout.

'It's prettier than the books make it out to be,' Khan thought once he became able to see the various bright domes.

The surface of the asteroids was barren, but life thrived inside domes that spread inside those vast rocks. Cities expanded vertically there, but Khan couldn't see much from outside.

The situation didn't improve after the spaceship approached the first asteroid. One of the domes on its surface opened to reveal a giant hangar full of vehicles and people belonging to different species.

Khan's excitement rose when he saw that crowded environment. He left Martha and went to his room to take his bag before moving to the area connected to the entrance.

The group quickly gathered around Khan. Luke and Master Ivor placed themselves in front of the entrance, and they didn't hesitate to descend from the metal staircase once it opened.

Air that carried the strong scent of synthetic mana immediately entered Khan's nostrils. He was ready for that, but he didn't expect such intensity. Even the space stations didn't reach those levels.

Apart from that, the environment reflected what Khan had read in the reports. His eyes soon lost themselves on the various alien faces and interesting details of the hangar, but a familiar aura eventually reached his senses.

"Oh, the guides are here," Luke exclaimed while turning toward a small group of humans approaching the spaceship.

Khan's face turned cold as he sprinted forward to arrive in front of a member of the incoming group. His hand went on his knife and grabbed its peculiar handle firmly as he voiced a question. "What are you doing here?"

"Long time no see, alien-lover," Rodney chuckled while wearing a sneering smile.

Chapter 340 - Cek

More than a year had passed since Nitis' events, but Khan recalled everything. Most memories featured Liiza, Snow, Doku, Azni, and George, but he couldn't forget about the traitor from the human side.

Rodney had been in chains the last time Khan had seen him, but the departure from Nitis had clearly benefited him. Rodney had developed burlier muscles, and the mana inside his body put him close to the limits of the first-level warriors. He must have had a lot of time to train, stating that he didn't spend a single day in prison.

"Better than being a traitor," Khan stated.

"I've never betrayed anyone," Rodney sighed without dropping his smile. "I was doing my interests in the middle of a worldwide crisis. Can you really blame me?"

"I'm sure the Global Army didn't," Khan snorted.

"Oh, it did," Rodney contradicted. "I would be somewhere on Earth otherwise. Instead, I have to work in this place until the Global Army is sure that my return won't offend you."

Khan had seen something similar happening in his early days in Ylaco's camp when the Global Army expelled the four bullies. His talent had made him stand out, so his superiors had chosen to punish his enemies even if they belonged to wealthy families.

Rodney had apparently suffered from the same fate. In the report, Lieutenant Kintea had been vague about him, but the Global Army had still decided to punish him, and Khan's fame was probably to blame.

"The Global Army should have sent your ass to Ecoruta," Khan responded.

Truth be told, Khan didn't hate Rodney too deeply. The soldier had tried to kill him, but that had happened after a tragic occurrence. Forgiving him was impossible, but Khan could understand how and why he had snapped.

Still, Rodney's current behavior told Khan that he didn't see anything wrong in his past actions. Actually, Rodney seemed to take pride in them now, and his previous words even aimed to mock one of Khan's happiest moments.

"You have become all righteous," Rodney laughed. "What is it? Did being the Global Army's hero make you forget about what you did on Nitis?"

"What are you even trying to say?" Khan asked.

"I'm talking about the village," Rodney declared. "Man, that was some twisted stuff. How can you even sleep at night?"

Khan fell silent as the memories of that awful morning surged in his mind. He couldn't believe that Rodney had chosen to mention them, and the event made him accept that the soldier was far too gone.

"Fine," Khan exclaimed as he began to draw his knife out of the sheath. "I'll kill you."

"Hold on, young man," The stronger member in Rodney's group, a tall, burly man, called as he approached Khan. "What do you think you are doing?"

The man tried to place a hand on Khan's shoulder, but purple-red mana suddenly flowed out of that spot and interrupted his gesture. Khan slowly turned toward the guide, and a calm threat escaped his mouth. "What do you think you are doing?"

The atmosphere immediately became tense. Khan appeared out of control, and the guides didn't know how to approach him. The tall man was a second-level warrior, but the mana that had come out of Khan's shoulder had filled him with terror.

"Khan, what is happening?" Luke asked when he reached the guides with the rest of the group.

"Did you know that he was among the guides?" Khan asked while using his free hand to point at Rodney.

"I don't even know who he is," Luke promised before turning toward the tall man. "Send him away. We don't need his services, and I also expect a refund for this problem."

The tall man wanted to complain, but he eventually nodded, and a command quickly left his mouth. "Rodney, you heard him. Go back to the guild."

"Sure, boss," Rodney shrugged his shoulders. "See you around, alien-lover."

Khan felt the urge to make Rodney's body explode with one of his spells, but he held back. Even his previous action had been nothing more than a pretense. Rodney wouldn't have even seen the knife cutting his head if Khan really wanted to kill him.

However, no matter how Khan wanted to jump at Rodney, he couldn't ignore the threatening presence that had landed on him right after his sprint. Master Ivor had been ready to intervene during the whole interaction.

'Ivor is strong,' Khan concluded as he watched Rodney vanish in the crowded hangar.

"Was that Rodney Semmut?" Luke asked after Khan let go of the knife.

"I thought you didn't know him," Khan pointed out while memorizing Rodney's family name.

"I didn't connect the dots until I heard his name," Luke explained. "I swear. I had no idea he was a guide here. The hiring process happens through the network, and it only shows the captain of each team."

"Do you know what he has done on Nitis?" Khan asked.

"The reports are a bit sketchy," Luke revealed. "I know he did something bad, but his family is trying to silence the matter. Investigating any further could create hostility, so I didn't use my connections. That was a bad choice."

"Did you really not know?" Khan asked again.

"I have no reason to lie," Luke declared.

Khan inspected Luke's expression for a few seconds, but he eventually sighed. "Then you made the right choice. Creating hatred between two families for him isn't worth it."

"It is for you," Luke stated, but Khan ignored that comment.

The relationship with Luke was still a bit tense. Khan vaguely trusted him, but he couldn't forget that he had chosen to use Martha for his needs.

The happiness that came from having Martha awake helped the situation, but Khan wanted to take things slow. He would probably understand his position toward Luke only after the mission was over.

"Khan," Bruce's turn to talk arrived when the guides began to move. "I understand that you have a history with the guy, but you can't just threaten people. You can't lose control so easily."

"I have been perfectly calm for the entire time," Khan exclaimed as the group walked right behind the guides.

"I've seen your mana," Bruce uttered.

"That's nothing more than a trick," Khan half-lied as he showed his forefinger and made a sliver of purple-red mana come out of its tip.

The group didn't know what to say at that scene. Khan's actions had left a few of them unsatisfied, but his current performance appeared completely honest.

"Khan, I trust you, but Bruce is right," Luke added at that point. "I need to ask you to hold back in the future before mentioning the matter in private. I promise I'll do my best to help."

The group seemed to agree with Luke's words. Amanda and a few others even nodded to express their stance, but they grew confused when they noticed Khan's frown.

"Do you understand where we are?" Khan questioned. "This isn't Earth. People disappear every day here, and no one asks too many questions. Showing strength is better than diplomacy."

"Lieutenant Khan is right," Master Ivor voiced before anyone could contradict Khan. "Milia 222 is the home of many shady characters. Your status offers some form of protection, but this remains a lawless zone."

Khan launched a meaningful glance at Master Ivor, and the two reached a silent understanding. They were both experienced warriors, and Khan basically said that he was reliable through that gesture.

Master Ivor and Khan had spoken the truth. Milia 222 was closer to the Slum than to the cities. The various factions in place and the widespread corruption could even make it more dangerous than some of the places Khan had seen.

Behaving as thugs had its benefits, especially when the backing was more than exceptional. Khan didn't like that approach, but he knew that taking a firm stance right away was for the best. He was even sure that the guides would talk about the recent event and warn other activities.

Luke and Bruce felt a bit ashamed after that reprimand, and Amanda didn't like how Khan had put them in a bad light. Instead, the others renewed their trust in Khan, and Monica didn't hold back from approaching him during the walk.

"I'm afraid I overheard something," Monica announced.

"Don't worry," Khan reassured. "It's old stuff that's better to leave in the past."

"I see," Monica said. "Though you must have many exciting stories."

"Most of them are available on the network," Khan joked.

"The reports always get things wrong," Monica chuckled. "Besides, there is nothing better than hearing them from the main character."

"I won't sell myself short," Khan joked again, "But I was simply in the middle of powers far above me most of those times. My view of the events is probably flawed."

"Why don't you let me judge that?" Monica asked. "Maybe in front of a drink. I'll also tell some of my stories."

Khan wore a slightly surprised expression on purpose. The group believed that he was feeling awkward in front of that explicit invitation, but Monica doubled down on the flirt.

"I do have stories to tell," Monica insisted while covering her mouth. "Don't you trust me?"

"I guess I'll see in front of a drink," Khan smiled without adding any superfluous emotion to his tone.

Khan couldn't refuse Monica, but he didn't feel like flirting. He didn't want another relationship so soon after Cora, and Monica was no Liiza. Her beauty was on point, but she lacked what had made Khan move on quickly in the past.

The conversation still created an awkward atmosphere since everyone could hear it. Martha's partially hidden glare didn't help either, but Luke's mastery of social relationships saved the day once again.

An announcement resounded throughout the hangar while Luke was busy establishing a casual conversation. The mechanical voice repeated the contents of the message multiple times while switching languages and everyone disregarded it after understanding that it involved the imminent departure of a passengers' ship.

Only Khan tried to make that announcement echo inside his mind as he muttered some of the alien words in it. He had studied the most popular languages of the area, but he obviously lacked practice in the accents required to speak them.

"Do you know how to speak some of them?" Martha asked when Khan ended his muttering.

"I have memorized the grammar and vocabulary of all of them," Khan revealed, "But I don't know if I can speak them."

"All of them?" Monica didn't miss that chance to join the conversation. "Milia 222 can have visitors from more than ten alien species."

"But only five live here," Khan continued. "I focused on their languages. Some are quite easy, but others had me cough many times."

As if to challenge Khan's statement, a series of bubbling noises resounded next to the group and forced them to turn. Khan and the others found three strange creatures waving their tentacles at them.

Those aliens were relatively short. None of them went above one meter and fifty centimeters, but their bodies were beyond odd from a human perspective.

The upper part of their bodies was oval and featured many small cavities. Instead, their flesh transformed into multiple short tentacles in their lower part.

Those aliens resembled huge jellyfish with far thicker tentacles and dark-green skin. Their insides were hidden, but specific lights could reveal their organs.

"These are Cek," Luke commented. "They should be peaceful."

"Were they calling us?" Amanda asked.

"Hard to understand," Bruce stated. "Still, they are pointing their tentacles at us. It's better to ignore them."

"Does anyone know where the second deck is?" Khan asked.

"What do you mean?" Luke questioned before looking around to find signals. "We came from the third deck, and this is the fourth, so I guess the second is past our ship."

"So, after the big ship," Khan repeated before turning toward the three Cek and raising his forefinger.

Khan twisted and bent his finger slowly, and he often halted his movements to dive into his memory. A few group members understood what was happening, and the guides expressed evident surprise at that scene.

The Cek didn't move while Khan was busy drawing different shapes with his finger, but a series of bubbling noises came out of their cavities when he lowered his hand. The aliens then waved their tentacles a few times before leaving in the direction of the group's ship.

"Explain," Martha announced once the Cek left.

"They didn't understand the previous announcement since it wasn't in their language," Khan revealed. "They asked me to translate. Apparently, their ship is about to leave."

"But the Cek aren't one of the aliens living here," Martha stated. "I thought you only learnt those languages."

"Oh," Khan exclaimed before raising his finger. "This isn't exactly a language. It's something used to convey simple messages. Only a few species have accepted it."

"That's from the Ipinia convention, right?" Monica asked.

"Exactly," Khan nodded.

"I didn't recognize it from the tentacles," Monica admitted. "My family made me practice a few signs, but I didn't understand anything of what you said."

"I'm not sure I did it correctly either," Khan laughed. "I might have even misunderstood their question. Fingers and tentacles aren't the same things in the end."

"Why did you learn it if it's not popular?" Martha wondered.

"It's not hard at all," Khan revealed. "Also, I liked the idea behind it. Each species has physical limitations. Humans can never speak the Cek's language. We can learn how to make bubbles, but we can't turn them into a language even if we rely on mana.. The Ipinia convention wanted to fix that."