

Chaos' Heir 361

Chapter 361 Invitation

Khan found Jenna staring at him when he opened his eyes. The room was dark, and a glance at the wall told him that the dawn had yet to arrive. He had slept a lot, but the faint worry in Jenna's expression made him disregard that thought.

"[What is it]?" Khan asked while caressing Jenna's cheek.

Jenna closed her eyes as she immersed herself in the caress. She snuggled in Khan's palm, but she eventually took his hand to hold it firmly on her face.

"[What is it]?" Khan repeated.

"[You have seen your monsters]," Jenna whispered as she opened her eyes and reached for Khan's scar with her free hand. "[How often does that happen]?"

"[Every time I fall asleep]," Khan admitted without even considering lying.

"[I see]," Jenna sighed as she traced the scar's edges with her fingers. "[Maybe that's why you prefer Martha. It reminds you of what you can no longer be]."

Jenna pushed on Khan's chest and kept him down as she changed her position. The sheets slid away as Jenna climbed on Khan to sit on his abdomen. She completely exposed herself, and the faint darkness of the room didn't hinder Khan's vision.

That position would normally push Khan to his mental limits. Jenna's most intimate spot was pressing on his skin, and he could experience part of its captivating warmth. Still, the serious topic allowed him to divert his attention from that tempting sensation.

"[Maybe]," Khan uttered as he reviewed his past relationships. He had tried his best every time, but there was a lot of selflessness in his actions. He couldn't confirm that his intentions had always been pure.

"[I thought my curse was awful]," Jenna stated as she let go of Khan's hand to reach his face with both palms, "[But yours is worse. I'm sorry for not noticing this until now]."

"[It's fine]," Khan revealed a reassuring but sad smile. "[I've gotten used to it. It's part of me now]."

"[Your dark parts]," Jenna whispered as she lowered her head without getting too close to Khan's face, "[They were forced on you. No, you developed them to cope with your curse]."

"[Maybe I've always been twisted]," Khan wondered. "[I don't care anymore. I can't find answers anyway. I only know that I can't stop]."

"[I can see it now]," Jenna whispered again.

Khan still had one hand on Jenna's face, and the other had instinctively gone on her waist. Jenna didn't get too close, but her long hair created a soft curtain that filled Khan's vision.

The room seemed to disappear. Jenna's green hair prevented Khan from looking elsewhere and almost forced him to stare at her beautiful purple eyes. They were so deep that Khan felt naked under their firm inspection. His whole mind was for Jenna to study.

"[I want to comfort you]," Jenna eventually stated.

"[You are already doing that]," Khan reassured.

"[I want to do more]," Jenna said as her thumbs caressed Khan's cheeks.

"[No]," Khan firmly refused.

"[I wouldn't mind it]," Jenna continued. "[I think I would even like it]."

"[Jenna]," Khan called before heaving a sigh. "[Don't throw away your values]."

"[I'm not throwing them away]," Jenna responded. "[Lesser men and women had their way with my ancestors. My customs are a result of that abuse, not an unbreakable law. I'm sure Caja would also understand]."

Khan saw the same selflessness that had afflicted his actions in Jenna's expression. Still, her face carried much more than that. Her arousal was impossible to miss, and Khan obviously shared that feeling.

Khan held Jenna's waist firmly as he straightened his back to sit on the bed. Jenna ended up on his lap, and a suppressed moan left her mouth when her most intimate spot touched his groin.

Jenna seemed to lose herself. Her palms grew warmer, and her mouth opened as she brought it closer to Khan's face. Yet, he put strength on the hand on her cheek to stop her when she was about to kiss him.

Khan moved his thumb over Jenna's lips. At first, she let him experience their softness, but she soon closed them to leave a kiss on his finger. The gesture almost made Khan lose control of his actions, but an intense emotion allowed him to remain lucid.

"[Do you remember what you told me the first time I almost kissed you]?" Khan asked while using the affection he felt for Jenna to suppress his urges.

"[Will your feelings be okay afterward]?" Jenna recalled.

Khan let go of Jenna's face to wrap both arms around her waist. He pulled her closer to put some distance between their crotches and make their foreheads touch.

"[I wouldn't hesitate to take you now if I knew I could keep you happy for my entire life and more]," Khan declared. "[Yet, you said it yourself. I've already found my one]."

Jenna's eyes widened in surprise. Khan had always found it hard to talk about that topic, but he had openly admitted it now. That revelation allowed her to snap out of her strange trance and calm down.

"[Oh, Khan]," Jenna called as she wrapped her arms around Khan's neck to rest her head on his shoulder. "[I'm so happy we met]."

Jenna seemed to have every intention to suffocate Khan, but he saw nothing more than honest affection in her tight hug. He couldn't refrain from diving into her neck to get a better taste of that emotion, and the two silently decided to remain in that position for a few minutes.

Khan understood that Jenna had gone back to her usual self when she started leaving deep kisses on his shoulder. He voiced a faint laugh as he lay back on the bed and seeped a hand into her hair. That wasn't enough to stop Jenna, but it made her giggle softly.

"[Enough, enough]," Khan half-joked. "[I will really take you if you keep this up]."

Jenna finally stopped kissing Khan's shoulder but only to approach his ear and whisper something far more tempting. "[You can use me however you please]."

Khan's head instinctively turned to glance at Jenna's smiling face. She had been serious. Her previous mood had not been something temporary. Jenna had decided that Khan could use her if that could bring him some peace.

"[You will make me go crazy]," Khan cursed as he dived into Jenna's chest and closed his eyes.

"[That sounds exciting]," Jenna laughed as she hugged Khan's head and played with his hair.

"[Don't worry. I'll lower the bar for your future woman so you can vent sooner]."

"[I don't need to vent]," Khan complained.

"[It was about to explode before]," Jenna whispered as her knee went dangerously close to Khan's groin.

"[You are getting lewder with each passing day]," Khan stated while leaving Jenna's chest to face her. "[I don't want a woman only to vent. I'm not like that]."

"[I know]," Jenna reassured. "[You would have already taken me otherwise]."

"[Exactly]," Khan agreed.

"[Sadly, I don't know many women outside my species]," Jenna revealed before pushing Khan down and turning to lay the back of her head on his chest. "[I want to know Monica better. I'll give my approval if I like her]."

"[Why would I even need you to get a girlfriend?]" Khan laughed as he pinched Jenna's cheek.

"[Because you can't refuse my whims]," Jenna claimed.

"[You are impossible]," Khan cursed as he covered Jenna's eyes with his hand and made her explode into a cute giggle.

"[Well, what now?]" Jenna asked as she seized Khan's arm.

"[I don't know]," Khan admitted. "[Moving too much isn't ideal due to the spies. It's also impossible to remain unnoticed with you around. I guess we can only wait for Luke to open a path to the dock]."

"[What do you want to do in the meantime?]" Jenna asked.

"[Except retaining my mental sanity?]" Khan joked. "[Training sounds nice]."

"[Right, let me show you the trick for the hair again]," Jenna exclaimed. "[I should be able to teach you a few things since we are among synthetic mana now]."

The two proceeded to do just that. The synthetic mana in the room allowed Khan to achieve some results in the Nele's arts. He learnt the trick for lowering the hair, but he also focused on the fundamentals behind establishing conversations with the mana.

Jenna never let Khan alone. She guided him through every exercise and performed examples whenever he failed to grasp the theory behind the technique.

The room wasn't the lake, and the synthetic mana was far easier to affect, but Khan managed to develop the correct habits thanks to Jenna. He still had a long way to go, but he was slowly getting there.

Breakfast time went by quickly. Khan and Jenna didn't even realize they had skipped it as they remained immersed in their training. Khan even interrupted the Nele's exercises to perform his usual schedule, and Jenna either watched him or meditated in the meantime.

Khan learnt how the Nele increased their attunement with mana during that training. Those aliens were born with mana, so they used a type of trance that forced their specific organs to expand and improve.

Jenna actually let Khan feel how she moved the mana inside her body to improve her organ. She didn't know if humans could use the same methods, but a few tests revealed that Khan couldn't benefit from it.

Khan didn't know if that went for all humans, but he had no interest in researching the matter any further.

Jenna had the chance to get a general idea of Khan's knowledge while she watched him go through his various exercises. The two didn't hold back from discussing them afterward in the hope of finding something that the Nele could use.

It turned out that the Niqols had many theories that the Nele could study to develop better exercises. Khan had already shown something about the control field, but, according to Jenna, the manipulation also had potential.

The theory was simple. The Nele had to talk with the mana around them, but they still needed to use their energy to send messages. Changing the nature of their mana according to the environment could improve part of the conversation.

Of course, Jenna alone couldn't come up with proper answers. She was one of the most talented members of her species, but she remained young, with limited knowledge. Caja or other leaders had to go through Khan's techniques to decide if they could help them.

Lunchtime also arrived and went by, but Khan and Jenna recalled asking for food at that time. Waiters left carts with impeccable plates that the two enjoyed in the privacy of their room.

Luke didn't remain completely silent. He never suggested meetings or similar events, but he sent reports to Khan's phone as the other team members went on with the investigation.

Those reports mostly involved mere patrols, or questions asked to known criminal figures, and they all led nowhere. Khan's view of Milia 222 grew slightly clearer, but that was it.

The training, the review of the various reports, and the playful interactions with Jenna kept Khan busy most of the time. He couldn't care about the world outside the room when he had so much to do, but a few worries inevitably appeared in his mind.

Those worries obviously involved Martha. Khan knew that she was relatively safe and that she could use her mana correctly. However, he didn't like how he had left things with her. They didn't even talk at all after the events with the soldier.

'What should I even do with her?' Khan found himself thinking during the afternoon while resting on Jenna's lap.

Jenna was still deciding whether to fall asleep or not while she played with Khan's hair. Her free hand stood in front of her as she used the synthetic mana to create small structures on her fingers that could keep Khan entertained.

Initially, Jenna limited herself to flowers, humanoid figures, or trees with multicolored air to highlight details. Yet, as Khan lost himself in worries, she started to create explicit images that forced him to pinch her leg.

"[You always stop me at the best part]," Jenna complained.

"[I was thinking about serious stuff for once]," Khan replied.

"[Was it about Monica]?" Jenna announced as her eyes lit up.

"[What Monica]?" Khan grunted. "[I was thinking about Martha. I need to talk to her to explain the situation]."

"[What situation]?" Jenna whispered as she lowered her head to get closer to Khan's face. "[Do you need to explain to her how we spend entire days naked on each other]?"

"[Something like that]," Khan sighed while grabbing Jenna's nose and gently squeezing it.

"[Doesn't she know you enough to understand what's going on]?" Jenna asked after Khan let her go.

"[She is very human]," Khan explained. "[She would misunderstand this as long as I don't explain it]."

"[Did you ever consider that she might be unable to understand this]?" Jenna wondered. "[You are atypical. You can't expect every human to see the world through your eyes]."

"[I need to try]," Khan stated, "[At least with her. She is important to me]."

"[Sure]," Jenna exclaimed. "[I'll avoid teasing her]."

"[Who told you that you could come]?" Khan sneered.

"[I want to know the people important to you]," Jenna revealed. "[They must have something special since they managed to get close to you. Besides, how would I learn about Monica if I remain in this room]?"

"[What is it with you and wanting to find me a girlfriend]?" Khan asked.

"[I'll probably get harder to bear as we grow closer]," Jenna admitted. "[I want to do something for you]."

"[Jenna]," Khan sighed as he straightened his position to sit on the bed and face Jenna, "[I've just come out of a relationship. I don't want to jump into another one only to avoid using you. It wouldn't be fair on many levels]."

"[Oh]!" Jenna gasped as her face lit up with curiosity. "[How was she? Was she lewd like me]?"

"[No]," Khan firmly stated as he lay down again. "[She probably was the best woman on Earth]."

"[Is it a good thing to be prudish]?" Jenna wondered.

"[I wasn't talking about that]," Khan laughed as he reviewed his time with Cora. "[She was good, really good. She loved me deeply]."

"[But you didn't]," Jenna commented as she put an arm around Khan's head to hug him.

"[I think part of me did]," Khan revealed, "[The part of me that she could see]."

"[Khan]," Jenna called in her serious tone, "[Don't get the wrong idea. When I talk about finding you a partner, I mean someone who can make all of you happy, not only part of you. Also, yes, she needs to be naughty, at least a bit]."

"[Isn't that a description of the one]?" Khan asked.

"[Humans work differently]," Jenna sighed. "[I've seen enough of you to know that you did your best with your one. Maybe you'll meet her again. Maybe you won't. I only want to make sure that your curse doesn't eat you up in the meantime]."

"[So, I should use someone to feel better]?" Khan wondered without hiding his disdain for that plan. He had already tried something similar. It had only hurt him.

"[Do you think I'll propose something similar]?" Jenna almost scolded. "[Your species can enjoy certain freedom. I want to redirect yours in the right direction]."

Jenna's words reassured Khan and allowed him to crack a joke. "[I'm sure most of those potential partners wouldn't like us to spend so long together, especially with no clothes involved]."

"[They won't end in the list then]," Jenna scoffed.

"[Would you like me to do this with someone else]?" Khan teased.

Jenna rolled her eyes without answering. She limited herself to tightening her hug, which made Khan explode into a laugh.

"[I don't like this idea anymore]," Jenna complained. "[Are you sure you don't want me]?"

Khan continued to laugh, but his phone suddenly rang and forced him to drag Jenna for a bit so that he could reach the wall. The two ended up showing different faces when the contents of the message expanded on the metal surface.

"[Are you sure that your species can't alter the future]?" Khan asked as he skimmed through the short lines on the wall.

"[That's perfect, isn't it]?" Jenna questioned.

"[I want to remind you that my priority is keeping you safe]," Khan declared.

"[Do you think she'll try to hurt me]?" Jenna asked.

"[No]," Khan stated. "[I don't want you to face risks]."

"[Khan]," Jenna called as she made their faces draw closer, "[I live among five other species that can't resist the natural scent of my skin. Every day is dangerous for me]."

"[I still don't like it]," Khan uttered.

"[It will improve your position among humans to be with me during this event]," Jenna teased.

"[Don't try to make this about me when you have far different plans]," Khan scolded.

"[I can make this about anything I want]," Jenna replied. "[You have already given in anyway]."

"[You are impossible]," Khan cursed as he reviewed the message again.

Monica had sent a formal invitation to dinner in one of Milia 222's exclusive restaurants. She had also mentioned in her message that Martha would join her.

Chapter 362 Perfect

The dinner wasn't scheduled for that very night. Monica could vaguely understand Khan's difficulties, so she planned to have that event two days from now.

That period would give Khan and Jenna the time to study the situation and prepare without hindering the eventual programs they had planned before they arrived at the building. It would also allow Martha and Monica to complete the missions they had in mind without risking pissing Luke off.

Of course, Luke was granting the group complete freedom, but his patience was limited, and Monica understood that very well. Manners were an essential part of those relationships, and only soldiers like Khan could partially ignore them since he didn't speak for entire families.

Khan had to admit that he didn't hate the idea of a proper dinner. All his worries had Jenna at their center, but nothing could change her mind. The event was already mandatory, so Khan began to see its positive aspects.

Khan wouldn't reject the chance to explain his situation to Martha, and Jenna was right. Appearing in public with a Nele at his side would definitely benefit his profile. Also, depending on who was invited, Khan might use the dinner to talk about deeper topics connected to the investigation.

'Who else is coming?' Khan sent through a message.

Monica's reply arrived almost immediately and reading it made Jenna giggle. Still, she quickly wrapped Khan in a tight hug when she realized what it implied.

'It can be only you and me if you want,' Khan read on the wall.

Khan let Jenna do as she wished while he tapped on his phone to send a simple answer. 'I prefer having only the four of us. It would be easier to talk.'

'I expected as much. I'll send you everything I know about the location in the meantime,' Monica responded.

The message with all the information about the restaurant arrived on Khan's phone after a few minutes. Khan and Jenna skimmed through everything, but he eventually heaved a sigh as he sent another text.

'Tell me if I need to save you from Francis' booze again,' Khan said in his message before placing his phone on the bedside table and studying the information thoroughly.

The restaurant that Monica had chosen sounded perfect in every aspect. It wasn't only high-class. It also featured different services depending on the type of clients.

Those services didn't only involve the different types of nights that the clients wanted to have. They had specific set-ups and layouts depending on the species that wanted to attend dinners or simply hang out in the restaurant.

Khan believed that the reports lacked the information connected to illegal services. Something so high-class had to have prostitution and drugs available for its most important clients, but he didn't care about that. What he had read had already satisfied him.

Monica didn't answer, and Khan didn't expect anything different. The silence had already explained enough since the relationship between the two was quite complicated right now.

Jenna and Khan didn't have much to do inside the building. Flirting, training, and reviewing the various reports were their only occupations since they had to wait for Luke to start their task.

As for going out, Khan preferred to keep Jenna in her room for safety reasons. The lack of interactions with the rest of the group would also thicken the aura of mystery surrounding that odd relationship, which only benefited Khan's figure.

Experiencing the environment of a team with prominent soldiers granted Khan the experience that the battlefields had failed to provide. He wasn't doing much. He was even actively avoiding deepening his relationship with his companions due to Jenna, but he still gained insights into that political field.

Khan realized how his value significantly increased as long as he remained the only one able to interact so freely with other species. Being necessary granted him immense freedom and authority.?

Luke had his family and all the money in the world, but Khan knew that he would remain the key figure of the team if the situation didn't change. There was power in that behavior, and Khan understood that a good ambassador had to establish similar environments everywhere to become truly important.

Khan took care of updating Jenna on his relationship with Monica and Martha during those days. She was curious, and learning about the two women would help her decide how to behave during the event.

The day of the dinner eventually arrived. Khan and Jenna left the room for the first time since their arrival at the building, and a desolate atmosphere welcomed them.

The dinner wasn't a secret, but it wasn't special either. Besides, those wealthy soldiers respected the need for privacy to establish meaningful relationships, so they focused on the investigation instead of waiting for their companions in the main hall.

Jenna had to light up her purple clip as soon as she left the room since she wasn't using the spray. The restaurant had spaces meant for Nele accompanied by members of other species, so she wouldn't need to suppress her pheromones.

The same didn't apply to Martha and Monica, at least when it came to the trip. Khan and Jenna found the two women waiting for them right outside the building, and both of them had applied the brown ointment under their noses.

"Can you enjoy the food like this?" Khan asked right after his eyes darted between the two brown spots.

"We will remove this once we get into our room," Monica promptly explained while showing her elegant smile. "[I hope the place is to your liking]."

"The Kingsize is a famous location," Jenna replied in her aloof tone. "I heard good things about it."

Monica seemed pleased that Jenna had dropped her silent behavior now that it was only the four of them, but Khan knew that she would have reacted like that. He took that chance to inspect his companions, and he had to admit that the two women had surprised him in that field.

Khan and Jenna were wearing relatively simple clothes. Khan had a tight blue pullover and dark trousers that highlighted his muscles. Meanwhile, Jenna had a dark-green sundress paired with black tights.

Martha was far more elegant with her bluish one-shoulder dress that ended in a relatively tight skirt that covered half of her bare thighs. She didn't seem too comfortable in those clothes, but she did her best to show confidence.

As for Monica, she was wearing a white wrap dress that reached her knees, with only the large bow on it being scarlet. She appeared born for those clothes, and her smile slightly broadened when Khan spent a few seconds inspecting her.

Khan had to admit that Monica was stunning. She would claim the attention of all the people on the street if it weren't for Jenna's natural beauty.

The matter didn't only involve pure physical appearance. Jenna was in another league, but Martha merely fell one step short compared to Monica. Yet, the latter expressed confidence that enhanced her already incredible features.

Still, as much as Khan liked the view, he found himself lost in thoughts that expressed his doubts. 'How much of this is the real her? Is this also part of her education? I bet she was the one who convinced Martha to wear something so revealing.'

The paranoia rekindled by the potential presence of a spy prevented Khan from enjoying the scene, but that situation didn't last for too long. A triangular ship with a single engine and a long, cylindrical cabin descended toward the sidewalk and stopped when it was only three meters from the group.

"This is our ride," Monica exclaimed. "The Kingsize surely has good taste."

The ship carried the Kingsize's name on its white side. It was one of the rides included with the restaurant, and the mana coming out of it told Khan about the species of the pilot even before the cabin opened.

The dark, cylindrical glass of the cabin partially opened, and four circular platforms made of grey metal came out. The four stepped on the items and saw the latter lifting them toward the vehicle before placing them on specific seats.

Khan and Jenna ended up right behind the pilot's seat. A middle-aged male Nele was in charge of the ship, and the alien exchanged a faint nod with Jenna when their eyes met.

The pilot had used the spray recently. Khan could find its traces in the Nele's aura, but the latter appeared used to the gas and didn't address the issue.

Martha and Monica landed on the seats behind Khan and Jenna. The ship only had room for five, but everyone could sit comfortably without risking touching each other.

The cabin closed, and the ship rose to leave the street. The glass wasn't dark from the inside, so the group could watch the various buildings running through their vision as the vehicle moved toward the city's edges.

Khan didn't bother to inspect the view. His attention was on the ship's controls. He had recognized the vehicles, and he even knew that the various keys did. His eyes followed the pilot's movements, and he rejoiced whenever he predicted what they would activate or trigger.

The ship reached the platform's edges before diving directly into the space between the city and the dome's walls. The vehicle made the elevators useless as it made its way for Lower Level 2 while remaining on its path.

Khan moved his attention away from the ship's controls now that he was in front of an unfamiliar spectacle. The Lower Level 2 of the second asteroid featured a second city smaller than the one above. Even the platform where it grew was only half of the Lower Level 1.

The hidden city seemed heavily focused on casinos and other flashy attractions that bordered the illegal aspects of Milia 222. Bright signs shone from the various skyscrapers and smaller buildings to create a colorful spectacle that made it almost impossible for Khan and the others to study everything.

The ship didn't stop in the city. It continued to fly along the asteroid's edges to reach an even deeper level. The smaller platform had many isolated buildings and streets seemingly hanging on the void under it. Each structure resembled an island floating in the faint darkness of Lower Level 3.

Khan and the others knew that they had almost reached their destination. The vehicle finally stopped its vertical descent to fly toward an island that carried a castle-like structure with four cylindrical towers instead of corners.

The castle aimed to replicate an old type of architecture from before the First Impact, but it couldn't hide its technological advancements. Its surface was dark and smooth, and lines of windows separated different groups of floors. The roof seemed to be the true VIP area, but the ship didn't fly there.

Khan felt to have seen structures with a similar shape during his first months in the academy, but he didn't recall much about them. The castle was clearly unique, but he couldn't find beauty in its uniqueness. He didn't have a thing for architecture.

The ship approached the upper part of the castle and stopped in front of a line of windows. One of those dark glasses opened while the vehicle rotated on itself and the cabin allowed the seats to fly out gently.

Khan, Martha, Jenna, and Monica's seats flew inside the open window to land in a large room that seemed able to contain twenty people. Its walls showed different menus with a green environment as a background, and a circular table grew from its center.

The table and its four seats were thick, and synthetic mana ran through them. Khan could sense the channels sending energy to that furniture and guessed that they could also transport meals or drinks.

Still, his attention soon fell on a purple spot that occupied a good chunk of the area past the window.

Khan and the others jumped off their seats, and the latter automatically returned to the ship. The window closed at that point, and the metal chairs moved on their own to reach the four soldiers. One of them even shone with purple light during the process.

"According to the reviews," Monica announced, "This purple light is special. Its range changes depending on the reach of the Nele's pheromones. Even the various menus are programmed to mark where the safe distance ends."

There seemed to be some xenophobia in that programming, but Khan understood that the building had no ill intentions. As he approached the wall to study the menus, he realized that the many options were more suitable for official meetings among higher-ups from various species rather than a simple dinner among friends.

'What the fuck?' Khan gasped in his mind as countless labels and lists filled his vision.

Calling the room interactive would have been an insult. Khan could modify the layout, atmosphere, and even structure of the area. He could decide whether to have stands handled by waiters, various spectacles, and real vegetation introduced during the dinner.

Each option had countless variants. The spectacles alone had hundreds of options, and Khan felt lost just by looking at them. He had to launch a pleading gaze toward Monica to ask for her help in the matter.

"Manners want us to prioritize our guest's well-being," Monica exclaimed while approaching Khan's right side.

Monica also felt a bit lost in front of the sheer number of options. She skimmed through them before giving up on finding a suitable combination and drawing her phone to look through her inbox.

"My parents have come here once," Monica explained while using the instructions on her phone to choose the labels on the menus. "It's thanks to them that we can enjoy such a good room. As for the options, they had an expert list them up for me."

Monica had lowered her voice during her explanation. Her tone had also grown cuter, which Khan saw as a change from the appearance she showed to the public. Martha and Jenna could still hear her, but it was clear that she wanted Khan to learn a bit about her life.

"Clients on their first time usually hire someone from the Kingsize to choose options for them," Monica continued as she browsed through the menus. "There are real experts working here, but it doesn't hurt to show off from time to time."

The process took a few minutes since Monica had to choose more than twenty different options from various lists, but the interactive menus eventually disappeared. A simple line written in multiple languages replaced them. The room was asking Khan and the others to take their seats.

Khan and the others followed the orders, and surprise appeared on their faces when they noticed that the metal surfaces of the chairs were extremely comfortable. Even Jenna's aloof expression broke for an instant when she experienced the flexibility of that material.

The chairs moved on their own after everyone sat. They brought Khan and the others to the circular table while the entire room began to change.

Holes, drawers, and proper secret passages opened on the walls, ceiling, and floor. A long counter filled with drinks and two masked waiters came out of the other side of the room. The windows began to depict a forest filled with chirping birds that flew from branch to branch, but that was only the beginning.

Flowers and plants inside long and deep vases filled every corner of the room. Some even came out of the floor to radiate a pleasant scent that forced the four to relax.

Two more masked waiters appeared next to the counter and took a few seconds to build a rectangular structure that released a calming melody as soon as they touched it. The song changed according to their movements, revealing how they were actively playing that instrument.

More waiters came out from another opening while holding devices that featured multiple menus. They formed a line at some distance from the table before standing still and looking at the window while waiting for the clients to give orders.

Khan focused on the mask, clothes, and level of the waiters. They were all first-level warriors and wore black suits that almost hid their species or gender.

As for the masks, they were completely white and only had openings for the eyes. They aimed to create a sense of unity among the waiters, but Khan didn't look with his eyes. The mana told him the difference among each employee and allowed him to confirm that none of them were Nele.

"How expensive is this place?" Khan whispered.

"Don't worry about it," Monica reassured. "My parents have already dealt with the bill. They wanted me to show the hospitality of the Solodrey family."

"Wow," Khan couldn't help but exclaim. His companions were in the same condition. They were all surprised about the amount of wealth concentrated in a single room, and their thoughts went wild when they compared that scene to the number of options they didn't choose.

No one felt in the mood to talk with so many waiters in the room. The four's attention soon went to the interactive table to pick meals, but that turned out to be another impossible task due to the sheer number of available plates.

Khan had Jenna on his right, Martha on his left, and Monica in front of him. He exchanged glances with all of them before choosing the only reasonable option. He would fill a survey, and the chefs would prepare a menu according to his decisions.

Martha, Jenna, and Monica followed his example, and the meal finally started. The music changed as the waiters began to move to pick up the drinks from the counter and deliver them to the table.

Plates quickly arrived, and the waiters didn't make their clients wait. The table soon became full, and everyone found it impossible to hold back in front of those delicacies.

Khan's eyes widened in surprise when he saw that his side of the table mostly had chicken or meat with similar flavors. He remained stunned a second time when he realized that many of those plates were spicy. The survey had guessed his favorite meal right, but the quality of that food was something he had never experienced before.

The same went for the drinks. The waiters seemed to pay special attention to his cup and refilled it whenever he was almost about to empty it. The bartenders always prepared new booze for Khan to try, and none of them disappointed him.

Martha, Monica, and Jenna went through the same amazement. They were eating different meals and drinking various drinks, but they all seemed to satisfy them completely.

The food, the drinks, the music, the scent, and the scenery were so perfect that the four forgot to talk. Their thoughts also stopped afflicting them as they enjoyed one of the best experiences of their lives. The Kingsize offered only the best of the best, and they bathed in that wealth.

The pace and size of every round of plates also seemed to express mathematical perfection. Khan became full at the same time as his companions, after exactly one hour since the beginning of the dinner.

Most of the waiters left through openings in the walls at that point. The vegetation and music also changed without creating the slightest chaos. Everything seamlessly transformed as if it was just another part of the meal.

"Wow," Martha exclaimed during the transformation of the room. Her comment was mostly due to the meal, but the change in her surroundings also left her amazed.

"My parents said great things about this place," Monica added, "But I didn't think it could be so amazing. No wonder it's so expensive."

Jenna limited herself to nod. She had gone back to her aloof self in that unfamiliar environment, but her expression couldn't hide how pleased she felt about the meal.

"Everything was amazing," Khan added as he laid back and the chair bent backward to accompany his movements. "Though I was expecting a different type of dinner."

"Oh, I'm curious now," Monica teased.

"It's a bit too crowded," Khan admitted.

Khan wanted to talk, but the many waiters made any serious conversation impossible. He felt sure that most of them would spread rumors about the dinner, so he couldn't speak freely, especially when it came to the investigation.

"That's just the first part of the dinner," Monica revealed as she pointed at Khan's cup. "Your booze wasn't strong, right? Mine neither. As per Kingsize's tradition, the meetings happen only after the belly is full."

The few remaining waiters understood the hidden order and disappeared behind openings in the wall. The counter and instrument also slid away to vanish inside holes, leaving only the vegetation and the fake environment depicted by the windows behind.

The room didn't stay still even after those changes. Dark metal layers slid over the walls, floor, and ceiling to cover all the menus without affecting the vases or scenes depicted by the windows. Soft music also resounded behind those new surfaces to suppress a vague sizzling noise.

Khan and Jenna didn't need explanations. They could sense that a thick layer of synthetic mana had appeared behind the new surfaces to isolate the environment. Even the menus on the table had changed to offer a more limited list of products.

Martha also sensed something, but her perception still lacked Khan and Jenna's accuracy. She could only glance at Khan to silently ask the reason behind his evident surprise.

"A barrier is separating us from the menus," Khan summarized.

"The Kingsize hosts countless secret meetings," Monica explained. "Privacy is a must, and the owners even claim not to record anything. Still, they offer these protections to reassure the clients."

"I also knew about this," Jenna spoke for the first time during the meal. "Members of my species have taken parts in meetings in this and many other similar buildings."

'These settlements are built on a foundation of criminal organizations,' Khan thought as he inspected the area one last time before relaxing completely. 'I guess I had to expect something similar from one of their high-end activities.'

"We can talk business now," Monica declared before voicing a faint laugh. "We can also have our drink."

Khan liked the idea of ending the night with strong booze, but he wanted to see if Jenna had other plans first. It turned out that the Nele had something in mind, but that went outside Khan's expectations.

"The Nele don't enjoy booze," Jenna calmly announced as she stood up. "I think I'll excuse myself for a bit."

The purple light radiated by the chair and table followed Jenna by spreading on the floor and ceiling, but she only took a few steps before addressing Martha. "I'd like your company if you don't mind."

The offer surprised Martha, but she found no reason to refuse. Monica pressed on the table to summon a lotion that came out of its metal surface, and Martha picked it up to apply it under her nose.

Meanwhile, Martha tried to find Khan's gaze, but he was busy looking at Jenna. His eyes expressed curiosity, but Jenna remained expressionless. It was unclear whether they were communicating, but Martha and Monica couldn't answer those doubts.

Martha and Jenna quickly left the area through an opening that led to private bathrooms. Khan managed to see that the place was immense before the metal doors closed. He even noticed that the barrier spread there, which confirmed the overall privacy of the area.

"Shall we have our drink then?" Monica asked as she browsed through the menu to press on a label.

Khan did the same, and two drinks soon came out of the table. The mere scent leaking from those cups was enough to confirm the strength of the booze, but neither of them backed off.

'It's good,' Khan exclaimed in his mind after taking the first sip. 'How can such strong booze be so good?'

Monica was also visibly surprised by the quality of the booze, but her elegant expression broke when she put the cup down. She slightly lowered her head before throwing a glance at Khan. Her pretenses were vanishing now that they were finally alone, but that made some problems return.

"I think you are making a big mistake," Monica eventually stated.

"About?" Khan asked while hiding his mouth behind his cup.

"I know about the dock," Monica revealed.

"How?" Khan frowned.

"Khan, my family has invested many Credits in Luke's factory," Monica uttered. "Getting the authorization to enter the dock is a big deal. Rumors spread when Luke requested it, and my parents questioned his parents after hearing them."

"Are you all keeping track of each other?" Khan questioned without hiding the faint irritation that he felt.

"Yes and no," Monica explained. "We are here to complete Luke's mission, but our family won't stay still in the meantime. They never stop playing their political games."

The revelation was quite shocking, but it told something important to Khan. The dock was a truly secretive area, which made it incredibly interesting.

"What mistake?" Khan asked after he spent a second sorting out his thoughts.

"There must be a spy," Monica declared. "That's obvious, but think about it. The factory's security is incredible. Do you really think that smugglers could go past them?"

"I'm not considering them," Khan revealed, "But they might have revealed something to powerful parties. Who knows? We all lack leads anyway."

"But there might be something you didn't consider," Monica stated. "Going against powerful families, overcoming tight security, and risking lives must have rewards. Alien parties wouldn't gain much from seizing the reinforced fabric."

"Why?" Khan asked. "That would create a competitor. I bet there's a lot to gain from that."

"Not if the competitors are aliens," Monica corrected. "The Global Army might be willing to take a bad deal to keep the Cobsend family happy, but the same wouldn't happen for alien forces. Our superiors would just buy one product and try to reverse-engineer it."

"That might be impossible without the main material," Khan pointed out.

"And why would the Global Army care?" Monica asked. "Soldiers have lived with normal uniforms for centuries. Delaying improvements on that field to save Credits doesn't sound like a bad deal."

"So," Khan sighed when he understood where Monica was going, "You are saying that the thief must be human. Moreover, it must have deep connections with a seller that the Global Army can't refuse."

"Which most likely doesn't include anyone from the dock," Monica added.

Khan took another sip from his cup. The investigation still had too many dark areas. Nothing felt clear, and the doubts increased as discoveries popped out. Still, Khan inevitably focused on a specific detail revealed by Monica.

"You said overcoming tight security," Khan repeated. "How do you know if it is possible?"

"I only know rumors," Monica sighed. "And I know that talking about them puts me under a bad light. After all, the spy would definitely know about this."

"Monica," Khan called. Part of him wanted to add cold tones to his voice, but he suppressed that habit.

"The Fuveall are unmatched when it comes to fusing technology with mana," Monica revealed.

"They might know how to handle those defenses. They might even know how to hack the network."

Chapter 363 Memory

'So, there is a way,' Khan thought.

The network was something that Khan had learnt to trust after his enlistment. He didn't understand how it worked, but it was a core part of the everyday life of basically every member of the Global Army.

Learning that the network could be hacked was a revelation that Khan couldn't exploit. Still, he made sure to memorize it. If his future put him on a path that went against the Global Army, he wanted to be ready for the clash.

The factory probably had barriers or protections that limited the network's reach, but it was theoretically possible to breach through those defenses. That could create a flaw in the security of the building, allowing eventual thefts to go unnoticed.

'The Fuveall,' Khan repeated in his mind.

Khan already felt a great interest in the Fuveall due to their atypical use of mana and technology. Yet, Monica's revelations strengthened that feeling. Part of him wanted to leave right away to study ways of entering the Fuveall's society.

Nevertheless, Khan's interest in those aliens didn't make him forget the main topic. Monica's words carried truths that he could confirm with Luke easily. The thief might have received the help of different parties or species, but the mastermind had to be human and with deep connections to the Global Army.

'That hypothesis is a bit convoluted,' Khan thought as he reviewed what he knew.

Only two hypotheses sounded plausible in Khan's mind. The first saw one or more of the families involved in the factory planting spies among the workers and somehow avoiding the security to steal the reinforced fabric.

Instead, the second saw the smugglers leaking information to interested parties that had relied on the Fuveall to enter the factory.

The first hypothesis was far more reasonable. The families involved with the factory had a higher chance to learn about the reinforced fabric, and they would have also found it easier to plant spies.

Meanwhile, the second hypothesis involved a series of leaks and ploys. There had to be interested parties with connections to the Fuveall and the Global Army. Moreover, even with all those possible factions, the culprits had to be humans.

Khan knew that both hypotheses could have common points. Maybe the families involved with the factory had relied on the Fuveall. Perhaps the smugglers had found a way to contact the workers. Khan couldn't confirm or deny any of that. He only had doubts and a lack of proof.

"This is way above my paygrade," Khan sighed before emptying his cup.?

"Forming a team like ours was a smart idea," Monica commented, "But I think Luke underestimated Milia 222. Either that, or he plans for us to stay here a long time."

"I wouldn't mind it," Khan admitted as he browsed through the menu to choose another drink.

"Milia 222 is an incredible environment."

"There aren't many places like this one in the universe," Monica agreed while forcing herself to keep her eyes on the table.

Khan noticed how Monica had tried to look in the direction of the bathroom before halting that gesture. It didn't take a genius to understand what was going through her mind, and Khan couldn't help but stare at her while she emptied her cup and chose another drink.

Two cups came out of the table, and Monica didn't hesitate to take hers. Khan quickly imitated her, and faint helplessness filled his mind when he saw that she was still avoiding his gaze.

"We aren't together," Khan whispered.

"What?" Monica asked while finally raising her gaze to inspect Khan.

"Jenna and I," Khan explained. "We aren't a thing."

Monica had acted cool during the meeting in Khan's room, but she had noticed almost everything there was to see. No one would believe Khan's claim under those circumstances, but she had practically begged him not to lie to her anymore.

"She touches you," Monica pointed out.

"We are close," Khan stated without revealing any detail, "Really close."

"You sleep together," Monica continued.

"You don't know that," Khan declared in an unconvincing tone before hiding his mouth behind his cup.

Monica didn't need to say anything else to express her thoughts. Her expression told Khan that she didn't believe him, and he couldn't blame her for that.

"It's Nele stuff," Khan half-lied. "I don't want to go into details. I just want you to know that we are only good friends."

"I-," Monica voiced before interrupting her line to sort out her thoughts. She didn't know how to take that explanation. Honestly, she felt that only an idiot could consider true something so unreal.

Doubts appeared in Monica's mind. She wasn't Luke when it came to social skills, and she lacked Khan's keen senses. Still, she had always been confident in her ability to read people, but that feeling wavered in front of Khan's words.

"What do you want me to say?" Monica eventually asked.

Even if Khan were telling the truth, the situation wouldn't change. He would continue to share his room with Jenna, and he still wouldn't trust Monica.

His words sounded like a lame attempt to keep Monica's interest in him alive while he played around with other women. Monica didn't want to think that of Khan, but it wouldn't be her first time meeting untrustworthy men, and the situation felt oddly familiar.

"You don't have to say anything," Khan uttered. "I just wanted you to know how things are."

That was the truth. Khan had no deeper reasons, and the idea wasn't wholly his. He had decided with Jenna to partially explain the nature of their relationship to Monica and Martha.?

Of course, Khan had Jenna had different intentions. Khan wanted Martha to know the truth, while Jenna had pressed to give the same treatment to Monica. Khan could have refused, but he didn't completely dislike the idea.?

Also, building a wall between Khan and Monica wouldn't help anyone. He could give something away and use that to test Monica's true character. Confirming that she wasn't a spy would benefit the investigation, and Khan would happily take the chance to remove the awkwardness that had fallen between them.

"Oh," Monica couldn't suppress a faint gasp. She still didn't know what to think, but Khan's gesture seemed to show care. It almost felt like he wanted to reassure her.

"Don't get strange ideas now," Khan teased as soon as he saw that Monica diverted her gaze and started playing with her curls.

"I'm not thinking about anything," Monica scoffed before shooting a worried glance at the closed door and turning toward Khan to show a knowing smile.

Khan shook his head when hearing a tone that didn't match Monica's usual elegant behavior, but a faint smile quickly appeared on his face. He preferred that version of Monica. It was easier to talk to, and her reactions were adorable. Part of him even began to hope that she wasn't pretending with him.

"Are you drunk already?" Khan joked.

"Hey, I'm still a second-level warrior," Monica complained. "I'm even sure that Francis made my tolerance increase."

"You should be careful around his booze," Khan warned. "I couldn't find much from the bottle I stole, but I saw enough not to like it."

"Right, I have yet to thank you properly for that time," Monica recalled.

"I didn't do that to get a reward," Khan stated.

"Why did you do it then?" Monica asked in an aloof tone.

Khan and Monica found themselves staring at each other. Khan didn't have an actual answer. He had acted instinctively. He felt that he didn't need reasons to do a good deed.

"I didn't want someone stealing my room again," Khan teased.

"But you came back with someone occupying your room," Monica responded in the same emotionless tone.

"Are you jealous?" Khan mocked.

"A bit," Monica admitted without showing any shame before taking a short sip from her drink.

The answer startled Khan, but he wouldn't let it silence him. Something told him that Monica was only teasing him, and he knew that he was better than her in that field.

"Please," Khan sneered as he took a sip from his cup. "You would be too shy to spend the night in my room when sober."

"Who said anything about spending the night in your room?!" Monica cried.

Khan laughed at that reaction. Monica seemed pissed, but her expression relaxed when she inspected Khan. She even had to cover her mouth at some point since chuckles tried to come out of her throat.

Khan could experience something similar to what had happened back in his room. The walls between Monica and him temporarily crumbled and allowed them to enjoy the moment.

"You should have seen Francis' face after you stole his bottle," Monica eventually changed the topic, but her tone now carried evident cheerfulness. "He was so pissed."

"About the bottle or you?" Khan wondered.

"I have no idea," Monica sighed as she laid back on the chair, and the metal bent to make her comfortable. "I swear. I can't understand what goes through his mind."

"I don't get what he is trying to achieve," Khan exclaimed as he imitated Monica. "It would make sense to take advantage of you since he is so set on getting you wasted, but he doesn't do that."

"I don't know what to say," Monica stated. "I've known him for so long. I guess he developed this shady side after seeing that I didn't belong to him."

"That shady side only pushes you into other men's rooms," Khan commented.

"How long are you going to tease me about that?" Monica pouted. "It happened only once, and you are to blame for appearing so trustworthy."

"I'll use it until I find something else to tease you with," Khan responded. "Wait, how is that my fault now?"

"It's your fault because I say so," Monica snorted.

"These wealthy women are so difficult to handle," Khan sighed.

"I am," Monica corrected. "I'm difficult to handle."

Khan frowned. He didn't understand what Monica meant, but he tried his best to play along. "Do you like to be the main topic?"

"I don't like you comparing me to others with similar status," Monica revealed in a low voice while diverting her gaze. "I'm me. Tease me with something about me."

Surprise swept Khan again, but an honest smile broadened on his face. Monica only wanted her true self to be seen by Khan, and he had no reason to refuse that.

"Fine," Khan uttered, "But I'll need to learn more about you to avoid comparison."

"Then do that," Monica timidly ordered.

While Monica and Khan were busy drinking and teasing each other, Martha and Jenna explored the bathroom and lost themselves among its wealth.

Martha couldn't believe how much that area offered. The actual toilets and sinks were vast and comfortable, but that space also featured proper bathtubs that could contain multiple people.

That wasn't even the end of it. The bathroom had luxurious services like saunas and so on. The Kingsize didn't lack any comfort, which also added sense to the relatively short time calculated for the actual dinner.

Martha didn't speak at all while following Jenna inside the bathroom, and she took the chance to relieve herself when her companion disappeared behind one of the metal doors. Martha didn't know what Jenna wanted, and the Nele's peculiarities stopped her from investigating any further.

The two women reunited in front of the sinks. They cleaned their hands in silence, and Martha was more than okay with that situation. She even started to believe that Jenna had requested her presence due to eventual insecurities caused by that unknown place.

Still, it became clear that Jenna wanted something more once she was done with the sink. Jenna turned to look at Martha, and she stared at her without showing any sign of wanting to interrupt her gesture.

"Yes?" Martha asked when the stare became too much for her.

Jenna didn't answer. She kept her emotionless purple eyes on Martha to study her various reactions. Martha initially remained calm, but the constant and intense stare soon forced her to speak again.

"Did I do something?" Martha asked.

Martha had studied Milia 222's environment with Khan. She didn't know the Nele as well as him, but she was more than ready to face those aliens. Yet, that remained her first mission after Istrone, and Jenna's situation was even peculiar since it involved Khan.

"Is something the matter?" Martha continued since Jenna remained silent.

Jenna didn't answer, and Martha wouldn't bother to ask a fourth time. She didn't understand what was going on, but Jenna's behavior was irritating, especially for what she represented in Khan's life.?

Martha suppressed a snort as she turned toward the exit of the bathroom, but Jenna finally decided to speak at that point. "You love him, don't you?"

A tremor ran through Martha and made all the annoyance vanish. The topic had changed, and she knew what Jenna had asked, but she still forced herself to mutter a clear "excuse me?" while turning.

"Khan," Jenna promptly explained. "You love him, right?"

"That's none-," Martha interrupted her rash reply to calm down and voice something more polite. "That's a personal matter."

"Though you don't love him," Jenna continued. "You are in love with a memory of him, a person that doesn't exist anymore. Maybe someone who had never existed in the first place."

"Where are you getting at?" Martha said without hiding the faint anger building up inside her.

"I'm curious," Jenna revealed. "He trusts you so deeply. I want to see why."

"You should ask him," Martha coldly replied.

"But I'll miss the chance to know you like that," Jenna stated. "Also, I already have his version. I want to hear yours."

Martha was getting genuinely annoyed, but she did her best to calm down. It was clear that Jenna's mindset was too different from hers, so she bottled up her emotions and approached that tricky topic as politely as possible.

"I'm sorry," Martha exclaimed. "I don't want to share my version. I hope you can understand."

Martha turned again at that point. She had every intention to leave the bathroom and escape that situation. She even prepared herself to ignore Jenna if she decided to speak again, but her resolve shattered in no time.

"Khan told me about the coma," Jenna announced. "He told me that you were about to end up together. He told me that he taught you alien arts to help you regain control of your mana."

Martha halted her steps and turned to face Jenna. Disbelief and surprise filled her face. She felt betrayed. Khan had revealed some of her most personal secrets to an alien he had known for no longer than a week. It sounded as if those events weren't important to him.

"Do you think you know me because Khan told you a few stories?" Martha questioned as evident anger filled her tone.

"No," Jenna replied.

"What is it then?" Martha asked. "What are you trying to prove? Are you having fun of me?"

"Not at all," Jenna calmly responded.

"What's all that stuff about love?" Martha asked. "Why did you even mention it? What do you want from me?"

"I want to get to know you," Jenna stated.

"I don't," Martha snorted. "I don't care what you have with Khan or what you two have planned, but leave me out of it. I don't want any part in these games."

"You misunderstood," Jenna pointed out.

"Misunderstood what?!" Martha shouted.

"Khan told me about you because she trusts me," Jenna explained. "Still, our connection mostly comes from the mana. It's not founded on experiences or time. It's similar to the connection he shared with Liiza."

Hearing Liiza's name snapped Martha out of her anger. Her insecurities and Jenna's sudden revelations had made her doubt how much Khan valued her, but she knew that Liiza was no joking matter. He would never be friends with someone capable of using Liiza's memory disrespectfully.

"Instead," Jenna continued, "He built his relationship with you without any influence from the mana. Your friendship doesn't carry any instinctive purity, but he still trusts you deeply. You probably are one of the most meaningful people in his life. I can't fully understand how that's possible without an innate connection."

Martha struggled to follow Jenna's words, but she could make some sense out of them after reviewing them in her mind. She didn't know every detail of the Niqols' methods, but she had learnt to approach the mana differently. She could vaguely understand what Jenna had said, but her purpose still escaped her thoughts.

"I don't understand what you want from me," Martha whispered as a tinge of tiredness seeped into her tone. Her anger had vanished, but she remained confused.

"I want to know you," Jenna repeated while wearing a bright smile. "I want to understand why Khan trusts you so deeply. I want to hear stories about him, and I want us to discuss how to help him."

"But-," Martha muttered.

"Don't you want to help him?" Jenna interrupted, and Martha found herself unable to answer. She ended up nodding since her honesty was the only emotion able to make its way among her confusion and stupor.

"Let's go then," Jenna happily announced.

"Wait! Go where?" Martha asked as Jenna began to walk toward the exit.

"We can go to Khan's room to talk while he and Monica remain here," Jenna explained.

"Wait, wait!" Martha repeated. "I barely know you. I don't know if I'm comfortable revealing Khan's stories."

Jenna stooped when she reached Martha's left side and turned toward her to express her doubts. "He trusted me with yours. Isn't that enough for you?"

"I'm not Khan," Martha pointed out. "I can't trust my senses yet, especially when it comes to people."

"I see," Jenna whispered before showing her hand and pointing her palm upward. "[I offer myself with nothing but respect]."

Martha's eyes widened. She had studied that custom, and she had even seen Khan perform it with Jenna on the first asteroid. She knew what that meant and what Jenna wanted from her.

Martha hesitated as her eyes darted between Jenna's palm and her serious expression. Martha's right hand closed into a fist and relaxed a few times, but she eventually raised it to place it on Jenna's.

"[I'm Martha Weesso]," Martha said in the best Nele's accent she could muster.

"[Jenna]," Jenna replied before retracting her arm and walking toward the exit.

Martha was in a daze. She followed Jenna, but her thoughts were elsewhere. Touching a Nele was a big deal in her mind, but the scene that unfolded in her vision after leaving the bathroom forced her to recover.

Monica and Khan weren't doing anything special. They were simply talking from their respective seats and enjoying their drinks, but the peace between the two felt a bit too natural in Martha's eyes. Even she would fail to recreate that atmosphere with Khan.

"We'll take our leave," Jenna announced as soon as the bathroom's entrance closed behind Martha and her.

Monica promptly wore her elegant manners and voiced a few questions. "Did something happen? Did the Kingsize leave you unsatisfied?"

Jenna didn't answer. She limited herself to looking at Khan, and the two stared at each other for a few seconds. They seemed able to communicate through their eyes, but the truth was far different. Khan was simply trying to understand whether Jenna had something strange in mind.

"[I'll escort you to the ship]," Khan stated as he skimmed through the menus to request a specific type of vehicle and pilot.

Monica wanted to add something, but she understood that it was better to remain silent in that situation. Martha was the same, and she even felt trapped in the following events.

Khan left his seat once part of the wall opened to reveal the windows and the areas past them. A triangular ship was hovering right outside the landing platform, and three comfortable chairs had already reached that spot.

"[I'd like to speak with Martha Weesso alone]," Jenna said without adding a single emotion to her words while she, Martha, and Khan walked toward the chairs.

Khan and Jenna exchanged another long stare, but Khan eventually nodded. Jenna and Martha sat on the chairs, which set off to enter the ship. Khan could see the Nele pilot from his position, but the latter remained perfectly focused on the path ahead.

"[I'll see you in our room]," Jenna said to Khan while the dark glass of the cabin closed above her.

Martha shot a meaningful glance at Khan while the glass closed above her. She was asking for help, but she didn't know that Khan was powerless in that situation. It was impossible to change Jenna's mind. Khan would have found a way to make her wear clothes otherwise.

The ship departed, and the windows closed. The wall that isolated the area from the menus also reappeared, and Khan didn't hesitate to reach the table at that point.

Monica watched as Khan activated a few functions to keep track of the ship's movements. He could see its trip through the second asteroid from inside the Kingsize. He knew that Jenna was more than fine on her own, but he still wanted to be sure.

"You sure care about her," Monica commented as she kept her attention on the flashing dot moving through a simple map of the second asteroid.

"I care about both of them," Khan revealed.

"You are overprotective," Monica teased. "You did the same with me."

Khan ignored the joke and remained silent until the flashing dot reached its destination. It didn't take long before his phone received a message. Jenna had used Khan's room to confirm her safe arrival in the building.

"Monica," Khan called while sitting on the seat and closing the menu, "Can you keep what I told you about Jenna for yourself? I'd like the others to think that she is with me."

"I was planning to do that anyway," Monica responded before lifting her drink with both hands. "I don't think they would believe me even if I tried to explain the truth."

"Thank you," Khan sighed as he also moved his focus back on his drink.

"Yet, I want something in return," Monica exclaimed.

Khan looked at Monica, and she shot a timid glance at him before voicing her request. "Don't leave right away."

"What are you saying?" Khan sneered. "I won't leave a place with these drinks so soon. Also, someone has nagged me for a date since our first meeting."

"It was a drink, not a date," Monica complained, but a sense of defeat filled her mind when she saw the warm smile on Khan's face. She couldn't even pretend to be angry at him when he wore those expressions.

Chapter 364 Date

Martha felt tense during the trip back to the city. The vehicle was large enough to allow some distance between Jenna and her, but the two still sat side by side.

Jenna's silence didn't help the situation either. Martha wanted to voice some of the questions filling her mind, but she suppressed them due to the presence of a stranger. Yet, keeping everything inside her head only made her thoughts go wild.

The ship was fast, and the pilot took the shortest route back to Luke's building, but the trip still felt endless to Martha. She shot glances at Jenna from time to time, but she only met a stern expression focused on the path ahead.

The landing didn't break that tension. Jenna remained silent as she led Martha inside the building. The latter felt lucky that the path to the elevator was empty, but her mood didn't improve since each step closer to Khan's room reminded her of the imminent conversation.

The entrance opened in front of Jenna's genetic signature, and the two women soon found themselves in Khan's room. Martha couldn't help but notice the clothes lying around the untidy bed, and she felt some comfort in that mess. Everything there carried Khan's mark.

"You are tense," Jenna said as she approached the bed and threw the clothes to the floor before sitting near the pillows.

Martha didn't answer. She glanced at Jenna sitting cross-legged on the bed just to discover that she couldn't stand her gaze. Jenna had spoken the truth, but Martha still couldn't understand what she was doing there.

"Is it because of me?" Jenna wondered. "Is it because of Khan?"

"You said you wanted to help Khan," Martha announced to dodge the question.

Jenna revealed a smile before patting the bed in a spot in front of her. Martha understood the meaning behind the gesture, and she timidly climbed on the mattress to sit before Jenna.

Jenna made it easier for Martha by turning toward the wall to activate a few menus. She didn't have a phone with her, but she could still send a message to Khan.

The anxiety in Martha's mind reached its peak after Jenna sent the message. She was sitting right in front of her, and nothing stood in the way of the conversation now. The talk would happen no matter what now.

Jenna fixed her eyes on Martha for a few seconds before diverting them to stare at a spot at her side. Martha felt surprised to see some hesitation in Jenna's face, but the words that followed distracted her from that expression. "I have my reasons for helping Khan. I don't expect you to share them."

"What reasons?" Martha asked.

"I," Jenna sighed, "Part of me wishes to comfort him. It's unbecoming of my heritage to be like this, but I can't deny what I feel."

"Comfort him?" Martha repeated since she couldn't properly understand what Jenna meant.

"I offered myself to him," Jenna revealed. "He refused."

Martha's eyes widened, and her cheeks reddened. Surprise, confusion, and embarrassment filled her mind as Jenna's revelation gave birth to multiple thoughts that forced her to reevaluate everything she believed about the situation.

"Wait, aren't you two together?" Martha asked.

"We are friends," Jenna explained while fixing her gaze on Martha and showing a gentle smile. "We can't be more than that."

"Why?" Martha questioned as her expression saddened. "You seem suitable for each other."

"We definitely are," Jenna exclaimed. "I almost can't believe that I found such a good match among humankind. It's a pity that we can't be together."

"I don't understand," Martha admitted before recalling a specific topic. "Is that due to the one you mentioned back then?"

"Yes," Jenna nodded. "Khan mentioned her with you too, am I right? That Liiza must be quite interesting."

"Liiza," Martha muttered. She had already reached a similar conclusion after her talk with Khan, but Jenna brought definitive answers.

Faint sadness appeared inside Martha. She wasn't stupid, and part of her had already accepted the situation, but she couldn't control how she felt.

"Are you comfortable now?" Jenna asked, forcing Martha to snap out of her thoughts.

"You are so honest," Jenna giggled. "I can read your emotions on your face without even studying the mana around you."

"I still don't know what you want from me," Martha responded to dodge the topic. "You are close to Khan, and you see the mana as he does. Why would you need me?"

"I told you already," Jenna declared. "He trusts you deeply, and he feels the same about me. We'll both have to leave him at some point, so it's our job to make the best out of our time together."

Getting rid of the embarrassment had been easy for Martha. She only had to avoid thinking about anything sexual. The confusion was hard to kick out, but the surprise was slowly waning.

However, coldness replaced every emotion in Martha's mind when she heard those words. The content of Jenna's statement wasn't too important. Martha simply felt pissed that Jenna could decide something so personal on her own.

"Is this what you wanted from me?" Martha coldly voiced. "Don't get me wrong. I wish the best for Khan, but I have to think about my life. I don't have the time to participate in your selfless plans."

The cold reaction surprised Jenna. She had initially believed that the two had reached an understanding in the Kingsize's bathroom, but that answer revealed a different truth.

Moreover, Martha was showing a different side of herself. She had tried to leave during the talk in the bathroom, but now she didn't hop off the bed. It almost seemed that she wanted to argue.

"I don't understand what made you so angry," Jenna admitted.

"How can you talk about these things so casually?" Martha complained.

"Which things?" Jenna wondered. "I only want to talk about helping Khan."

"Not that," Martha responded before realizing that what she was about to say was a bit embarrassing. Her voice lowered, and her tone grew quieter as she gave a vague answer. "You can't make such decisions on your own. I also have things I want to do."

Jenna didn't immediately understand what Martha meant. The issue went beyond words and involved the differences in their mindsets. Jenna dealt with feelings through the Nele ways, so it took her a few seconds to get an idea of what Martha was talking about.

"You have yet to give up on him," Jenna declared, and Martha confirmed that guess by diverting her gaze and wearing a saddened expression.

"You," Jenna spoke before interrupting her line. Her species gave a lot of importance to feelings, especially love, and she had basically disrespected that with her previous statement.

"I'm sorry," Jenna eventually said. "I didn't realize you were harboring hopes of getting with Khan."

"I might have overreacted," Martha sighed. "I can't even follow him anymore. These hopes are foolish, but I can't get rid of them."

Jenna bent forward and startled Martha by taking her hands. Martha saw a smile that seemed able to express the same emotions running in her mind. She could immediately understand that Jenna shared her sadness.

"Love is foolish," Jenna uttered. "That's part of its beauty. It's so powerful that even monsters can't resist its appeal."

Martha glanced at Jenna's hands before raising her gaze to meet her eyes. That was the second time Jenna had touched her, and the similarities that Martha saw in her companion eventually opened a crack in her walls.

"How can you give up on him so easily?" Martha asked as a tremor ran through her fingers. "I mean, you like him, right?"

"My species handles emotions differently," Jenna explained. "I know I can't have him, so I want to do everything I can to make things easier for him, even abandoning my traditions, apparently."

Martha blushed again when Jenna mentioned the "offering herself" part. She couldn't help but take a good look at Jenna, and what she saw left her stunned.

Jenna was truly beautiful. Martha could appreciate that part of her even without the influence of the pheromones. The sole thought that Khan had refused her was almost unbelievable.

"I can't be so selfless," Martha admitted. "Part of me still wants him. I keep thinking about the time we spent together and how I lost my chance because I ended up in a coma."

"It's not easy," Jenna revealed. "I struggle when I'm with him too. Luckily, he also wants my well-being, so he stops me when things get too dangerous."

"That side of him is troublesome," Martha sighed. "He can get so gentle out of nowhere. His honesty is also surprisingly good."

Martha almost couldn't believe that she was going along with that conversation, but she felt unable to remain silent. She actually thought about that while she talked, and an explanation for her unusual behavior became clear in no time.

After waking up, Martha had to face countless problems, especially in the social field. Luke and Bruce were friends, but they remained people who had decided to help her to involve Khan in their plans.

As for Khan, he had been up to the craziest stuff while Martha was asleep. He had also changed and had gone through many experiences. He was still a trustworthy friend, but he couldn't pick up from where the two had left.

In short, Martha had been completely alone ever since waking up. Amber and Cora had helped a bit in that field, but they remained people deeply connected to Khan and his relationship. Martha couldn't get too close to them due to that lingering awkwardness.

However, Jenna was like Martha. The two basically were in the same situation when it came to their relationship with Khan, which made it easier for Martha to open up a bit.

"He is really earnest about many things," Jenna commented. "It's so unusual for a human to have such a broad mindset. It's as if I can finally experience a normal friendship with someone outside my species."

"You must have it hard here," Martha stated.

"I take pride in my innate gifts," Jenna declared, "But it still feels nice to be seen for more than them. Khan does that, and he is so permissive with all my whims."

"How do you deal with all of that while sharing his room?" Martha wondered. "I can't remain alone with him for too long without getting pissed or sad."

"I take small paybacks," Jenna revealed while wearing a sly smile. "He never refuses them, which makes it harder not to exploit his character."

"Paybacks?" Martha asked.

"I make him cuddle me while we sleep naked," Jenna stated. "That's not nearly enough, but it's better than nothing."

Martha's eyes widened as her embarrassment reached its peak. She didn't know what to think, and Jenna's sly expression only told her that she had completely misunderstood the Nele.

Jenna appeared cold and detached in public. Martha had managed to see her interest in Khan during that short conversation, but the last revelation hinted at something far lewder. Jenna's true character probably hid far more surprises, and Martha didn't know how safe it was to discover them.

"What is it?" Jenna asked in front of Martha's silence. "Do you want that too? I think I can convince Khan."

"No!" Martha promptly replied. "I'm fine!"

Jenna liked that honest and innocent reaction. Something told her that Martha had finally started to feel comfortable, so she let go of her hands to move to another topic.

"You have known Khan before Liiza," Jenna announced. "How was he back then?"

"Back then?" Martha repeated before wearing a nostalgic smile as memories appeared in her mind.

"At first, I thought he was an idiot," Martha exclaimed. "He chose to wield a shovel during our first test since he didn't know how to use other weapons."

Jenna couldn't refrain from laughing, and Martha also giggled. She missed that naive but driven boy. She didn't even realize how much she treasured those memories until now.

"Khan used to lie a lot," Martha continued. "He didn't trust anyone, but his playful behavior always came out at some point. I laughed so many times with him, but he could also get all serious in an instant. I guess I never truly understood how deep those parts of him were."

"He probably didn't know that either," Jenna reassured.

"Probably," Martha sighed. "Everything changed after my coma. Khan still joked around, but he had turned pretty serious. He wasn't a lost kid anymore. He was actually a mature teacher. I don't know how I could like him even more than before."

"You also changed during the coma," Jenna suggested. "Maybe, that's why the new Khan was so appealing to you."

"Maybe," Martha sighed again. "Did he talk to you about Nitis? Do you know what he went through there?"

"I don't know much about it," Jenna responded.

"He saw and did things I can't completely believe," Martha revealed. "Half of that stuff is enough to leave anyone scarred for life, but he speaks so fondly of it. I think that's when I understood that I was no match for Liiza."

"I see," Jenna exclaimed. "I should ask him about Nitis, but I'll leave that for later."

Jenna took Martha's hands again before showing her incredible smile. Martha experienced a sense of defeat in front of that expression. She knew that she would probably agree to Jenna's next request. Luckily for her, she didn't mind it.

"Should we complain about Khan while also trying to come up with ways to help him?" Jenna asked.

"Complain?" Martha asked.

"I bet you have something you don't like about him," Jenna exclaimed. "For me, it's his constant need to train even when I'm in need of cuddles."

Martha chuckled before suppressing that reaction. She glanced at her hands before looking at Jenna again. She liked where the situation was going, so she eventually nodded.

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Khan and Monica enjoyed their drinks while Martha and Jenna talked in his room. The two didn't have anything specific to discuss, but the booze made even casual conversations louder or generally more interactive.

In short, Khan teased Monica to no end while he learnt more about her life. She also voiced questions to add details to everything described on the network. The two got to know each other through jokes and blatant flirting.

It turned out that Monica's life had been far from happy or peaceful. The Solodrey family's wealth had offered her the best education and countless comforts, but she had to face the harsh reality of her status pretty soon.

The descendants of wealthy families were a powerful currency when it came to political alliances and similar. Monica had to deal with countless pursuers from a young age, and she couldn't disrespect any of them for multiple reasons.

Growing up in an environment full of untrustworthy people who only aimed at the family's wealth or at a chance to brag about eventual sexual conquests was far from ideal for a kid. Monica was also beautiful, and the elegant manners that she had learnt due to her status only enhanced that aspect of her figure.

The situation didn't improve after Monica showed talent and determination toward mana. Her rise to power turned her into a desirable prize that many families aimed to seize.

Her father made everything worse since he was a core part of that political game. Her mother was more protective, but she also expected her to behave like a proper daughter of a wealthy family.

Monica had grown up without a single trustworthy person in her life. She was even smart, but that had only made her more detached. She could have probably managed to build good relationships among servants or masters, but the fact that they belonged to her family prevented her from dropping her barriers.

Khan had to admit that their lives shared many common points. Monica didn't have to go through physical hardships or traumas, but her surroundings had never been too different from the Slums.

Sure, the members of important families were well-educated and polite. They also knew how to respect boundaries, but that intelligence made them more dangerous.

A wanderer in the Slums could only do so much, but a powerful member of a wealthy family didn't have any limit. Monica knew all the bad things that could happen to her if she trusted the wrong person, so she decided to wear her mask all the time.

That was why Khan was such a big deal for Monica. He was someone outside of that toxic political environment, and he was also pretty impressive. His character wasn't bad either, and his confidence with women only made him more interesting.

Of course, Khan didn't fully believe what he was hearing. Even if Monica were telling the truth, that would only confirm that her lying skills were incredible. He felt that she was being honest, but he hesitated to trust her.

Monica learnt about some of Khan's stories, but he never added too many details. Monica had to insist many times to get to the gory parts, and she faced them quite coldly even.

That aspect of Monica surprised Khan. In theory, Monica didn't have much experience outside the safe environment of her family, but she faced gory details calmly. She appeared pretty mature as a soldier, which earned her some temporary respect.

Second-level warriors had great tolerance for booze, and Khan and Monica were even unusual cases. However, they started to reach their limits as the dinner went on, and it became pretty clear that they had to put an end to it at some point.

Khan and Monica didn't need to speak about their departure. After emptying their sixth drink, they called a cab and left the Kingsize to return to Luke's building.

Khan didn't say anything when Monica chose to sit next to him, and he remained silent even when she asked the ship to land a few blocks before their destination.

"Thank you," Monica timidly said after the ship set off and the two remained alone on the sidewalk.

"I told you I wouldn't have left right away," Khan calmly replied.

Monica wrapped her arms behind her back as she fixed her gaze on the ground and took long steps. She wasn't walking quickly. Her pace actually was slower than usual.

"It's strange to see Milia 222 so empty," Khan commented as he inspected the almost empty streets.

"It's pretty late," Monica replied. "Maybe everyone is holed up in clubs or shops."

"I bet you prefer it like this," Khan stated. "Your plan to have me on a date is working perfectly."

"It does feel like a date, doesn't it?" Monica asked. "I only wanted to be with you a bit longer, but I didn't expect the streets to give us some privacy."

"You sure lose your shyness when you drink," Khan laughed.

"I'm too tired to complain," Monica whined. "I can't show you any cute reaction right now. You'll have to settle for the bold, shameless me."

"That's not really settling," Khan uttered.

"Ooh?" Monica voiced while turning toward Khan. "I thought you preferred the shy type."

"I don't have a type," Khan snorted.

"Martha and Jenna are quite different now that I think about it," Monica stated while remaining turned. "Well, I don't know much about Jenna, but she seems pretty bold. I envy her a bit, and her hair looks so soft."

"You don't have bad hair," Khan exclaimed.

"Was that a compliment?" Monica giggled. "Did I hear it correctly? You just said that you like my hair."

"I said it wasn't bad," Khan pointed out.

"Come on," Monica complained. "Give me an honest opinion."

Monica stopped walking and tilted her head to show part of the back of her head. Khan could see most of her curls like that, and he found nothing bad with them.

"I like it," Khan sighed.

"It's pretty soft too," Monica added while caressing her hair.

"Do you want me to touch it?" Khan teased.

"If you feel like it," Monica pouted before tidying up her dress and spinning on herself.

"What is it now?" Khan laughed.

"Do you like this dress?" Monica asked. "I don't enjoy wearing it, but it does highlight my figure."

"Did you want to show off tonight?" Khan wondered.

"Of course," Monica announced while performing another spin.

"I think I've seen enough," Khan chuckled.

"Are you sure?" Monica wondered. "I'll do another just in case."

Monica spun on herself again before stopping and voicing a short laugh. Khan laughed too, but his arm instinctively went for Monica's back when he noticed that she was losing her balance.

"Always so protective," Monica teased.

"You are drunk," Khan sighed as he retracted his arm.

"Yes, I'm definitely wasted," Monica stated in an unconvincing tone before taking Khan's elbow. "I need help getting back home."

Khan shook his head but let Monica cling to his arm. He even smirked when he noticed that Monica started to dodge his gaze. Her tipsy state couldn't get rid of her shyness.

"You have gotten oddly silent," Khan joked while bending toward Monica. "Is everything alright?"

"Shut up," Monica whispered. "We should have drunk more."

"And miss all of this?" Khan chuckled while bringing his arm closer to his side to force Monica to tighten her grasp. "Not a chance."

"So, did you enjoy the date?" Monica timidly asked.

"I did," Khan admitted. "You are fun."

"I liked it too," Monica said as she clung even closer to Khan. "Would you like to do it again? Money is not a problem."

"Are you trying to buy me off?" Khan wondered.

"Don't-!" Monica said in a high-pitched tone before retrieving her cool. "Go easy on me. I'm not used to this. I don't know what to do or say."

"Didn't your family teach you how to date when you were seven?" Khan joked.

"Nine," Monica scoffed, "But those are for the dates with other rich soldiers. They are political meetings, not something meant to be enjoyed. I don't want to have those with you."

Khan wore his smirk again. That had almost become an instinctive reaction whenever Monica went all shy and honest. Still, the topic forced him to think and realize that his experience in actual dates was pretty limited, especially when it came to women who had yet to become his girlfriends.

"I'm not too sure either," Khan admitted. "Maybe we can check some popular spots without going for the high-class all the time."

"Did you just agree to more dates?" Monica questioned.

Khan glanced at Monica and found her staring deep into his eyes. Her face showed hope, but her grasp tightened and relaxed to reveal her anxiety.

"We had fun, right?" Khan vaguely answered. "Why would I refuse?"

Monica wasn't too happy about that answer, but she chose to see its positive aspect. Khan still didn't trust her, but he wasn't building a wall between them either. That was enough for now.

Nevertheless, Monica got closer and laid her head on Khan's shoulder. She avoided Khan's gaze while remaining in that new position, but she had no intention of getting off.

Khan simply let her be. That slow pace was actually enjoyable. They both knew that they liked each other, but they were taking their time to establish the foundation of their friendship before moving to deeper topics.

Monica slowed down as Luke's building appeared in her vision. She tried to prolong that intimate walk as much as possible, but the two eventually reached their destination, which forced them to separate.

Monica took a deep breath before her expression changed. She wore her elegant behavior as she and Khan approached the last steps that separated them from Luke's building. They both knew that the date was over.

However, a surprising scene welcomed the two once they crossed the entrance. The main hall was strangely loud, but Luke and the others weren't the reason behind that noise.

A group of six well-dressed Orlats was standing in front of Luke, Francis, Bruce, and Master Ivor. The tones hinted at complaints, but the main topic escaped Khan's understanding.

Moreover, Khan couldn't focus on the conversation right away since the auras of the Orlats claimed his attention. One of them was familiar, while another was strong enough to make Khan mentally prepare for a deadly battle.

One of the Orlats was Sher, the group leader from [The Loophole], but the head of that group was a third-level warrior, who didn't hesitate to turn toward Khan and Monica after hearing the metal door closing.

Chapter 365 Cruel

The hall disappeared as the third-level warrior inspected Khan and Monica. The Orlats was clearly angry, and its stare carried a pressure that forced Khan to disregard his surroundings to focus on that potential threat.

The third-level warrior's slightly larger waist and bigger chest revealed its gender. The leader of that alien group was a woman, and her appearance was in line with her companions.

The Orlats were wearing elegant black suits, with black shirts and ties. Jeweled earrings and piercings hung from their eyebrows, but only the third-level warriors wore them on her ears and nose too.

"Khan! Monica!" Luke exclaimed to introduce the two. "I'm afraid you have returned at a bad time."

"That's an understatement!" The third-level warrior snorted while turning toward Luke. "You have caused trouble in my activities for days already. My customers don't like having people prying around while trying to have fun."

The nature of the argument became evident right away. Monica and Khan could understand that someone in Luke's group had caused problems in one of the Orlats' activities. Sher was also pretending not to know Khan, so he excluded himself from the possible troublemakers.

"Our interests simply happen to clash," Luke announced. "Also, I know that my companions have done their best to preserve Milia 222's peace. Don't blame them if your activities are losing money."

Luke wasn't backing down in front of the presence of a third-level warrior, and even Khan felt surprised to see such calm. Luke was facing the issue as a prominent member of a wealthy family, so he couldn't show weakness, especially to other species.

"We are back at it again," The third-level warrior cursed. "I have proof that your men have disturbed my activities."

"What proof?" Luke asked.

"My word," The third-level warrior claimed.

"You won't rip me off so easily," Luke chuckled. "I don't know you. How can your word have any value?"

"I'm Awiza!" The third-level warrior angrily shouted. "Only a foreigner wouldn't know my name."

"Learning your name doesn't change anything," Luke stated. "You can't prove that my companions affected your activities."

It felt surprising for Khan to see Luke acting so disrespectfully. The latter usually showed nothing but politeness. Yet, the situation seemed different now that the Orlats were involved.

'Is this xenophobia?' Khan wondered before disregarding that idea.

Luke was a proud member of the human species, but Khan had never seen him show signs of xenophobia. Istrone's events could have given birth to something similar, but Khan believed they had the opposite effects.

Luke wouldn't underestimate someone due to their species. His current behavior definitely had a different source and meaning. Khan guessed that his family's pride couldn't let him lose ground in front of mere gangsters.

"I know your faces now," Awiza continued in a far colder tone. "I only need to spread a rumor to ban all of you from the Orlats' activities. I also have many friends among the other species. A mere word from me can close every door on Milia 222."

"Are you threatening me?" Luke asked in the same cold tone.

"I am," Awiza declared. "You are looking for something here. I bet you can't do that with the entire underground world against you."

Luke wore a cold face, but he didn't give an immediate answer. The truth was more than obvious. He would lack the connections to act freely on Milia 222 if the Orlats started spreading nasty rumors about his team.

Hesitating wouldn't lead anywhere. Actually, delaying the answer would only reinforce Awiza's position. Political skills and similar abilities had no place in an argument that had already reached its conclusion.

Khan felt able to see helplessness filling Luke's eyes. The latter was about to acknowledge Awiza's statement and start to find an agreement, but an idea suddenly appeared in Khan's mind and made him step forward.

Everyone was standing still, so Khan's movement made many gazes fall on his figure. The gesture also surprised him since he had yet to come up with a complete plan. He had only felt the urge to butt in and see if he could influence the situation. Luckily for him, he knew enough about pretenses to improvise.

"[Sher]!" Khan exclaimed in the best accent he could muster. "[You should have told me that you were coming. I would have welcomed you properly]."

The Orlats and Luke's group couldn't help but turn toward the alien eyed by Khan. Sher didn't know what was happening, and surprise took over him for an instant. Yet, his leader's cold gaze soon forced him to calm down.

"[Do you know this human]?" Awiza asked.

"[Of course he knows me]!" Khan laughed. "[We shared a cell for a few hours. I actually owe him one]. Luke, can you ask the servant to bring food and drinks?"

Sher felt the urge to kill Khan right away. His expression remained cold, but something told Khan that he was pretty angry. That revealed a few details that Khan could exploit. He only needed Luke to play along.

Luke was the most reliable soldier when it came to social interactions. Also, he trusted Khan deeply, so he didn't hesitate to wear a bright smile and pick up his phone to send a series of orders.

Meanwhile, Khan inspected the interactions among the group of Orlats. They limited themselves to silent glances, but they revealed a lot and added information to the picture in Khan's mind.

'Awiza doesn't know everything about the prison,' Khan concluded. 'I guess Sher kept his mouth shut, at least partially.'

"[Please, sit]," Khan said in a cheerful tone despite the calculations happening in his mind. "[Let's talk after eating something]."

"We are not hungry," Awiza replied in her cold tone before glaring at her companions, who nodded to confirm that statement.

"[A drink then]," Khan continued. "[I'm sure we can find bottles to your liking. You look like the type of refined people who wouldn't say no to good booze]."

The faint compliment eased the general coldness in the group of Orlats, and even Awiza couldn't help but glance at the seemingly comfortable couches pointed by Khan. The building was incredible, so the main hall appeared cozy and appealing.

"[Please]," Khan repeated. "[I want to pay Sher back for his help. Offering you nice drinks is the least I can do]."

"[Paying Sher back]," Awiza repeated while shooting another cold glance at Sher. "[Sure, let's have a drink. I want to hear how Sher earned this favor]."

Khan kept a bright smile on his face as he led the Orlats toward the couches. Waiters soon arrived, and Luke ordered them around to add furniture to the hall and allow everyone to sit around the same table.

Soon, the six Orlats occupied two couches on one side of the table. Luke and Master Ivor sat on one of the short sides while Bruce and Francis went in front of them.

As for Khan and Monica, the two sat on the other long side, right in front of the Orlats. Everyone had fallen silent while the waiters filled the table with bottles and glasses, but Monica still found ways to talk privately with Khan.

"Khan," Monica whispered while suppressing a cute laugh and showing her phone to him.

Khan understood what Monica wanted when he looked at the screen. She had written a text for him to read.

'What are you doing? Luke can settle this with Credits,' Khan read on Monica's phone.

'That might be hard to explain,' Khan thought as he wore a fake smirk to pretend that Monica had shown him a joke.

Truth be told, Khan had acted impulsively and without a clear plan. He didn't even have Luke's interest in mind when he had stepped forward to join that discussion.

The urge that had driven Khan's action had a simple nature. He had moved out of curiosity. He wanted to see if his knowledge and ability could pacify that conflict. It was a challenge that only Milia 222 could offer under such favorable conditions.

Khan waited for everyone to fill their glasses and take short sips before moving his plan forward. Awiza's slightly satisfied face told him that it was time to speak.

"[By the way, what happened here]?" Khan asked.

"[Why don't you talk first]?" Awiza questioned before switching languages. "Also, let's use the human language. I know that most foreigners don't bother to learn ours."

The coldness had returned, but Khan didn't let it worry him as he voiced a lie. "There is nothing much to say. Sher and I had a misunderstanding, but we solved it quickly. He even helped me out afterward."

"What misunderstanding?" Awiza asked.

"I came to [The Loophole] to ask a few things," Khan half-lied. "It turned out that you had already helped us in the past, so I agreed not to cause any problem."

"Did you threaten us?" Awiza asked.

"I just pretended to," Khan laughed. "It was totally my bad. Sher saw through me in an instant and prevented any mess. I have to say I have come to respect your species a lot more after that meeting."

"You sure know how to talk," Awiza snorted.

"I'm not lying," Khan promised. "Anyway, what's up with this mess? What happened?"

"It happened that your friends came to my activities and started interrogating customers," Awiza declared while pointing at Francis. "Privacy is one of Milia 222's golden rules, especially in those places."

"I-!" Francis tried to speak, but Bruce placed a hand on his shoulder to stop him. He even shook his head to force his friend to stay silent.

"My companions know how to conduct themselves," Luke responded. "I can vouch for them since I handpicked this team."

"It's your responsibility to pay for their mistakes then," Awiza didn't hesitate to go straight to the point.

"Why don't we relax a bit?" Khan jumped in before the situation could degenerate any further. "We have just begun to drink. Let's not try to kill each other already."

"Why would I choose to spend my time here instead of getting what I deserve?" Awiza wondered.

"Because I know that the Orlats understand when they are in front of something good," Khan lied. "I'm sure you can taste the quality of this booze."

The Orlats smirked, but Awiza did her best to remain cold and angry. However, her expression began to relax when she took another sip from her cup. She had to admit that Luke was treating her properly.

"It is my understanding that my friends didn't cause any significant problem," Khan said at that point.

"That's not for you to decide," Awiza complained.

"I wouldn't dare," Khan immediately responded. "Yet, I'm sure an influent species like yours would have already kicked us out of Milia 222 if we had caused real problems."

The third compliment hit even harder than the previous. The good booze only helped, but it would take a while to make it influence a third-level warrior. Still, Awiza didn't seem to mind where that conversation was going.

"What do you mean?" Awiza asked as she drank from her cup again.

"I think you came here to scare us before we cause real problems for your activities," Khan revealed. "I know you don't need our Credits, so you can already call your mission a success."

Khan had to drink with Awiza to bring the two groups closer, but his time was short. He couldn't keep his cool for too long in that condition. The dinner had already brought him close to his limits, so he had to mention the main topic right away to make sure that the conversation would reach its conclusion quickly.

"You sure know how to talk," Awiza repeated. "I've met humans who could talk like you, but they always tried to trick me during meetings. I'd rather prevent eventual problems."

"How?" Khan asked. "Let's say that you get some money now. What would stop us from creating problems tomorrow?"

"Are you threatening me?" Awiza coldly questioned. "Are you threatening my species?"

"I'm only stating the obvious," Khan sighed as he emptied his cup. "If money can settle everything, we can't be scared or worried. Isn't it better to find an agreement?"

"You wouldn't talk like this if you realized how influential the Orlats are," Awiza uttered.

"I know that you could probably topple Milia 222's government overnight," Khan voiced a fourth compliment, "But you can't cut us off from the underground world. Our connections are too good."

"The humans excel in many things," Awiza stated. "Finding secrets isn't one of them. Instead, the Orlats know how to hide things pretty well."

"We wouldn't rely only on humans," Khan replied.

"Which species would even help you?" Awiza scoffed. "You are foreigners. You need months or years to build trust here."

"Come on," Khan chuckled. "I know that you know."

Awiza's face froze for an instant, but she quickly hid that reaction by emptying her cup. Khan didn't hesitate to refill her drink before doing the same for his glass, and the two never stopped staring at each other.

"A human and a Nele walking side by side through Milia 222's streets is a rare sight," Awiza pointed out.

Khan showed his smirk without adding anything. He didn't want to involve the Nele in that conversation. It was enough for Awiza to think that he had an agreement with them. That wasn't even a complete lie in the end.

"How did you earn the Nele's trust?" Awiza asked.

"I don't know what you are talking about," Khan calmly replied as he grabbed his drink.

"What kind of agreement do you have with them?" Awiza continued.

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

"Will they help you if we try to stop you?" Awiza questioned.

"I don't know what you are talking about," Khan said again.

Silence fell in the main hall. Khan and Awiza continued to stare at each other under their companions' intense gazes. Seeing Khan in action was a rare sight, and the scene ended up captivating his companions.

The silence continued for a few minutes. The group drank without adding much. A few murmurs and words of appreciation for the booze resounded from time to time, but that was it.

The situation grew awkward since the two groups weren't interacting anymore. The conversation had yet to reach a conclusion. It had stopped at a threat, and Awiza felt no need to add anything else.

"Right," Khan eventually exclaimed while glancing at Sher. "I didn't tell you how things ended in the prison. A soldier tried to steal my knife."

Awiza and the other Orlats turned toward Sher, and the latter felt the need to say something now that he had ended at the center of the attention. "You can't expect a soldier to give up on the chance to seize something good."

"I can see that," Khan sighed before exploding into a laugh. "Sorry. I just recalled his face. I think he won't steal anything else for the rest of his life."

"A soldier tried to rob you?" Awiza voiced her curiosity.

"Indeed," Khan revealed while pointing at the knife at his side. "He wanted to steal this beauty, but I made him understand that he had messed with the wrong person. I think he cried."

Khan exploded into another laugh that surprised his companions. They didn't expect him to take joy in that scene, but Luke and Monica noticed something odd. After all, they had been part of the audience when the beating happened.

The Orlats couldn't help but snicker when they heard that. Some even decided to drink more now that the atmosphere had turned cheerful. Those reactions told Khan that he was on the right path, and Awiza gave him a perfect chance to continue.

"Wait, aren't you sure?" Awiza asked through her smirk. "How can you only think if someone is crying?"

"His face was full of blood," Khan laughed. "I couldn't even see his eyes clearly. Though he sobbed a lot."

The story made the Orlats laugh, and some even voiced their approval. They liked how Khan had acted, and they enjoyed how he described what had happened.

"I had to stop beating him at some point," Khan eventually sighed. "I was afraid he would have pissed himself on the spot."

More laughs resounded. The Orlats had stopped containing themselves and gulped down drink after drink. They had finally relaxed, and Awiza even followed with a story of her own.

It didn't take long before all the Orlats decided to share one or two stories. They always involved beatings or pitiful aftermaths of a battle, but the aliens never mentioned names or similar.

Luke and Monica knew that Khan had lied, and the result of his approach told them why. The Orlats seemed to love those pitiful stories. They rejoiced to hear how other people had suffered.

That blatant cruelty felt sickening, but the humans kept their smiles as bright as possible to avoid getting in the way of Khan's plan. Everything was going well, so they didn't dare to ruin the situation.

"You are a funny human," Awiza announced once the bottles on the table had become empty. "Come on. Give me a decent offer."

"What are you talking about?" Khan laughed, pretending not to understand what Awiza meant.

"I can't leave empty-handed," Awiza stated. "You must offer something else if you don't want the initial agreement."

"There has never been an agreement in the first place," Khan chuckled before clearing his throat.

"Look, I'm almost certain you have nothing to do with what we need. Why don't you smooth things out for us? It would be far easier for us to get where we want with your help."

"I thought you were going to give something to me," Awiza sneered, "Not the other way around."

"Wait, hear me out," Khan continued. "You don't want problems, but you know that we might cause them, so you are asking for advance payment. Why don't we pay you for something more specific?"

"Like?" Awiza asked.

"You have great connections throughout Milia 222," Khan pointed out. "Use them to put us inside some activity. We can't cause problems for you if we are busy with something else."

"I have a reputation to preserve," Awiza snorted. "I can't vouch for untrustworthy people. Everyone will take it on me if you cause problems."

"Just blame someone else," Khan laughed. "I mean, you Orlats are natural tricksters. I know you can find a way to make that work."

The compliment hit in the right spot and made Awiza fall silent. The offer was far from bad. It could actually set the foundation for decent cooperation.

Of course, Awiza didn't speak for all the Orlats on Milia 222, but that made the offer more interesting. Establishing cooperation with Luke's group now would give her priority over future deals, which could bring a lot of money.

"What activities are we talking about?" Awiza asked, basically revealing how she was ready to accept that deal.

"You should talk with Luke for the details," Khan stated while raising an arm to point at Luke. "I think it's too late to discuss money right now too. Why don't we plan a meeting for another day when we have less booze inside us?"

Awiza played with the piercing hanging from her nose while her dark eyes darted between Khan and Luke. She seemed pensive, but Khan knew that she was only stalling to create some tension.

"A meeting sounds nice," Awiza exclaimed while standing up. "We'll take our leave then."

"It was a pleasure," Khan stated as he left the couch. The rest of the groups soon imitated the two, and a series of short salutations unfolded before the Orlats left the building.

Khan's expression changed once the metal doors closed behind the Orlats. His cheerful face turned cold and detached, and his eyes half-closed now that his concentration wavered.

"That was spectacular, Lieutenant Khan," Master Ivor declared during that peaceful moment. "You'll become a great ambassador one day."

"Thank you," Khan sighed while rubbing his eyes. "Luke, can I leave that stuff to you?"

"Of course!" Luke claimed. "You have given us a great chance. The investigation can really begin now."

"I'll hit the bed then," Khan weakly said before walking toward the elevator past the main hall.

"I'll also take my leave," Monica stated. "It's been a long night."

"Sure," Luke uttered. "I hope you enjoyed your dinner."

"It was great," Monica showed her elegant smile as she began to follow Khan. "The Kingsize doesn't disappoint. You should go there one of these days."

"Monica, do you want to hang out a bit longer?" Francis questioned.

"I'm sorry," Monica chuckled while covering her mouth. "I'll take this chance to share one last talk with Khan if you don't mind."

Francis couldn't say anything to that. Luke and Bruce shook their heads and smiled as they went back on the couch, while Master Ivor remained still as Khan and Monica disappeared behind a metal door.

The world in Khan's vision spun and blurred. His senses were off, and the same went for his balance. He basically slammed his back on the elevator's surface after crossing its entrance.

Monica dealt with the commands before reaching Khan's side. She took his right arm and put it around her shoulders while he was busy looking at a random spot on the machine.

Khan had never been so drunk. He had relied on the mental barrier and his sheer determination to remain in control of his body, but everything had fallen once he had relaxed.

Monica could limit herself to a single drink, but Khan had to be part of the meeting, which had required him to go beyond his limits. He was wasted, and his thoughts were a mess that he couldn't hear properly.

"When did you get there?" Khan asked when he noticed Monica under his right arm.

"Let me help," Monica said as she wrapped her arm behind Khan's back to prepare him for the arrival at the designed floor.

"You must like touching me," Khan snickered before heaving a helpless sigh. "George would have a good laugh if he saw me in this state."

"George?" Monica repeated.

"That was awful," Khan ignored the question. "I feel so dirty. Fucking Orlats and their bad tastes."

"You have been great back there," Monica said as the elevator opened and the two walked inside the corridor.

"Yeah, great," Khan scoffed. "So great. A lie after a lie after a lie just to get some money."

Monica didn't say anything there. She didn't have a real answer, and she guessed that Khan wouldn't even hear her out.

"Is that what an ambassador does?" Khan wondered in a complaining tone. "That's so sad."

"You can always choose another path," Monica said as she continued to support Khan throughout the corridor. "Nothing is out of your reach."

"I need to become an ambassador," Khan weakly replied. "I need to."

"Why?" Monica asked.

"I need to," Khan sighed. "That's the price I have to pay."

"Khan, is everything okay?" Monica questioned as she inspected Khan's unfocused expression.

"Nothing is okay," Khan cursed. "Nothing is ever okay. That's my room."

Khan pointed at a door a few steps from his position, but Monica didn't immediately walk him there. She hesitated for a bit before her drunken state took over her shyness and made her ask a question. "Are you sure you want to go back to Jenna in this state?"

"Yes, I want Jenna," Khan stated.

"But," Monica began to complain before interrupting her line and lowering her eyes.

Khan's confused gaze fell on Monica when the two reached the door. He was trying to take his phone, but he ended up focusing on Monica's face. Her beauty was undeniable, but there seemed to be something else in her expression.

"What?" Khan asked. "Were you trying to get me in your room?"

"You are in no condition to tease me," Monica pouted.

"You aren't sober either," Khan laughed.

"Still better than you," Monica scolded. "Now, go back to Jenna."

"Are you jealous?" Khan tried to use his teasing tone, but his drunk state gave strange accents to his words. Still, he laid his free arm on the wall, leaving Monica stuck between his limbs.

"What are you doing?" Monica giggled as she let the arm on her shoulders slide down until it reached her waist.

"This is what you want, right?" Khan asked as he grabbed Monica's waist and slowly pushed her onto the wall.

"Khan, you are drunk," Monica stated in a cheerful tone as she took Khan's face in her hands.

Khan had slept with Jenna in the last days. It was safe to say that his lust had reached unhealthy levels, especially since he couldn't vent it. However, he was drunk now, and Monica was right in front of him. Khan could feel her soft skin. Her captivating figure was within his reach.

Monica's hands were on Khan's cheeks, but she didn't put any strength in them. They even slid past his head and reached his neck as he lowered his face toward her.

Monica initially smiled, but her expression turned serious once Khan got too close. She almost couldn't believe what was happening, and she didn't know how to take the event.

"Khan, not like this," Monica pleaded, but she soon found Khan's mouth on her lips.

A whimper escaped Monica's mouth during the kiss. She wanted to reject it, but she soon lost herself inside it. Her hands dug into Khan's hair as she let him do as he wished.

Monica snapped back to reality once their waists touched. She pulled Khan's head back and looked at him in disbelief. That kiss had really happened.

"What?" Khan asked. "Didn't you like it?"

A wave of anger ran through Monica and made her slap Khan. The gesture carried no real strength, but it was enough to startle Khan and partially awaken him.

However, Monica didn't stop there. She pulled Khan toward her again to leave another deep kiss.

"We are even now," Monica pouted as soon as their lips separated.

Khan was at a loss for words. He could only watch as Monica freed herself from the arm on her waist and left the wall to walk toward the elevator. Khan followed her with his eyes, so he saw the exact moment when she turned.

"Don't you dare to pretend that this didn't happen!" Monica shouted before turning again and jumping inside the elevator.

A single slap couldn't remove all the booze running inside Khan's body. His senses dulled as soon as the elevator closed and forced him to give up on thinking about the situation.

Khan opened the door and entered his room only to find Jenna waiting for him under the sheets. She was still awake, and a knowing smile filled her expression.

"[Did you have fun with Monica]?" Jenna teased.

"[Not now]," Khan pleaded before kicking away his shoes and jumping on the bed to take his place under the sheets. He didn't even feel surprised to see Jenna's naked body waiting for him.

"[Won't you take off your clothes]?" Jenna joked as she ran her fingers over Khan's shoulder.

"[Let me be]," Khan requested as he wrapped his arms around Jenna's waist and laid his head on her chest. "[I'll sleep like this tonight]."

"[What did you even do outside the room]?" Jenna asked as she hugged Khan's head and started caressing him.

"[I probably made a mess]," Khan admitted.

"[That's so exciting]," Jenna giggled.

Chapter 366 Drawn

Memories returned before Khan completely woke up. A series of images, sounds, and voices ran through his mind as soon as the nightmare ended.

'Shit,' Khan thought before opening his eyes to find a worried, purple gaze fixed on him.

"[How long did I sleep]?" Khan groaned.

"[Longer than I have ever seen you sleep]," Jenna responded. "[Your monsters kept you company for the whole time]."

"[That's how it is]," Khan sighed as he let go of Jenna's waist and sat on the bed.

Khan felt strangely well. He was thirsty but also full of energy. A quick use of the check-up technique revealed that his body was completely rested and didn't show the slightest trace of tiredness or instability.

Jenna remained silent as Khan left the bed and reached the bathroom to fill a glass with water. He drank until his thirst disappeared, but the problems didn't end there.

Khan found Jenna's meaningful stare waiting for him when he returned to the room. She was still under the sheets. It was clear that she was waiting for something.

Khan rolled his eyes before undressing and jumping on the bed. Jenna giggled as Khan took her in a warm embrace, and a question came out of her mouth when he started caressing her.

"[What happened with Monica]?" Jenna teased. "[I know you did something outside the room]."

"[We kissed]," Khan said while lying deeper on the pillow. "[Well, I kissed her. Then, she slapped and kissed me]."

"[Exciting]," Jenna exclaimed while changing her position to lay her waist on Khan's lap. "[How did it feel to kiss her? How did she taste]?"

"[Don't get so excited]," Khan scolded as Jenna basically laid on him. "[It wasn't anything special]."

Jenna took Khan's face between her hands before whispering. "[Tell me anyway]."

Trying to deny Jenna's whims was a battle that Khan had never managed to win, so he didn't even bother to try. He patted her head to make it lay on his chest before coming up with a description.

"[It was simple]," Khan voiced. "[I had too much booze to enjoy it. Though I liked the slap]."

"[The slap]?" Jenna asked.

"[The slap]," Khan repeated. "[I didn't think Monica could do something like that]."

Jenna raised her head to show her confused expression. She stared deep into Khan's eyes for a few seconds until a question left her mouth. "[Do humans hit each other while kissing]?"

"[No]," Khan laughed. "[I guess there are some things you can do, but I wasn't talking about that. I just liked to see her reaction]."

"[Would you hit me if we kissed]?" Jenna continued.

"[Stop misunderstanding]," Khan laughed again as he hugged Jenna to put her back on his chest.

"[I think I would like a bite on my neck instead of a slap]," Jenna commented.

"[Don't get all lewd already]," Khan complained. [You are partially to blame for what happened]."

"[How so]?" Jenna giggled as she ran her right hand over Khan's waist.

"[You are impossible]," Khan cursed before closing his eyes and wearing a smile as soon as he heard Jenna's happy laugh.

The fun part ended there in Khan's mind. He had joked a bit about what happened the previous night, but the time to face the situation seriously had arrived.

Truth be told, Khan had excuses for what he had done. He was drunk, and his mood was on the ground due to the meeting with the Orlats. Yet, he couldn't deny the existence of real motivations behind his actions.

Jenna had stuffed Khan with urges, which had come out during that moment of weakness. His drunk mind didn't care about the potential threat that Monica posed. He had ignored all those issues, which left only a beautiful and funny woman behind.

'Do I really like her?' Khan wondered. 'I mean, I know I do, but still. Why did I even do something like that?'

Khan had a wonderful time during the dinner and the walk back home. He even had to admit that he and Monica had great chemistry. She didn't lack anything either, both in terms of maturity and beauty.

However, a relationship was out of the question, and the existence of a spy wasn't Khan's only worry. He didn't want to get romantically involved so soon after Cora.

"[I'll only focus on you from now on]," Khan declared.

Jenna was almost a perfect compromise since the two didn't need to explain where they stood. Khan and Jenna could be intimate without hurting each other. Their relationship caused problems when it came to urges, but that was the best path Khan could find.

"[Denied]," Jenna announced. "[I won't let you use me to hide]."

"[Don't you fear that I might do this with someone else]?" Khan teased as he hugged Jenna tightly.

"[These tricks won't work today]," Jenna stated as she snuggled closer to Khan's chest.

"[Can I at least have a say in this]?" Khan almost pleaded.

"[You'd probably choose a path that makes you suffer if I leave it to you]," Jenna explained. "[That's why I need to help you]."

"[I'm not a masochist]," Khan scoffed.

"[You said that the best part of the kiss with Monica was her slap]," Jenna pointed out.

"[That's not what I said]," Khan complained.

"[Besides, Martha shares my opinion]," Jenna continued.

That answer reminded Khan that Jenna and Martha had been in the building on their own for a while. The meeting with the Orlats had also lasted quite some time, so it was safe to assume that the two women had a long talk.

"[How did the talk with Martha go]?" Khan questioned.

"[I think well]," Jenna replied. "[I like her. I now understand how you two got close in the first place]."

"[Did she tell you stories about the academy]?" Khan asked.

"[Just a few]," Jenna revealed. "[I laughed quite a bit]."

"[I was a desperate case back then]," Khan chuckled. "[She had to teach me the very basics behind the human society]."

"[She speaks fondly of that time]," Jenna stated. "[You left such a good impression on her]."

"[Those were good times]," Khan sighed. "[We just didn't know that yet]."

Jenna sensed the faint sadness in Khan's voice and tilted her head to look at him. Khan felt her movements, and he even predicted her worry, but he kept his eyes closed as memories ran through his mind.

The innocence of the first months in Ylaco's training camp was impossible to retrieve. Khan had already experienced the tragedy of the Second Impact back then, but naivety still used to fill his thoughts.

That had completely disappeared after Istrone and Nitis, so Khan couldn't help but think about that time with joy and nostalgia. Everything used to be easier back then. He recalled how having a full stomach was enough to make him happy.

"[You make it so hard for me]," Jenna whispered as she turned and spread her legs to sit on Khan's torso. "[How do you expect me to contain myself when you are like this]?"

Khan opened his eyes when Jenna's hands fell on his chest. Her naked figure was completely exposed to him, but he could differentiate between mere lust and affection now.

Khan straightened his back and let Jenna slide on his abdomen as he reached for her waist. Jenna seemed to understand what he wanted, so she bent forward and lowered her head.

Their foreheads touched, and the two remained in that position for a while. Words didn't matter in that situation. Knowing that they both understood what was going through their respective minds allowed them to enjoy the moment.

"[Can I crack a joke already]?" Jenna whispered.

"[Is it about something lewd]?" Khan asked.

"[What do you think]?" Jenna giggled.

"[Then no]," Khan responded. "[Let me rest like this a bit longer]."

Jenna's smile widened as she wrapped her arms around Khan's neck. She knew that he had a lot to think about, especially after the previous night, so she remained still to support him.

Khan let Jenna's warmth envelop him. Her forehead seemed able to radiate her affection and good intentions, and he used them to sort out his messy mind.

It was already far past lunchtime. Khan had slept for a long time, which explained his rested state. Yet, his phone didn't carry any message.

The situation with the Orlats was probably fine. Being present during the next meeting would definitely help, but Khan didn't want anything to do with that. Those aliens' taste for cruelty was sickening, so he would avoid the matter unless Luke explicitly asked for him.

Khan wanted to know more about Martha, but he felt sure that Jenna would reveal a few things later that day. Moreover, he had already accepted the fact that Jenna wouldn't tell him everything, which was obviously fine. She and Martha deserved to have their secrets.

Monica was the only real problem, and Khan didn't know how to deal with it. Avoiding her sounded bad and unfair, but Khan felt that seeing her would only worsen the situation.

Khan had crossed a line. He had done something that he couldn't take back, and he wasn't even sure how much he regretted that choice. Khan honestly didn't know how things would end up if he happened to be alone with Monica again.

"[I'm a bit lost]," Khan admitted. "[I wonder if I have to blame my element for putting me into these situations]."

Jenna lifted her head, and Khan opened his eyes to inspect her expression. He found a bit of pity there, which left him confused and surprised.

"[Khan, the mana affects us a lot]," Jenna explained. "[It alters our perception, feelings, and thoughts. It can add strange habits to our behavior and more, but I don't think this is the case]."

"[What makes you say this]?" Khan wondered.

"[Khan]," Jenna called as she reached Khan's cheeks, "[You are young, but you have already seen so much. You live with a curse that haunts you every time you fall asleep. Don't blame your element when you do something that you like]."

Khan honestly found it hard to accept those words. He would have even disregarded them if they had come out of someone else's mouth. However, he couldn't contradict Jenna when it came to mana, and he even trusted her judgment a lot.

"[Are you saying that I like to cause messy situations]?" Khan asked.

"[I'm saying that it's okay to want to relax a bit]," Jenna stated. "[You don't need to blame your element when you don't act all perfect]."

Khan didn't know what to say, but his silence seemed to satisfy Jenna. She didn't want answers, and she didn't even care about discussing that topic. Making Khan aware of that idea was already enough.

"[Right]," Khan eventually announced. "[We ran into some troubles with Orlats after the dinner. I have hinted at our cooperation to gain some leverage and settle for a second meeting]."

"[Caja has already put her trust into you]," Jenna exclaimed. "[I also know your true character. I'm sure you didn't put my species in danger]."

"[I still don't feel too good about it]," Khan revealed. "[I don't like the Orlats either, but I couldn't think of other ways]."

"[Caja didn't say anything specific]," Jenna responded, "[But you have already gained some authority among my species. Having our trust means that you can use it to benefit your situation]."

"[That feels cold]," Khan uttered.

"[Did you have bad intentions when you mentioned my species]?" Jenna asked.

"[Not at all]," Khan stated. "[I mentioned you only because I knew that the Orlats were already aware of your presence here]."

"[Did you make things hard for us]?" Jenna continued.

"[I wouldn't be able to live with myself in that case]," Khan admitted.

"[Why are you worrying then]?" Jenna giggled. "[I really found the oddest human in the universe]."

"[What do you mean]?" Khan wondered.

"[Power can be addicting]," Jenna explained. "[Humans are known for their greed, so seeing one of them who fears it so much is surprising]."

"[I don't fear power]," Khan frowned. "[I seek it]."

"[I'm not talking about your mana]," Jenna pointed out as she left Khan's head to run her fingers on his scar. "[You are selfless. I can also say that you are quite merciless toward yourself, but you get all worried when you have to rule over others]."

Khan finally understood what Jenna meant. She wasn't talking about his personal power. She was speaking about his current ability to speak for the Nele's species.

"[I-]," Khan said before hesitating for a second. "[I don't want to rule over others. I don't want that responsibility]."

"[That's not up to you to decide]," Jenna revealed a gentle smile. "[Different cultures and species have given birth to countless definitions, but that doesn't change the truth. A true leader is chosen by others, and Caja decided to trust you for that role]."

The word "leader" sounded strange in Khan's mind. He usually preferred to act alone, but he found various reasons for that behavior, especially after reviewing it.

Khan had often taken the mantle of the leader during tragedies, but he had never aimed to become one in normal times. He didn't want any additional responsibility when he could barely take care of himself.

Yet, it seemed that people kept adding value to his figure. Khan had experienced that on Nitis, Ecoruta, and even Reebfell due to his job as a professor. He refused the idea, but he had to admit that many were already willing to listen to his orders.

"[Well, you can always run away]," Jenna chuckled while bringing her hands back to Khan's face. "[I would even come with you]."

"[I guess I still have a lot to learn about myself]," Khan sighed while laying back on the bed and letting Jenna fall on him.

"[Isn't that fine]?" Jenna asked. "[Your curse made you hasty, but you can't rush some things. You know your dark and good sides. You should focus on expressing the entirety of yourself now]."

"[I should train more]," Khan stated.

"[I was talking about Monica]," Jenna pouted.

"[I'm not in the right mind to deal with Monica]," Khan admitted. "[I'll just make mistakes if I decide something now, and I don't want to hurt anyone]."

"[Are you sure you aren't running away]?" Jenna asked.

"[I don't really know]," Khan replied, "[But that's the problem, right]?"

Jenna stared at Khan for a few seconds before heaving a sigh and laying back on his chest. She wasn't too happy about that outcome, but she didn't mind it too much either. After all, she could have Khan all for herself because of that.

"[I'll let you win this one]," Jenna eventually said, "[But be sure to cuddle me a lot]."

"[I would have done that anyway]," Khan chuckled, and the topic ended.

Khan and Jenna spent the rest of the day in peace, without worrying too much about the outside world. They exchanged a few details about the previous night, but they never lingered too much on those events.

The waiters were quick, so Khan and Jenna never lacked food. No one bothered them either, so they could focus on casual talks and intimate moments.

Still, it didn't take long before Khan restored his tight training schedule. He had a lot on his mind, and he lacked the power to solve many of his problems, so he immersed himself in what he did best.

Jenna complained from time to time to get free cuddles, but Khan soon understood that she used her whims to enforce breaks on his training schedule. Moreover, she never failed to keep track of his progression and correct him during his exercises.

The synthetic mana couldn't make Khan experience the full potential of the Nele's arts, but it allowed him to learn their fundamentals faster. Khan paired that training with his regular exercises, including those with the flight simulator, and time inevitably flowed quickly in his perspective.

The lack of external influences, the room's isolated environment, and the building's services allowed Khan and Jenna to ignore the outside world as long as they liked.

Martha and the others were also busy with the investigation, especially now that they had gained access to valuable connections to the underground world. Only Luke, Master Ivor, and Bruce had the chance to bother Khan, but none of them interrupted his time with Jenna.

Days went by in complete peace. Khan's phone never rang. No one disturbed his full immersion in his training, and his relationship with Jenna managed to improve even further in that environment.

Khan and Jenna struggled occasionally, but they eventually reached a decent balance. Their relationship deepened, and they started to share personal secrets with stories about their lives.

Jenna was an incredible consultant since she challenged Khan to explore the depths of his character. She actually did that on purpose to help him discover more about himself, which further deepened his connection with the mana.

As for Khan, he helped Jenna with her urges. She also discovered new parts of herself during that period since Khan could give her an idea of what a relationship was like.

The peaceful time came to an end when Khan's phone finally rang. Almost two weeks had passed since the meeting with the Orlats, so Khan and Jenna didn't feel surprised when they read the contents of Luke's message.

'I have the authorization for the dock,' Khan and Jenna read from the wall where Luke's message was displayed.

Khan exchanged a series of messages with Luke before starting to prepare. He and Jenna didn't have much, and the fourth asteroid offered Milia 222's standard services, so it didn't take long before the two left the room to head down.

Lunchtime was still a few hours away, so Khan and Jenna expected the main hall to be empty. Yet, Luke had prepared a surprise for them since the event was quite meaningful.

Khan and Jenna found Luke, Bruce, Master Ivor, Francis, Monica, and Martha waiting for them in the main hall. The six were standing into two lines to create a passage, and they were even performing military salutes to add meaning to the departure. Also, all of them had brownish patches under their noses.

That scene obviously wasn't for Khan. Luke wanted to show utter respect toward Jenna and improve his relationship with her species. Still, Jenna only showed an aloof face to underline the distance between her and that group.

"At ease," Khan joked as he approached Luke. "I believe everything went well with the Orlats."

"Indeed," Luke revealed a smile as he broke his salute. "Darrell, Isaac, Claudia, and Amanda have already joined some illegal activities. Monica and Martha will come next."

"That's great," Khan exclaimed, but those words forced him to look toward Monica.

Monica's poker face was perfect as always. Her calm smile didn't waver even when she met Khan's eyes, but the two weeks of training showed their results at that point.

The room was full of synthetic mana, but the people inside it affected that energy with their mere presence. The changes were slight, but Khan felt able to see them and understand what they meant in Monica's case.

'She is livid,' Khan concluded in his mind.

"I'll update you whenever I can," Khan promised while bringing his attention back to Luke.

"Do it only if it's safe," Luke warned, "And don't worry about money. Pursue any lead with any method you can find."

"I will," Khan replied before walking forward.

Master Ivor and Francis were the next on the line, and Khan exchanged a simple nod with them. Jenna followed him closely, and she almost predicted that he would stop when he reached Martha and Monica.

"Be careful out there," Martha voiced in a slightly cheerful tone.

"I'm always careful," Khan joked.

"I'm worried about your destination now," Martha responded.

Everyone in the hall probably knew about Khan's destination, but Martha still decided to be vague. Khan revealed a smile, and he bent forward to whisper words that only she could hear. "I'm only a call away from coming back."

"You don't have to worry about me," Martha whispered while diverting her gaze to avoid looking at Khan's intense eyes.

"I can't help it," Khan said. "So, try to be careful, and don't hesitate to call me if you need help."

Martha felt forced to raise her gaze. Her stubbornness wanted her to refuse or send Khan away through a complaint, but she gave in when she noticed Jenna in the corner of her vision.

"Okay," Martha muttered, and Khan straightened his back to turn toward Monica.

"Have a nice trip," Monica exclaimed through her elegant manners. She even performed a slight bow to appear more detached.

Khan didn't ignore the matter during his training. He didn't even try to stop thinking about it. Exploring himself meant learning what he liked, which involved Monica.

"Monica," Khan called in a serious tone. "Lend me your ear for a second."

Monica's eyes flickered, but she still obeyed. She removed the curls from her left side and let Khan bend toward her. She did her best to retain her aloofness, but a tremor ran through her when Khan's warm breath hit her ear and neck. Yet, only Jenna noticed that reaction.

"We'll talk about that when I come back," Khan whispered, and Monica retracted her head a bit to glance at his expression.

Khan tried his best not to hide anything. He wanted to convey his real feelings through his expression, but that turned out to be complicated due to how unclear they were.

Monica saw some hesitation, regret, and honesty on Khan's face. However, she didn't care about any of that. She simply liked that Khan had taken the time to address the matter. Confirming that the kiss had been more than a random action fueled by booze was more than enough for her.

Khan didn't linger too long in that gesture. He straightened his back and left Monica to exchange a polite nod with Bruce, who appeared on the verge of saying something before choosing to remain silent.

The goodbyes ended there. Khan ignored everyone as he took Jenna's hand and led her outside the building. The two picked up two backpacks that Luke had left for them in front of the exit before making their way toward the street.

A luxurious car was waiting for Khan and Jenna. The two quickly went inside it and found a Nele driver who waited for the doors to close before setting off.

One of the passenger's seats had a metal casket resting on it, and its sight didn't surprise Khan. He directly opened it to seize a rectangular dark-blue chip from its insides and place it on his phone.

The screen flickered as it absorbed the data stored in the chip until a symbol became clear. An image depicting seven spheres connected by a line that ran through their center appeared on his phone before vanishing as soon as Khan touched it.

Khan browsed through his phone until he reached the magical item's section, where he found a new label added to the list. The words "222 passage" confirmed that he had obtained the authorization for the dock.

Jenna and Khan spent the rest of the trip checking the contents of their backpacks. They had planned that matter with Luke, so they could find everything and more inside them. Clothes, ointments, and a few devices meant to help during the investigation ran through Khan's vision before he closed the item.

The car left Khan and Jenna near an elevator that brought them right before the hangar for the third asteroid. The two went through the lines quickly, and Khan even used his new knowledge to lower his spiked hair after crossing the short-distance teleport.

Khan and Jenna attracted a lot of attention, but they ignored everything as they took another elevator to descend to the city. From there, they found a cab that led them right under the hangar for the fourth asteroid.

Another elevator and another hangar went by before a familiar and unfamiliar scenery unfolded in Khan's vision. The insides of the fourth asteroid were no different from the previous. Four vast streets stood above a shining city, but Khan had seen enough of Milia 222 to notice the differences.

The fourth asteroid was equally split among the six species that inhabited Milia 222. Even the xenophobic Bise accepted to live there due to the meaning behind that area.

Except for the Nele, the various species couldn't see Milia 222 as their real home. They had other planets, space stations, and more, but that didn't prevent some citizens from gaining a special affection toward those asteroids.

A significant part of Milia 222's population was sedentary and didn't engage in interplanetary travels. That had given birth to something akin to national pride as time passed, which turned the fourth asteroid into a quasi-capital.

Yearly celebrations and other events happened on the fourth asteroid due to its diverse population. Its overall style resembled the first asteroid, but the stark lower number of tourists made it closer to Milia 222's core culture.

Khan had seen enough of Milia 222 to understand that he was finally in front of its real face. The first asteroid had too many tourists, the second was too human, and the third was too Nele. Yet, the fourth was a clear expression of how diverse that place could be.

The different shops, buildings, and people that ended in Khan's vision were part of that expression, but he couldn't linger too long in that inspection. Something felt off, but he struggled to find the source of that sensation.

Khan took a deep breath before ruling out the air from the possible sources. He couldn't even see anything special on the dome or in the distance, so the answer to his doubts became clear. The synthetic mana had to be to blame for that strange sensation.

Jenna noticed that Khan was looking for something, but that wasn't the right moment to stay still. Everyone was looking at them, and the Orlats even started to group up to exchange murmurs. The two had become the street's main attraction, and she didn't want to remain there for too long.

"[Is everything okay]?" Jenna whispered.

Khan eyed Jenna and frowned. She would typically be the first to sense something odd in the synthetic mana, and he knew that she wouldn't hesitate to tell him what was happening in that case. However, the lack of explanations meant that she was unaware of that feeling.

"[Do you feel anything strange]?" Khan asked while moving his eyes through the pale-blue ceiling. "[It resembles a scent, but it's fainter and not exactly bad. Just odd]."

Jenna didn't answer. She inspected Khan to check if he was okay, and she even pressed a hand on his chest to gain a better understanding of the flow of his mana. Of course, the gesture only intensified the murmurs resounding around them.

"[You are in perfect condition]," Jenna commented before glaring at one of the groups of Orlats near the edges of the purple halo created by her clip.

"[So, am I imagining this]?" Khan asked.

"[Maybe it's a reaction to the sudden exposure to a crowded environment]," Jenna guessed. "[You did train in a room in the end. You might need time to get used to your new perception]."

Both Khan and Jenna knew that the explanation didn't quite fit. Khan would have felt something similar right after leaving Luke's building otherwise. Still, he also grew annoyed by the current situation, so he temporarily dismissed the issue.

The murmurs turned into gasps when Khan took Jenna's hand and led her toward the nearest elevator. Jenna wore her aloof face during the walk, but she had to hide behind her hair when it became impossible for her to contain her smile.

"[Everyone will think that we are a couple]," Jenna giggled once the two reached the privacy of the elevator. "[Well, they probably already thought that]."

Jenna expected Khan to scold her or give her the chance to tease him again, but he appeared too distracted to hear her words. His eyes fell on the scenery outside the elevator's transparent surfaces as soon as their hands separated. He seemed drawn by the sensation that only he could feel.

Chapter 367 Nasty

A sea of buildings with different styles filled Khan's vision. He could easily recognize the tall and modern structures belonging to humankind and the various purple areas marking the presence of Nele.

The same went for the buildings belonging to the Orlats. They weren't too tall, but their bright banners and flashing signboards made them easy to spot even in a city crowded with structures. Someone would even describe them as vulgar.

Khan wasn't too familiar with the Fuveall's architecture, but spotting structures that suited what he knew about that species wasn't too hard.

The Fuveall claimed to have achieved a perfect balance between technology and mana, and many flashy structures carried those features. Those buildings shared part of the human style, but they added long and bright tubes over their surface. Azure mana flowed inside those channels and created a glowing spectacle that was hard to miss.

Khan had to rely on his instincts and general knowledge to link other styles to the remaining species. The city still carried two more very different types of structures, and he actually had to use the absence of striking features to reach his conclusions.

Some of the buildings were plain, to say the least. They appeared relatively modern and shared a few details with the smooth and dark human architecture, but they lacked the usual large windows.

Their metal also felt odd. Khan wasn't an expert in that field, and the distance from the city could trick his senses. Still, something in the alloy's slightly clearer color or seeming frailty made those plain buildings appear out of context in such diverse scenery.

Khan could only blame the results of his training with Jenna for those sensations. He couldn't pinpoint the exact reason behind his thoughts, but he believed that they came from the influence those buildings had on the synthetic mana in the area.

The Tors were the only species suitable for that style. Those aliens were famous for their jealousy toward their arts, so it made sense for their architecture to lack any detail that could reveal their customs, at least in that diverse environment.

The last style involved large pale-red buildings with yellowish tiles coming out of their surface to mark the end of their floors. Those structures looked quite poor compared to their clearly modern peers, but Khan knew that appearances alone weren't enough to evaluate their qualities.

Khan didn't see any flashy signboards or large banners on those red buildings. It almost seemed that they didn't want to attract people who didn't know what they meant. That allowed Khan to connect them to the Bise due to their xenophobic nature.

The diverse and wonderful scenery couldn't stop Khan from thinking about the odd sensation that had welcomed him as soon as he arrived on the fourth asteroid. He didn't know what to do with it, and everything about it was so unclear that he couldn't find anything to study.

The elevator eventually landed on Lower Level 1. Khan and Jenna exited the machine and found themselves on a vast sidewalk that provided good examples of what they could expect from the city. Jenna obviously didn't need those reminders, but Khan greatly appreciated them, and some curiosity even made its way through his thoughts because of them.

The streets in that area weren't crowded. Jenna and Khan had descended on the city's outskirts in the end. Yet, the two could still see a few groups hanging out in corners or in front of shops.

Surprisingly enough, those groups didn't stick to a single species. Khan didn't see any Nele, but he noticed humans, Fuveall, and Orlats walking or exchanging casual talks as they stood in lines or simply sat on partially hidden areas of the sidewalks.

Everyone there was also quite young. Those groups weren't doing anything special. They were only enjoying their time without letting the differences among their species get in the way of their friendship.

Khan wanted to let that surprising sight overwhelm him with amazement and curiosity. Still, he felt unable to drop his guard due to the odd sensation that continued to assault his perception. His paranoia didn't make things better either and forced him to fall into a battle-ready mindset.

"[Did the sensation change after arriving here]?" Jenna asked.

"[No]," Khan revealed. "[It's basically identical, which only makes it stranger]."

Jenna didn't add anything. She inspected Khan before moving her attention to her surroundings only to bring her eyes back on Khan again. She wanted to find something that could help him, but her senses turned out to be useless in that situation.

"Imminent chaos," Khan repeated the words that Jenna had said during their first encounter.

Jenna didn't want to add worries to Khan's mind, but she couldn't lie to him either. She performed a slight nod before reaffirming her position. "[I can't know for sure. My prediction could be wrong too]."

"[What about alternative causes]?" Khan wondered.

"[There might be many of them]," Jenna exclaimed, "[But most lead back to your element. This asteroid sees many strange materials and items. There is a high chance that one or more of them caused a reaction in your mana]."

Khan knew that Jenna's hypothesis made sense, but that wasn't enough to disperse his paranoia. Still, he didn't have solutions either, so he could only hope to grow used to the new sensation before it started affecting his behavior.

"[All of this might be a good thing]," Jenna eventually declared before showing her sweet smile when she saw Khan's frown.

"[If something really happens, at least I'll be with you]," Jenna explained. "[We'll also be among my species later on. I can't imagine a better situation where to face that problem]."

The frown on Khan's face instantly melted, and he stretched his arm to reach Jenna's hand. The gesture didn't go unnoticed, and most bystanders ended up focusing on them, but Khan ignored everyone as he led Jenna through the sidewalk.

Luke had provided Khan and Jenna with precise instructions. The dock was right under the city and expanded until the bottom of the asteroid, but its entrances were rather secretive.

Moreover, the six species had control over specific paths, and Khan had to use those handled by humans. Jenna could have asked the Nele to take care of that, but Khan had already decided to keep that official part on Luke and humankind.

Finding a cab was never a problem on Milia 222, and the fourth asteroid wasn't an exception. Jenna and Khan soon entered a car with a Nele driver and waited in silence for the vehicle to reach its destination.

The city on Lower Level 1 had sections dedicated to the various species, but the shared areas made up most of it. Khan could get a good grasp of that diversity from the window, and his appreciation for the fourth asteroid only increased because of it.

Khan even managed to get a good look at the Bise during the slow parts of the travel. Those aliens were humanoid, generally taller than two meters, but their faces made them unique from Khan's perspective.

The Bise had horse-like heads covered in short fur and with tiny horns growing right above their usually dark eyes. A pair of long, pointy ears lay at the side of their faces, but their earring had no problems.

The Global Army didn't know much about the Bise, but Khan had still managed to learn important information regarding their overall power. Their physique was firm and burly, which made them stronger than humans before the evolution. Their nails and teeth were also natural weapons, which they often added to their martial arts or techniques.

The Bise's peculiar's appearance obviously added fuel to Khan's curiosity, but he knew that getting close to that species would be hard. The situation was even worse with the Tors, but he hoped that the dock would give him a chance.

The cab dropped Jenna and Khan in front of a casino equally shared by humans and Orlats. The building had a bright sign that hid the pale-blue light of the dome and filled the street with orange shades, and two long lines stretched from its guarded large entrance.

The addition of a purple shade to the scenery attracted the attention of the bored customers in the lines. Jenna had to wear her bright clip in that situation, and she even had to endure the many gazes that followed her and Khan as they turned the closest isolated corner to get some privacy.

Khan could only wear his most sympathetic expression while he watched Jenna covering herself with the spray that suppressed her pheromones. They were going into neutral territory, so that process was inevitable, but she still expressed how pissed she was with glares.

The two soon left the corner and went back to the casino. Luke couldn't come up with special authorizations, and standing out wasn't ideal, so Khan and Jenna put themselves in the line and waited for their turn to arrive.

The wait was uneventful, mostly due to Khan and Jenna's wary behavior. Khan stood in line with a hand placed on his sheath while Jenna directly drew a sharp root from a hidden pocket of her dress.

That behavior was normal for a Nele, and Khan was with Jenna, so no one in the line complained. The various bystanders simply kept themselves outside of the range of the purple light to avoid causing problems.

A whole hour had to pass before Jenna and Khan could interact with one of the human soldiers guarding the entrance. Filling the simple form on the device that the man carried got them inside, and the flashy spectacle of the casino finally ended up in their vision.

Various noises, lights, and occasional shouts created a messy but tidy environment. Slots machines filled with people glued to their screens occupied the whole right side of the main hall, while different attractions stretched on the left.

A red carpet filled every corner of Khan's vision, and the yellow walls, paired with relatively dim illumination, created an environment completely different from the outside world. Jenna and Khan felt to have landed on a new planet, but those sensations were normal on Milia 222.

A waitress wearing revealing clothes tried to approach the two as soon as they entered, but Khan promptly waved his hand to send her away. His attention was on the two paths at the end of the hall. One led deeper into the first floor, while the other was a fancy staircase.

Luke's instructions had been pretty clear, so Khan and Jenna didn't hesitate to move toward the staircase. Elevators appeared on their left before they could reach the second floor, and the two directly entered one of them.

'The scanner is above the buttons,' Khan repeated in his mind as he picked up his phone.

The doors closed, and the elevator began to move since someone else had called it. However, everything stopped when Khan showed the 222 passage to a spot right above the buttons.

Mechanical noises came out of the elevator before a faint light shot out of the metal to fall on Khan's phone. The scanner studied the image on the screen for a few seconds before the machine changed direction and started to dive at high speed.

Jenna wielded her sharp root again. The instructions ended there, so nothing was certain anymore. Her species also occupied the dock, but she had to go through the human channels first, which were far from safe for her.

The elevator stopped after a while and opened in front of a long corridor filled with bright white light. Khan and Jenna couldn't see anything else from their position, and their senses also failed to go past the bluish surfaces.

The secrecy of the location felt normal, and the two couldn't back down now. Khan and Jenna stepped forward and crossed the long corridor until they reached a turn that led to a metal door.

"[Do you still feel it]?" Jenna asked while Khan took out his phone and prepared the 222 passage.

"[I do]," Khan sighed as he showed the screen to the door. "[That makes it even stranger, right]?"

"[It only means that the synthetic mana here carries the same nature that triggers that sensation]," Jenna tried to reassure, but it was clear that she didn't believe that statement.

The exit opened to reveal a small room that featured a counter and two doors at its sides. A middle-aged man stood behind the desk, and he didn't hide his surprise when he saw Jenna.

"I need to see your permit," The man muttered while his eyes remained glued on Jenna.

Jenna showed nothing but coldness while Khan approached the counter and lifted his phone so that the man could see it. The latter left his chair and inspected the screen through a transparent device with black metal edges.

The man murmured inaudible words while he rolled and inclined the device to inspect the screen from different angles. The process went on for entire minutes, and Khan had to suppress his curiosity to avoid asking questions.

It sounded odd to put the same image through so many scanners, but Khan couldn't complain. The dock probably was one of the most secretive locations on Milia 222, so it made sense for forgeries to exist, especially with the Fuveall on those asteroids.

The man took his time, but he eventually put down his device and gave one long look to Khan and Jenna before pressing a button under the counter.

The door on the right opened and showed another long corridor. However, that path had a series of devices and even more scanners that wanted to go through Khan and Jenna's items.

The two followed the instructions until the corridor ended and finally opened into a vast area that resembled a hangar. Half-dismantled ships, large boxes covered in plastic materials, and various desks filled the place. Still, Khan and Jenna's attention inevitably fell on the many humans standing next to those items.

The man behind the counter had only been a first-level warrior, and his appearance had also hinted at the fact that a long time had passed since his last battle. Yet, the people in the hangar had a far different atmosphere around them.

'Are they all ex-soldiers?' Khan wondered while performing a cautious nod.

The hangar contained eleven men and women. Most of them appeared over forty, but none had traces of naivety or kindness. Their faces were cold, and their expressions carried pure distrust and wariness.

'Three second-level warriors, eight first-level,' Khan counted in his mind as his wariness intensified since no one replied to his polite gesture.

"Do I need to show my authorization to anyone?" Khan eventually asked in the hope of dispersing that tense atmosphere.

"Oh!" One of the second-level warriors, a woman, exclaimed. "You are already inside the dock. You don't need general authorizations anymore."

The answer didn't make Jenna and Khan relax. The woman had worn a smile, but her expression was firm, clearly forced. She wasn't used to lying, and the two could see right through her, especially since they could sense the faint stench that her presence added to the synthetic mana around her.

Khan was honestly unclear about the reason behind that tension. He could accept that the presence of a stranger could cause a similar situation, but its intensity was a bit off. There had to be more to it.

The answer became evident after Khan witnessed casual and sporadic glances toward Jenna. The men and women in the hangar were doing their best to hide that gesture, but it happened so many times that Khan easily connected the dots.

"We aren't here to cause problems," Khan announced. "We just want to fit in."

"Fit in?" Another second-level warrior, a man, repeated. "Where exactly?"

'Is this a trick question?' Khan wondered.

Truth be told, Khan was utterly in the dark at that point. Luke had granted him access to the dock, but he was on his own now. He didn't even know what kind of underground society the humans had established there.

Mentioning the Cobsend family would do no good. Khan had to keep Luke outside of that mission. Still, he didn't expect things to get so hard right away.

"What do you want to let us pass?" Khan questioned while opting for a partially submissive approach. He couldn't get cocky or risk someone's anger while Jenna lacked any kind of support from her species.

"Pass?" The man repeated before wearing a fake smile. "We aren't guards or anything like that. You are free to go where you like."

The man didn't sound convincing at all, and Khan started to look around to evaluate the amount of wealth contained in the area. Life was cheap on Milia 222, but those goods weren't. Fighting in that space could probably lead to a real mess.

"Right!" The third second-level warrior, another man, suddenly exclaimed. "They have warned us about your arrival. Welcome, welcome. Why don't you follow us to the next room?"

That was a blatant lie. Jenna and Khan knew that Luke didn't contact anyone inside the dock. He simply couldn't achieve something like that in such a little time and without involving the higher-ups of his family.

Various hypothetical situations ran through Khan's mind as he tried to figure out what those people wanted. He had seen similar behaviors in the Slums. There was a high chance that those men and women were simply hoping to rip off some newbie, but Khan couldn't exclude nastier options.

The lack of answers and options forced Khan to wear a fake smile and nod. He took Jenna's hand while the third second-level warrior pointed his hand toward the end of the hangar, but the reactions of the people there didn't match what he had seen everywhere else.

The gesture surprised the men and women in the hangar, but Khan also saw glimpses of interest and excitement. The nastier options grew more probable in his mind as the group basically surrounded him and Jenna to escort them outside the area, but he was ready for the worst.

The new area turned out to be similar to the first. It was another vast hangar without multiple items on its floor. A few large boxes stood in the corner, and the silhouette of a small vehicle stood out from under a black blanket placed on another side, but the place was mostly empty.

"I don't want to know anything," The first second-level warrior, the woman, announced while spreading her arms and walking toward a door at the end of the hangar.

"Come on, Goldie," The third second-level warrior called. "The last time, you didn't mind that she was a woman."

"It's different with a Nele," Goldie responded. "That shit is too hot."

"Hot indeed," The second second-level warrior laughed while inspecting Jenna from head to toe.

"Well," The third second-level warrior uttered while approaching Khan's free side and placing a hand on his right shoulder. "We can't waste this gift. Good job, kiddo. What's your-? No, wait. Did you at least prepare an alibi?"

"Alibi?" Khan asked, pretending not to know where that conversation was going.

"Oh, my," The third second-level warrior gasped as he squeezed Khan's shoulder. "Don't tell me that you came here unprepared."

"Sir, I'm afraid I'm not following you," Khan responded in a firm tone.

"Go ahead, Joel," The third second-level warrior mocked. "Make him able to follow."

"Kiddo, how many know that you are here?" Joel, the second second-level warrior, questioned.

"How many would know where to search for you?"

Khan opened his mouth to answer, but the second-level warrior at his side raised his hand to interrupt him. He even used his head to point at Joel.

"All of that doesn't matter either," Joel continued. "You are here, alone. None of us will testify against each other. You just have to hope that we find something decent from your background check once we are done with your friend. Your very life will depend on it."

"You wouldn't care even if I were the descendant of a wealthy family?" Khan asked, trying to hint at the fact that he had a good background.

"Wealthy kids usually come down here with a full platoon," The third second-level warrior scoffed. "You came without any leverage. Actually, you decided to bring a surprisingly good reward. Aren't you too reckless?"

"Leave him be, Jonathan," Joel smirked. "He is just a kid. How do you expect him to understand this stuff?"

"You noticed that I'm with a Nele," Khan stated in a calm tone. "Aren't you afraid that you might ruin some important political meeting? You risk declaring war on two species."

"Who is risking anything?" Jonathan asked while pulling Khan's shoulder to bring him closer to his face. "I didn't see anyone coming from the casino's entrance today. Did you see anyone?"

"Boring work as always, sir," Joel joked, and the rest of the crew laughed.

"See?" Jonathan asked. "You have never left that elevator."

That blatant lie wouldn't work in most places, but Milia 222 and its illegal dock on the fourth asteroid were an exception. No one kept tabs on those going and flying away there. Someone's word had to be enough in the absence of proof.

Luke could testify in Khan's case, but the casino probably had no way to prove whether he and Jenna had actually gone to the dock or had lost themselves gambling.

"Out of curiosity," Khan muttered in a tone that struggled to hide his real feelings. "What kind of protection do you have? Are you the leader of this crew?"

Goldie burst into a loud laugh, and many of her coworkers imitated her, but Jonathan took that mockery well. He only shook his shoulders while remaining silent.

"We have a boss, obviously," One of the first-level warriors declared.

"Shut up, you idiot," Jonathan snapped. "Do you want to take the kiddo's place?"

"I'm sorry, Jonathan," The woman said before lowering her head.

The attention quickly went back to Khan and Jenna. She was suppressing her pheromones, but the group still appeared able to eat her alive. The scene would fill anyone with immense discomfort, but she was used to it.

"Where were we?" Jonathan questioned after things calmed down.

"Which way is the actual dock?" Khan asked. "This place can't just be debris, broken ships, and vast halls."

"It's on that side," Jonathan declared while pointing at the wall at his right. "Why? Do you want us to drive you there? I knew there was something decent in you."

Khan revealed his fake smile again, but his mana was behaving in ways that only Jenna could sense. She knew what was about to happen, and she couldn't be happier.

The many hypotheses Khan had come up with during the conversation had vanished when he understood what was happening. That group wanted to hurt Jenna, so his many options shrunk to a single one.

"Now," Jonathan called while stepping in front of Khan to approach Jenna. "Why don't we get to know each other?"

Jenna remained still. Jonathan's smirking face grew bigger in her vision, but that expression suddenly froze. Everything slowed down in her eyes. She saw the exact moment when Jonathan understood that something was off.

Khan placed a hand on Jonathan's waist and unleashed the Wave spell. A burst of purple-red mana came out of his palm and shattered the man's clothes instantly before moving to his skin.

Jonathan's reactions were quite insane. He kicked the floor while releasing a significant amount of mana that made him shoot in the air and crash on the tall ceiling before falling near the wall.

The others retreated at the sight of the destructive spell. They saw the wave of mana digging a long and deep hole on the floor, and they had no intention of ending in its range.

"Who the fuc-?!" Jonathan tried to curse, but blood suddenly filled his mouth and prevented him from finishing his sentence.

The event forced Jonathan to assess his condition. His eyes widened in terror when he glanced at his left side. A large patch of his skin had disappeared. He could even see some of his ribs among all the blood that flowed from there.

The realization stopped the flow of adrenaline. Jonathan's legs lost strength, and his knees hit the floor. A violent cough took control of his breathing, and his condition only worsened because of that.

Khan couldn't help but be surprised by Jonathan's quick reaction. It was rare for a second-level warrior to survive the Wave spell from such a short range, but that had to be expected from people who had lived in a dangerous environment for a good part of their lives.

Still, flaws in the group's behavior became impossible to miss during that critical moment. None of them appeared able to perform essential teamwork or make a joint decision. Half of them were stuck trying to understand what to do with Jonathan, while the others were preparing to fight Khan.

Khan could feel his darkness trying to take over his mind. Those people had threatened Jenna. The sole idea of what could have happened to her filled him with cold bloodlust. He wanted to kill Jonathan and the others, but that would probably mark the end of his mission in the dock.

Jenna didn't share Khan's restraints. She saw Joel pointing a hand toward Khan, so she threw her sharp root toward him. The man was too focused on Khan to notice the weapon in time to dodge it entirely, but he still managed to half-crouch on his right and end up with a long but shallow cut on his left forearm.

Joel moved his attention to Jenna now, but his eyes widened in terror when he saw that his left arm wouldn't move. Flowing mana through it only triggered a wave of pain that made black blood come out of the injury.

Goldie was keeping herself out of the fight, but the first-level warriors wanted to help. However, a tremor ran through the synthetic mana around them and disrupted their balance. Some had to disperse their attacks to prevent them from backfiring, while others directly fell on the floor.

Khan only needed one second to realize that he could press on. His target was clear, and he could pursue it now that Jenna had taken control of the situation.

Jonathan managed to raise his head only to see a foot filling his vision. The attack flung him away from the floor and slammed his back on the wall.

Khan reached Jonathan before his feet could go back on the floor to launch a precise kick on his crotch. Jonathan voiced a suppressed scream as he slid through the wall until he sat powerlessly in front of Khan.

Purple-red light filled Jonathan's vision. He felt weak, but he could see Khan's right hand glowing and taking the shape of a short sword.

Jonathan wanted to dodge and scream, but his body didn't answer him. He could only watch as the glowing short sword grew closer to his forehead before his courage gave in and closed his eyes.

A loud explosion resounded right next to Jonathan's left ear. Pain immediately spread from that spot and made him lie to his right. His confused and teary eyes opened to check on what had happened, and he almost stopped trusting them when he saw the huge hole that had appeared on the wall.

Khan didn't hesitate to stab his hand into the wall again, and the firm metal shattered as if it was glass. The hole enlarged until a fully-grown man could comfortably pass through it.

Loud noises came out of the hole, but Khan didn't check them. He turned only to smile when Jenna was running toward him. In a matter of seconds, she was holding his hand and jumping past the wall with him.

The scenery that unfolded in Khan's vision was hard to describe with a single adjective, but "messy" was the most suitable word his brain could find.

An immense and bright environment expanded from the hole and stretched way past the range of Khan's vision. Countless different types of mana also hit his senses and made it hard for him to rely on them. He could only use his eyes to study everything while he was busy running.

The area was mostly open. Khan saw buildings in the distance, but they were too far away to inspect them properly. The ceiling was flat and illuminated everything with Milia 222's iconic pale-blue light, but the smooth grey floor didn't send back any reflection or glow.

Khan could see multiple vehicles from his position. They were nothing more than small cars that hovered slightly above the floor while moving at high speed through that vast area.

The largest vehicles mostly consisted of small trucks with goods attached to their back. They flew farther away from the floor, but they remained dangerously close to it. There seemed to be some regulations at work there, but Khan couldn't be sure.

The vehicles appeared out of place in that crowded environment. They flew without caring about the many people on their way, and it seemed that the latter didn't mind them either.

The crowd was up to different tasks. The area was only a small fraction of the city above, but it remained vast enough to contain hundreds of people. Multiple groups occupied the floor, and most of them were pretty loud about their arguments.

Khan was in a hurry, but he still noticed a few peculiar situations. He saw a group of Orlats shouting at each other while standing next to three large metal boxes. They were arguing about the price of those goods, and they sounded unable to reach an agreement.

Another peculiar situation involved a proper fistfight. A human and a Fuveall were punching each other with a diverse crowd in a half-circle around them. An Orlats moved among them while waving her phone and shouting odds. She was taking bets that the bystanders didn't hesitate to place.

Another loud group involved a series of humans, Fuveall, and Orlats completely wasted. They chanted and hugged each other while waving their cups left and right, uncaring that booze poured on the floor.

The area was full of those messy events, and Khan couldn't find a single soldier or guard. Complete anarchy seemed to reign, and a smile inevitably appeared on Khan's face once he realized where he had ended. He felt the urge to laugh at those chaotic and funny sights.

Of course, the situation didn't allow Khan to lose himself in that mess. His senses had yet to get used to that new environment, but he didn't lose track of the enemies behind him.

Strangely enough, Joel had jumped through the hole and had started to chase after Khan and Jenna. Some of the first-level warriors in the previous room had even followed him, but Khan couldn't explain that behavior.

Khan and Jenna were in the open, and the area didn't lack witnesses. In theory, the plan of kidnapping Khan and having fun with Jenna secretly had already failed, but Joel and the others didn't give up on it just yet.

The fact that the pursuing group had no chance to reach Khan and Jenna didn't seem to be an issue either. Joel appeared almost desperate to catch up, even if his unresponsive left arm made him slower than the couple.

The chaos in the area didn't make Khan and Jenna pass unnoticed. Many glanced in the two's direction and even eyed the large hole in the building behind them. Yet, no one seemed to care. Everyone simply went on with their business.

'What is happening?' Khan couldn't help but wonder as he kept inspecting the area.

Hypotheses flowed through Khan's mind as details became clear in his vision. Soon, a few reasonable explanations survived among his jumbled thoughts, and all of them involved the absence of Nele in his immediate surroundings.

The crowd was diverse, but Khan mostly saw humans, Fuveall, and Orlats. He spotted a few tall silhouettes belonging to the Bise among that mess, but he failed to find his main target. Luckily for him, the Nele were too prideful to hide when dealing with other species.

'Do they hope to capture us before the Nele understand what's happening?' Khan wondered as he pointed with his head at the source of a purple glow partially hidden by the crowd and the ceiling's light.

The Nele were famous for their punishments toward those who tried to mistreat them. The desperation in Joel's face felt understandable now that Khan realized what would happen once Jenna spoke to her peers.

Nevertheless, Khan couldn't help but see Joel's efforts as pointless. The man was doomed. His desperation wouldn't make him faster.

"Ten thousand Credits if you catch these fugitives!" Joel suddenly shouted.

The mess in the area dampened Joel's voice, but his cry remained quite loud. Many heard it, and murmurs immediately started. It didn't take long before Khan and Jenna found a series of greedy eyes pointed in their direction.

"[We must hurry]," Jenna whispered as she tightened her grasp on Khan's hand.

Khan glanced at Jenna, and his mind went blank. The time spent with her allowed him to see past her cold face. He could see fear in her beautiful eyes, and that was enough to force his hand.

Khan abruptly halted his steps. Jenna didn't know what he had in mind, but she trusted him enough to stop next to him. The two had already crossed multiple groups, which put them in the middle of the crowd, and the few interested in the bounty didn't refrain from moving toward them.

'Even that Bise wants a piece,' Khan sighed in his mind when he noticed a tall figure making its way among the various group to approach his position.

"[Hop on me]," Khan ordered. "[Hide your face and protect your arms]."

Most of the people close to Khan had no interest in the bounty. Still, many remained in their position to observe the scene. Some placed bets, while a few decided to retreat to avoid getting caught in the mess.

A few words tried to reach Khan's ears. A human, two Orlats, and a Fuveall were already around him, and they tried to make him surrender peacefully, but his brain didn't hear anything.

One of the Orlats was so wary about the competition that he left his companion and tried to step forward, but the appearance of a purple-red glow forced him to give up on that idea.

Khan had joined his hands, and mana had started to leak out of his palms. The sight of the chaos element made many think twice about attacking him without a plan, and what followed only intensified their worries.

Khan separated his hands to create a long spear that brimmed with mana. The bright weapon shook violently as if it was about to explode, and many among the groups around Khan instantly retreated while voicing worried cries. Some even tried to reason with him, but he ignored those words.

Jenna was the only one not scared of Khan in that situation. She disregarded the violent mana between his palms and jumped on his back before adjusting her position.

The scene was quite incredible from the crowds' perspective. Khan had summoned enough mana to blow up a relatively large area. The groups near him knew that an eventual explosion would engulf them.

However, Jenna snuggled on Khan's back as if it was the safest place in the entire world. She wrapped her arms around his neck, uncaring that the glowing spear was close to them.

"[Your legs too]," Khan ordered when Jenna wrapped her legs around his waist.

Jenna nodded by rubbing her cheek on the back of Khan's head before hiding her face behind his neck. The synthetic mana in the area flowed toward her arms and legs, where it mixed with her skin and created a transparent membrane that resembled sweat.

Khan's senses still struggled to get a complete understanding of the area, but he could check his surroundings and the places slightly past them. He couldn't find any third-level warrior, and that filled him with confidence.

Jenna was ready, and the various groups were retreating, so Khan didn't hesitate. The glowing spear shattered and filled the crowd with intense panic. Screams resounded as people jumped to the floor in a desperate attempt to avoid the imminent explosion, but nothing similar happened.

The spear dispersed into a harmless purple-red cloud, and Khan sprinted right through it. He had yet to test the full potential of his body, but he didn't hold back a single whiff of mana in that situation.

The edges of Khan's vision became foggy. He couldn't express his peak speed with all those people around him, so he jumped to use heads and shoulders as footholds.

The high speed and the light steps made Khan's passage almost impossible to track by the first-level warriors. Only the second-level warriors noticed something, but Khan had already disappeared by the time they turned or lifted their heads.

The source of the purple glow grew closer as Khan advanced. Soon, he became able to recognize green figures among the sea of heads. He had finally found his target, and his eyes shone when he saw a vehicle floating on his path.

Khan put more strength on his right leg as he stepped on a Fuveall's shoulder. He performed a long leap before landing on the metal roof of the rectangular vehicle standing in his way.

The vehicle's windows went down, and two humans peeked out of them to check what had landed above them. However, the whole car shook as Khan jumped and flew above the crowd before landing in front of a green figure.

'I might have pushed myself farther away if I had more confidence in the Nele's arts,' Khan thought as he straightened his position and glanced at the vehicle behind him.

The space crossed with the last jump was by no means short, but Khan felt that he could do better. Yet, he had spent too little training with the Nele's arts to add them to his techniques. He had ideas, but he had never tested them out.

Khan didn't turn only to study his performance. The gesture allowed him to check Jenna's condition. The membrane on her arms and legs had dried up during the sprint, but she was fine. Her right forearm had a small dark patch that resembled a burn, but the injury was superficial.

On the contrary, Khan was far worse off, even if his condition remained quite healthy. The corners of his eyes, ears, nose, and the back of his hands itched. His skin had yet to get used to that speed, so burns had appeared on his extremities. Yet, they would all heal in a matter of hours.

Of course, the sprint had made most pursuers lose track of Khan and Jenna. Only the landing had brought the attention back to them, but those interested in the bounty were nowhere close.

"[Are you okay]?" Khan asked since Jenna had yet to leave his neck.

"[No, I'm deeply hurt]," Jenna complained as she tightened her embrace.

"[You are impossible]," Khan sighed and began to turn toward the green figure, but the arrival of a powerful presence forced both him and Jenna to look past it.

Khan had landed in front of a Nele, but the latter was only a first-level warrior. The abrupt arrival had actually scared the alien, who had taken a step back to rejoin the companions standing behind.

Ten Nele equipped with pendants, bracelets, or clips that emitted purple light stood in front of Khan. There were two second-level warriors in that group, but Khan and Jenna couldn't focus on them. Something stronger was about to show its face.

A tall and handsome Nele walked past the two second-level warriors and crossed their companions to reach a spot right in front of Khan. His dark-green hair fluttered with each step he took, and his piercing purple eyes showed nothing but coldness as they remained fixed on Khan.

The Nele didn't look older than thirty. His delicate facial features fought against the anger that tried to make its way into his expression, but Khan couldn't focus on any of that. The alien was a third-level warrior, and his intentions appeared far from friendly.

"[Maban]!" Jenna shouted, but her voice failed to spread since the Nele spoke in an even louder tone.

"[Filthy human]!" Maban exclaimed as his right arm performed a sharp movement. It moved behind his back to take something from his black jumper before snapping toward Khan.

Everything happened in an instant. Khan couldn't follow that gesture properly, but his pupils shrunk when he noticed something flying toward him.

The item moved too quickly. Khan didn't have the time to identify it, but he could see where it was going to land. His abdomen was the target, so he activated the [Blood Shield] to prepare for the worst.

Khan felt a hammer slamming on his abdomen and trying to pierce the thick layer of muscles that protected his internal organs. However, the array of clotted blood held strong, so the item ended up flinging him away.

The drawbacks of the [Blood Shield] hit Khan while he was still mid-air. He partially lost control of his body, and his chest grew heavy, but he forced himself to remain focused on his defensive technique.

The item eventually lost its momentum. Khan fell with his butt on the floor and felt the urge to lie down completely. Yet, he recalled Jenna at the last second, so he forced himself to keep his back straight.

His chest didn't like that effort. Khan felt unable to breathe, but he still saved Jenna from that fall. She wouldn't have had any problem dealing with it, but Khan's protective side was too powerful to suppress.

Jenna didn't hesitate to jump off Khan and step in front of him. She crouched toward him to check his condition, but he managed to muster a nod before a violent cough took control of his movements.

Jenna reached for Khan's abdomen and seized the sharp root stabbed in his clothes. She saw some blood on its tip, but the spot appeared insignificant. Yet, she still grabbed Khan's pullover and ripped it apart.

Khan was in no condition to stop Jenna. She quickly exposed his upper body and inspected his abdomen. She could find the injury opened by the root, but she couldn't sense any infection or trace of foreign mana when she passed her fingers over it.

Jenna sighed deeply after confirming that Khan was okay. His condition had yet to stabilize, but he didn't suffer any severe wounds. Still, that calm moment didn't last long. Anger soon took over her mind and made her snap back to her feet.

"[What are you even doing]?!" Jenna shouted as she turned toward Maban.

Maban didn't know how to take that scene. He had acted according to the Nele's customs, but he had left some room for his doubts. He only wanted to make Khan unable to fight, but the latter had come out of the exchange with a mere scratch. Moreover, Jenna appeared beyond livid now.

"[You can't let a human touch you so casually]," Maban scolded, but his cold expression wavered a bit.

"[He can do whatever he wants with me]," Jenna stated. "[Also, he was saving me from the real threats. Is that how we act toward those who help us]?"

"[Real threats]?" Maban asked while his expression regained utmost coldness. Even Jenna had to put aside her anger at that sight since the matter involved her whole species.

"[Some humans wanted to take me]," Jenna explained while pointing in the direction of the hole in the wall.

Maban seemed to teleport next to Jenna. His footwork was interesting, but Khan was in no condition to study it. The Nele showed his palm, and Jenna scoffed while placing the root at its center.

Maban didn't use any technique as he walked past Jenna. He shot a curious glance at Khan before moving his attention to the crowd. Everyone in that area had taken an interest in the event, but the change in the atmosphere made them retreat and pretend to have nothing to do with the matter.

The various groups retreated as the purple light released by Maban's bracelet advanced toward them. The Nele inspected every face that appeared in his vision until he found a suitable target.

Some of the pursuers had caught up with Khan during that time, and Maban only needed a glance to recognize those vile intentions. The Nele performed his sprint again, and Khan lost track of him.

The Nele left behind by Maban stepped forward to encircle Khan and Jenna. They glared at the people trying to look past them, but Jenna ignored all of that as she crouched toward Khan again.

"[I'm okay]," Khan reassured while Jenna reached for his cheeks.

The intimate interaction attracted the attention of the Nele around Jenna and Khan, but none of them spoke. They limited themselves to random peeks and suppressed gasps, but they tried their best to continue their silent guard.

It didn't take long before Khan could stand up. The drawbacks of the [Blood Shield] had intensified after reaching the third checkpoint, but Khan had also become a second-level warrior. Recovering after that short use wasn't a problem, and he even believed that he could get used to it with some training.

"[He shouldn't have attacked you]," Jenna exclaimed as her sad eyes fell on the shallow hole in Khan's abdomen.

The azure scar was in plain sight now, and many noticed it. Murmurs spread among the crowd, and even the Nele couldn't help but peek at Khan more often.

"[I got to see you angry at least]," Khan joked before wearing a guilty expression. "[I never thought things could be so bad down here. You might have-]."

"[Don't even say it]," Jenna scolded while taking Khan's hands. "[It was my choice. You couldn't stop me. You know it]."

Khan sighed before wearing a faint smile. It had felt good to fight after so long. He took no joy in putting Jenna in danger, but having her at his side during a battle was nice. They made a good team.

"[You will use this to blackmail me later, won't you?]" Khan teased.

"[Obviously]," Jenna proudly announced.

"[You are im-]," Khan said, but the return of the strong presence interrupted his line and made him turn toward the crowd.

Jenna and the other Nele also turned in that direction. The crowd there opened to create a path where Maban walked while dragging a pleading Joel from his leg. The human had a root stabbed on his right shoulder, which made him almost unable to use his upper body.

"[Is he the one who tried to take you]?" Maban asked while throwing Joel forward.

The Nele broke the encirclement before reforming it around Joel. The man remained on the floor and used his legs to turn belly-up. Tears fell from his eyes as he inspected the cold faces of the aliens.

"[He is one of them]," Jenna stated.

'Will they interrogate him now?' Khan wondered.

"[I understand]," Maban declared before bending forward to grab Joel from his neck.

Maban lifted Joel above his head before looking left and right. He didn't need to say anything to convey his intentions. That was a warning to all the people watching the scene.

Then, Maban reached the root inside Joel's shoulder and took it out before stabbing it at the center of his chest. The human could only muster a weak "wait" before life abandoned his eyes.

Chapter 369 Favor

Maban executed Joel publicly without bothering to listen to his version of the story. A mere line from Jenna had been enough to condemn him.

Khan felt surprised in front of that driven show of dominance. Murdering someone supposedly was a big deal, especially when the matter involved different species. A proper race war could start on Milia 222 if big powers got in the way, but Maban didn't care.

Maban retrieved his root while keeping Joel lifted. Blood left the hole in his chest and flowed through his body before falling on the grey floor, where it created a small puddle.

The crowd pretended not to see the scene. Everyone diverted their gaze, and some even moved on with their tasks. Yet, Maban kept the corpse lifted while his cold eyes scanned his surroundings.

Eventually, Maban released the corpse, which fell into the puddle and splashed some blood on the Nele. Surprisingly enough, none of them tried to dodge it. They let their clothes get dirty while they continued to glance menacingly at the dispersing audience.

"[You clean this up]!" Maban exclaimed to the crowd before turning toward Jenna and Khan. "[You two, come with me]."

Maban nodded at the Nele, who broke the encirclement and went on with their tasks. Then, Maban walked past Khan and Jenna to move toward a building in the distance.

Khan wanted to see how the crowd would react to the corpse left in the middle of the area, but Jenna pulled his hand, and the two began to follow Maban closely.

A Nele and a human walking hand in hand remained an interesting sight that turned many eyes in Khan's direction. The murmurs that spread the rumors about the recent event added fuel to that curiosity, but Maban appeared immune to the scene as he strode forward.

Soon, the crowd's diversity vanished to reveal a primarily purple environment. Nele began to fill Khan's vision as the building grew close, and they didn't hide their surprise when they saw how close to Jenna he seemed.

Worries kept Khan's mind busy, so he found it easy to ignore those familiar reactions. The gazes that fell on his exposed chest sounded far more troublesome, and the same went for the environment as a whole.

Khan didn't see enough of the dock to know for sure, but it seemed that the area lacked the diverse style of the city above. The Nele building was identical to the one from where the couple had escaped, at least on the outside.

Smooth grey metal grew seamlessly from the floor, creating a relatively short but vast building. Marks, symbols, and windows were completely absent. The structure didn't have anything unique except for the purple light that fell on its surface.

A few groups of Nele busy with different tasks encircled the building. Boxes, one vehicle, and other items that Khan couldn't see clearly stood next to the aliens who either checked them with scanners or moved them around.

The area only had a couple of Orlats in terms of other species. The two aliens were busy negotiating with a group of Nele, but their conversation stopped when they noticed Maban.

The Nele didn't worry Khan. Jenna held his hand in the open, announcing to everyone that he was an ally of their species. The few groups didn't even have anyone at Maban's level, but Khan still grew slightly tense.

Caja had hinted at the fact that she couldn't communicate properly with the dock, which made sense considering everything Khan knew about the area. The community of Nele there was probably even stricter than usual to outsiders. Khan had to win their trust, and that task had just started.

The exposed chest was Khan's second worry. He knew he couldn't remain unknown for long, especially with Jenna sticking close to him. Yet, the azure scar basically told his identity to everyone. He had already lost his partial anonymity.

Of course, the problems might not start right away. The dock remained an isolated area compared to the cities, but Khan felt the need to be extra careful now. If something happened, he would be identified immediately.

Maban led Jenna and Khan alongside the building until they reached a door that blended almost perfectly with the smooth wall. Maban placed his thumb on the grey surface, and a small hole soon slid open to point at his face.

Purple eyes moved on the other side of the hole. A Nele inspected Maban and unlocked the door after making sure that the situation was safe. The entrance slid open at that point, and a small room unfolded in Khan's vision.

The room could barely contain five people, and a simple chair already occupied part of its space. A series of scanners and screens with unknown purposes also stood in a corner, lying on the floor. The place resembled a closet, but the Nele inside it soon revealed its function.

The Nele remained a bit surprised when she saw Jenna and Khan, but her doubts didn't matter when Maban was there. She turned to pick one of the screens before placing it on the wall behind her and pressing a few symbols that appeared on it.

A second door unlocked and opened, revealing what looked like a big warehouse. Its overall structure resembled the place from where Jenna and Khan had just escaped, which reinforced Khan's guess about the dock as a whole.

The Nele stepped aside to let Maban and the others pass, and both metal doors closed behind them when they stepped into the warehouse. The place was mostly empty. It only had a few covered items, but it didn't have any Nele moving them.

"You stay here," Maban said in a perfect human accent while glaring at Khan.

"[You can trust him]," Jenna replied almost pleadingly, but Maban remained unfazed.

"[You know the procedure]," Maban stated. "[It's better to get it over with it quickly. Other Nele might be in danger otherwise]."

Khan didn't know what Maban was talking about, but the matter sounded quite serious. Jenna even confirmed his guess by revealing a conflicted expression.

"[Go ahead]," Khan reassured Jenna. "[I'll wait for you here]."

Those words didn't make it better for Jenna, but they forced her to give in. She let go of Khan's hand only to hold him into a tight hug and leave a sneaky kiss on his cheek.

Khan couldn't help but smile since he knew that Jenna was doing all of that to guarantee his safety. Yet, having Maban's cold gaze on him didn't make the gesture pleasant. Maban actually seemed to grow slightly pissed, but he hid his emotion quite well.

Jenna broke the hug on her own after a mere second, and she shot a smile at Khan before turning to follow Maban to a door at the end of the warehouse. Khan only managed to see a part of a corridor before the passage closed, leaving him alone in the area.

'He didn't leave any guard with me,' Khan thought, hoping to find a positive aspect in that situation.

The peace of the warehouse finally gave Khan some time to think. He disregarded the thought of checking the items around him to avoid causing problems and chose a random empty spot to sit, take care of his shallow injuries, and sort out his mind.

The scenes seen after the arrival on the dock made Khan both worried and excited. The area was more dangerous than he had expected, especially for someone without meaningful social connections. However, it was also messy and seemingly free, which suited Khan's skillset.

Khan was an expert at survival, and his social skills were exceptional. The dock's messy environment also paved the way for more corruption, which he could exploit. He only needed a starting point, but he had to rely on the Nele for that.

The shallow injuries healed quickly while Khan meditated. The hole on his abdomen took a bit longer, but it also disappeared. Khan even kept track of the process while reviewing the previous mess.

'I survived the attack of a third-level warrior,' Khan thought as excitement overcame his worries and put a smile on his face.

Maban didn't show his true prowess, but the achievement remained incredible. The [Blood Shield] had become strong enough to touch the realm of third-level warriors, but its drawbacks forced Khan to consider his current weaknesses.

The peaceful period on Earth didn't weaken Khan. He had followed his training routine strictly. He had actually gotten stronger than expected due to the long time he could devote to his exercises.

However, training areas and meditations couldn't provide everything needed to survive in the real world. The peace had allowed Khan to accumulate power steadily and quickly, but it had failed in posing significant threats that could make him explore his limits.

The [Blood Shield] was partially an exception since Khan had only recently pushed it to the third checkpoint. Yet, he had no excuses for the relatively poor resistance of his skin.

'Power is useless if I can't use it,' Khan scolded himself, but his smile remained broad, and his excitement didn't diminish at all. It only increased since he had finally gone back to where he belonged.

Being a professor had been fun, and Khan had even liked preparing the new generation of soldiers. Meeting new species and interacting with them was also an incredible experience, and Milia 222 was perfect for that.

Yet, the dock had what Khan truly sought. Things would be dangerous and messy down there, but that was the nature of a battlefield, and he was perfect there. He could stop holding back and pretending for the sake of politics. Khan would have to be careful, but he could finally be himself.

'I must be really twisted to like all of this,' Khan mocked himself without feeling any actual guilt. He didn't know why he had become like that, but he wouldn't suppress what he was.

The warehouse's walls stopped Khan's senses and prevented him from understanding how long he would have to wait. Jenna didn't return even after his injuries healed, but he kept himself busy by planning his next moves.

New training schedules took form in Khan's mind. He needed to add specific exercises to temper his body and get used to his new strength, but he knew he would probably fail to start them on the dock. The real dangers would have to replace them.

As for the actual investigation, Khan had a few ideas. Cooperating with the Nele was mandatory, but they could only cover certain aspects of the mission.

'I need to find a way to interrogate the Fuveall,' Khan concluded.

The presence of a spy sounded almost necessary to accomplish that feat. Still, Khan couldn't exclude the possibility of external help, especially to go through the security measures in the factory.

The Fuveall were famous in that field and even had factories near the crime scene. There was a high chance that they had some involvement with the theft. Even something minor, like providing the right tools to hack through the security measures, could lead to more clues.

Khan also had personal reasons for wanting to meet the Fuveall, but he kept them in the back of his mind for now. He would decide how to handle his curiosity only after establishing meaningful relationships with those aliens.

The wait ended one hour after Khan's injuries fully healed. The second door opened, and different auras hit his senses. Multiple first and second-level warriors entered the warehouse while wielding devices depicting vaguely familiar human faces.

Khan jumped to his feet when the door opened, but the Nele ignored him and approached the building's exit. Jenna also stepped into the warehouse and quickly split from her peers to reach Khan.

Khan found his arms wrapped around Jenna's waist in a few seconds. The two inspected that deployment in silence and waited for the Nele to leave the building before voicing their thoughts.

"[Were those the faces of our pursuers]?" Khan asked.

"[Those that I could remember clearly]," Jenna revealed. "[It's a standard procedure for us. It's too dangerous to let these things go]."

"[Can they really catch them]?" Khan wondered while tightening his hug to console Jenna.

"[It's unlikely]," Jenna sighed, snuggling as close to Khan as possible to exploit his consoling mood to its fullest. "[If they are smart, they have already left the dock to prepare for their departure from Milia 222]."

Getting on the Nele's bad side was truly scary, but Khan felt no mercy for his assailants. They had tried to hurt Jenna. They already deserved death in his mind.

"[What happens now]?" Khan wondered.

"[Maban is waiting for us in the other room]," Jenna stated.

Khan tensed up. Making a third-level warrior wait for no reason was an awful political move, but Jenna didn't withhold that information only to get some alone time with Khan. She was actually quite pissed.

"[That's what he deserves for attacking you]," Jenna pouted at the sight of Khan's worry.

"[Jenna, I should befriend the guy]," Khan wanted to sound serious, but he ended up laughing a bit.

"[Don't worry]," Jenna reassured. "[I haven't met him in years, but I remember him as a softie. He probably acts all cold only because he needs to]."

Khan could only trust Jenna on that. He heaved a sigh, but he didn't force her to hurry. She had to take the lead in that environment.

Jenna didn't abuse her power. She kept Khan for herself for a minute, but she eventually left the embrace and took his hand to lead him into the next area. The door had remained open, so the two could quickly cross the short corridor to reach a relatively big room with few tables and bright devices on them.

Maban was waiting next to one of the room's doors, and he opened it when Jenna and Khan appeared in his vision. The two followed him inside that new area only to find themselves in a small place with only one metal table and a few chairs.

"[He is an ally, not a prisoner]," Jenna complained, refusing to sit at the table even after Maban pointed at the chairs.

"[He is a human]," Maban pointed out. "[I can't bring him into areas that could reveal our secrets so easily]."

"[It's fine]," Khan whispered, seizing the initiative and taking a seat, basically forcing Jenna to imitate him.

Maban sat on the other side of the table and fixed his gaze on Khan. His previous words didn't carry the same coldness as before, and the same went for his current expression. Still, his face wasn't friendly either.

"[Jenna told me why you are here]," Maban announced. "[Finding a specific material among all the goods that reach the fourth asteroid is no easy task]."

Khan couldn't help but be surprised, and his question conveyed that feeling. "[Will you help me]?"

"[I didn't say that]," Maban corrected. "[I have no reason to help you, and I don't care about your employers either. I won't split my forces to handle your problem]."

Maban had chosen his words carefully to avoid revealing important information, but Khan knew enough about the matter to understand a few things. The Nele probably didn't have enough manpower to help him. They would have to abandon some crucial tasks to join the investigation, and a stranger couldn't make them do that.

"[However]," Maban continued, "[You did fight humans to help one of our own. Your affection toward Jenna is genuine. I understood as much]."

Maban's stare intensified. He seemed set on uncovering the depths of Khan's mind with his mere eyes, but he eventually diverted his gaze to look at the table.

"[I won't accept you in our community]," Maban stated, "[But I won't reject you either. Normally, I'd never let a human use our channels, but I have to pay you back for my previous actions]."

"[Channels]?" Khan repeated. "[Will you introduce me to some smugglers]?"

"[No]," Maban explained. "[I'll only bring you where the smugglers are]."

"[I'm already here, right]?" Khan replied. "[This is the dock]."

"[This is the storage area of the dock]," Maban revealed. "[You must go deeper to see the true face of the fourth asteroid]."

The news shocked Khan, but it made sense when he thought about it. There had to be a place where ships could land and unload the goods. Lower Level 2 probably was only a public market, but the actual illegal deeds happened under it.

"[Come with me]," Maban exclaimed before leaving the table.

Khan and Jenna stood up and followed Maban outside the room. Maban used one of the devices in the area to send a message, and a Nele carrying a simple black helmet soon came out from one of the doors.

"[You must wear this until we get to the elevator]," Maban announced while taking the helmet and handing it to Khan.

Jenna wanted to complain, but Khan shook his head before she could say anything. He seized the helmet and put it on his head obediently, but he remained surprised by the change the item brought.

The helmet covered his ears and half of his face. Khan couldn't see or hear anything, and the item also affected his senses. He felt cut off from the synthetic mana in the room, and nothing he did made him overcome that problem.

Still, a familiar warmth soon spread from his hands. Jenna didn't hesitate to take them and pull Khan to guide him through the area, and he trusted her enough not to stumble or slow down.

The experience made Khan realize how deeply he relied on his sensitivity to mana during his everyday life. Having eyes and ears closed was annoying, but being unable to sense his surroundings made him feel lost. It was shocking to see that difference, and he hated that darkness.

Luckily for Khan, the walk didn't last long. Someone soon took off the helmet from his head, and the mana reappeared in his senses.

Khan found himself before a large door that led toward a circular room. Jenna was on his right, and Maban stood behind him while wielding the terrifying helmet. Only a simple corridor stretched past Maban, preventing Khan from learning anything about that building.

"[The Nele won't see you as an ally]," Maban warned. "[Our trust is hard to obtain]."

"[I expected as much]," Khan admitted. "[Thank you for granting me access to the lower level]."

Maban didn't say anything. He couldn't remain completely cold when Khan was so polite. That behavior warmed Maban a bit, which eventually forced a comment out of him.

"[You are quite strong]," Maban praised. "[Maybe, if you prove yourself to be worthy, we will have another chat]."

Khan nodded in gratitude. Maban didn't completely reject him. Khan still had a chance to get close to the Nele there.

"[Right]," Maban continued. "[If Jenna gets hurt because of you, I won't limit myself to a warning]."

"[Maban]!" Jenna scolded.

"[Go now]," Maban said, uncaring of Jenna's anger. "[You aren't welcome in our buildings]."

The message was only for Khan, but Jenna felt terrible anyway. She didn't like seeing her species treating Khan so coldly, especially since she knew his pure intentions. Yet, she was powerless, which only worsened her mood.

On the other hand, Khan had been fully prepared for the situation. Maban had even overcome his expectations with that simple gesture. The Nele had probably done that to keep Jenna safe a bit longer, but Khan appreciated it anyway.

Khan wrapped an arm around Jenna to take care of her foul mood and led her inside the circular room. Maban revealed a bit more when he inspected the intimate interaction. Some curiosity appeared in his eyes, but Khan couldn't see it.

The room contained a surprise for Khan. A loose black jumper stood on the floor, but the door behind him closed when he turned to thank Maban. The walls moved at that point, and the floor began to descend. It turned out that the place was a big elevator.

Khan donned the jumper quickly, and Jenna avoided joking around since the situation could become dangerous as soon as the elevator stopped. The two prepared for an eventual battle, but nothing similar happened once the doors opened.

A slightly darker version of Milia 222's iconic light illuminated a vast and messy environment. A large street stretched from the elevator, and Khan became able to see many more of them when he stepped on it and looked around.

The streets were similar to those found on the first floors of the asteroids. They were slightly smaller but retained some of their most iconic features. No pillars stretched from under or above them, but they remained in their position as if they could fly.

Past the streets' guardrails, Khan could see that some structures stretched below until they got pretty close to the bottom of the dome. He could inspect the lower side of that giant structure from there. Lower Level 3 seemed to be the very end of the fourth asteroid.

The streets weren't packed, but many diverse groups still occupied them. Khan also saw various small stands and other buildings in the distance, but all of them appeared cheap compared to the rest of Milia 222.

Multiple elevators also appeared in Khan's vision. The environment above was small compared to the current area, so most of those structures had gathered in that quadrant. Truth be told, Khan didn't expect to see so many of them. The scene made him reevaluate how much of a favor Maban actually did.

The area didn't have a proper ceiling. Khan could follow his elevator with his eyes to reach the bottom of Lower Level 2, but only darkness occupied the spaces around it. The artificial light didn't arrive there since it mostly came from under the streets.

Being so close to the dome allowed Khan to reevaluate its beauty, but something far more interesting soon caught his attention. The lower part of that seemingly spherical structure had a big hole connected directly to outer space.

A barrier made of mana covered the hole and prevented the artificial atmosphere from vanishing. Yet, its purpose became clear immediately since Khan saw a big spaceship cross it to enter the dome. He only needed to peek past the guardrail to follow the vehicle as it slowly flew until it reached one of the landing areas stretching under the streets.

Chapter 370 Vendor

The barrier didn't prevent the passage of the spaceship. Khan didn't recognize its model, but its shape reminded him of some of the cargo vehicles seen during his studies.

The spaceship flew slowly and completely stopped when it reached a specific area stretching under the streets on Khan's right. The vehicle didn't actually land anywhere. It only attached its side to a channel-like structure that managed to keep it lifted even after its engines shut down.

Khan couldn't see every detail due to the distance from the landing area, but it wasn't hard to recognize the Orlats. A group of those aliens hurried into the channel and came out a minute later while carrying multiple small boxes.

The Orlats amassed the goods on a rectangular platform near the landing area that shot up as soon as enough boxes gathered. The elevator reached a location right below the streets, where more Orlats promptly got to work to load everything on a big cart.

Khan followed the process until the Orlats pushed the cart into a building that stretched below the streets. A big entrance opened to allow the crew inside before closing in the next seconds.

The spaceship had more goods, so Khan could observe the process several times, but he eventually grew tired of it. His attention moved elsewhere, and he soon realized that he couldn't get a complete understanding of the dock in those short minutes.

Lower Level 3 seemed as big as the city on Lower Level 1. The array of streets made the environment quite open and easy to study, but Khan's vision and senses had clear limits. He simply couldn't inspect buildings and areas kilometers away from him.

The environment didn't stick to a single floor either. Multiple buildings and structures expanded under and above the streets. The dock had numerous layers that featured different activities, and Khan didn't know how long it would take him to become knowledgeable about the environment.

Khan compared the dock to Reebfell. He had lived there for a whole year, but he had barely got to see a few districts. Reebfell obviously was way bigger, but the situation in Khan's mind didn't improve even when he thought about the training camp. The latter was far smaller, but Khan still didn't know all of it.

The dock wasn't only bigger than the training camp. It also had a higher diversity of buildings even when Khan didn't consider the various species. Those features depicted a troublesome picture that almost confirmed one of his initial guesses about the investigation as a whole.

'We'll never get this done in weeks,' Khan concluded. 'Even half a year might be too optimistic as an estimate.'

Khan knew that his calculations only involved the current scenery. Things would worsen if the dock carried clues that led to multiple cities. The investigation could easily last years in that case. By the time Khan found something, the reinforced fabric might have already left the asteroids.

'The investigation might have been impossible in the first place,' Khan admitted when he considered all the possible variables.

It would have been fine if Milia 222 only had a few criminal organizations involved with thefts and similar activities. The mission would have been doable even with tens of them.

However, it seemed that every asteroid had dozens of different organizations involved with countless illegal activities. The dock only highlighted that aspect since basically every crew in the streets had something to do with smuggling and other illicit tasks.

The dock most likely didn't have the same population as the cities, but that still left Khan with thousands of potential targets that could help him with the investigation. Gaining enough trust to interrogate all of them was a project that a single person couldn't complete.

Khan realized that even his worst expectations might have failed to depict the actual difficulty of the task. Yet, he didn't despair. The dock had always been a long shot. Even if he didn't find anything, he would still experience something that no other planet could offer.

'The Bise deliver the merch,' Khan thought about Luke's words while trying to find buildings and ships connected to that species.

Khan gave up on the inspection in a few seconds. That part of the dock had a few symbols and iconic marks that could lead to a specific species, but all the buildings and structures resembled each other.

The ships were even worse. Khan could spot some vehicles under the streets from his position, but they didn't carry any iconic detail, which made sense considering their tasks. Identifying some of them as non-human didn't help either since smugglers could use that feature as a decoy.

Jenna had also been busy inspecting the area, even if her thoughts didn't involve the investigation. She showed pure curiosity about that part of her home that she had never visited, but many of its areas ended up worrying her. She would be in danger without the support of her species.

Those worries slightly affected the synthetic mana around Jenna and made Khan turn toward her. Jenna showed a reassuring smile at that gesture, and she even relaxed a bit due to the relative safety of their surroundings.

"[You are getting good at it]," Jenna exclaimed.

"[Is that fear]?" Khan asked since he couldn't completely identify those changes due to Jenna's good control over the synthetic mana.

"[I was just studying the potential dangers]," Jenna explained. "[It's a habit every Nele has to develop]."

A sense of defeat invaded Khan. He couldn't even begin to imagine how careful Jenna had to be every second of her life. The fight against Joel's group had only been a single example of what could happen to her simply because of her species.

"[Come here]," Khan whispered, and Jenna's face lit up as she jumped on him.

Khan wore a cold face while Jenna had fun on his neck. No one was trying to use his elevator, but the streets nearby had bystanders that didn't miss the scene, and all of them met his warning gaze.

"[How are you instead]?" Jenna muttered without leaving Khan's neck.

"[The sensation is still there]," Khan sighed.

Jenna placed a hand on Khan's chest, and her expression told him that everything was fine with his body. She had no idea why he felt like that, but their current location confirmed that the issue involved the entire fourth asteroid.

"[Let's find some Nele districts]," Khan warmly said while taking Jenna's hand and officially starting their exploration of the dock.

The entire quadrant had circular structures connected to Lower Level 2. Short paths and steps linked the various elevators to a larger street that stretched left and right while branching out in multiple spots.

Cheap-looking shops and stands stood near the main street's guardrails. A few vendors even sat on the dark-grey floor and placed their goods on blankets or pillows. Khan mostly saw Orlats, but he was surprised to find even a couple of Fuveall with their items in the open.

Walking hand in hand with Jenna avoided Khan the trouble of dismissing eventual bold and annoying vendors. The Nele's reputation and the surprising scene kept the travel relatively peaceful, but it also attracted a lot of attention.

Of course, Khan and Jenna had long since grown used to those reactions, so they kept their attention on the streets. They didn't have any maps, but the open environment allowed them to notice purple lights and walk in their direction.

Most Milia 222's species had occupied streets and districts around the elevator area for obvious reasons, so the couple didn't take long to reach a path with an electric purple lamp hanging from its guardrail. Similar items stretched through that road, marking the arrival into a Nele district.

Buildings of different sizes grew from the various roads illuminated by the purple lamps. The district wasn't big. It could contain at most a hundred people, but it appeared empty now.

Khan and Jenna had to reach the center of the district to find a group of Nele sitting on the floor and busy exchanging metal bowls. The aliens were in the middle of a large street that branched in multiple directions, and they didn't hesitate to stand up when they noticed the couple.

The group mostly had first-level warriors, with only one of them as strong as Jenna and Khan. The Nele inspected the nearing couple while shooting multiple wary glares at Khan, and Jenna did the same while searching for familiar faces.

"[Nessa]!" Jenna announced when she recognized one of the Nele. "[It's me, Jenna]."

The Nele turned toward the woman targeted by Jenna's gaze. Nessa was shorter than Jenna, and her hair carried darker shades of green. Her eyes were darker too, but she remained a perfect example of the Nele's beauty.

Nessa was one of the first-level warriors, so her authority there wasn't too high. She whispered a few words to the second-level warrior while the rest of the group hinted at the couple to stop by placing their hands behind their backs.

The second-level warrior eventually nodded and whispered something to another member of the group, who quickly ran into one of the streets. The leader then stepped forward, and Nessa walked at his side while their companions followed them closely.

Khan couldn't help but notice how the Nele felt stronger than the average first and second-level warriors. They looked even better than Joel and the others, especially the group leader.

"[You came here unannounced]," The leader stated when he stopped a few meters from Khan and Jenna, "[And with a human]."

Jenna was growing truly pissed at how her species treated Khan. She still had the spray on her too, which only worsened her overall mood. Yet, she kept her cool when interacting with the leader.

"[Maban allowed us through]," Jenna explained.

"[I've sent someone to contact Maban now]," The leader responded while moving his eyes on Khan. "[You can stay, but he must leave the area until Maban authorizes his presence]."

"[I'll leave with him then]," Jenna declared.

"[We can't have that]," The leader responded. "[It will put you in danger if you leave with him now]."

The meaning of those words quickly became clear. Khan and Jenna sensed something that made them turn in time to see two spaceships flying toward them. The vehicles landed on a spot behind the couple in a matter of seconds before opening their doors to reveal two groups full of second-level warriors.

Khan didn't need to know the Nele's customs to understand the consequences of eventual rash actions. Many had seen the spaceships and were probably aware that they contained reinforcements. If Jenna was to leave the district with Khan, it might mean that she lacked the support of her species or worse.

'We did enter a bit too easily,' Khan commented in his mind before showing a reassuring smile toward Jenna.

"[You don't deserve this]," Jenna whispered in a tone that carried her deep sadness.

"[I'm sure it won't take long]," Khan uttered while caressing Jenna's cheek.

"[You know you can't stop me]," Jenna complained.

"[Coming with me is one thing]," Khan pointed out. "[Telling the dock that you aren't with your species is way too dangerous. I'd rather leave than put you in that situation]."

As always, Khan and Jenna's intimacy made those in their surroundings feel awkward, especially when it came to the members of her species. The Nele on the scene didn't even have Maban's self-control, so curious faces and interested gazes inevitably fell on the couple.

Even the leader couldn't help but falter a bit. In theory, the sole fact that Jenna was letting Khan touch her vouched for him. The location was the real problem. Things would have been easier to handle without the constant tension of the dock.

The leader glanced in the direction where his companion had run off once Jenna hugged Khan. He appeared conflicted about the matter and wanted Maban's answer right away, but communicating between floors on the dock was a troublesome matter.

Khan noticed those reactions, and ideas flowed through his mind. He could probably exploit that internal conflict to his advantage with his political skills, but he disregarded those thoughts to keep his relationship with the Nele honest.

"[Before I leave]," Khan said while pushing Jenna away to comply with the Nele's order, "[Can you tell me where I can buy some food? I'd rather save my provisions]."

The leader glanced at Khan's backpack and noticed that Jenna had something identical hanging from her back. The Nele even paid attention to Khan's baggy jumper at that point. Those clothes clearly came from the Nele.

"[Just stay here]," The leader eventually sighed. "[It would be easier to interrogate you in case Maban tells us to]."

Khan didn't expect that change of heart, but the leader didn't wholly trust him either. The Nele gestured at the ships, and one of them closed its doors before setting off. The other remained there, and the team inside kept track of Khan's every move.

"[Get them something to eat]," The leader ordered before turning to walk where his team was eating before.

Jenna brimmed with joy as she retook Khan's hand and pulled him toward the guardrails. The two chose a spot close to the leader's group, but they didn't join them as they sat on the floor and waited for the food to arrive.

One of the first-level warriors had hurried into a small building nearby, and it didn't take long for him to come out of it with two bowls. The Nele approached the couple, and Jenna seized the meal from his hands before he could show any hesitation.

Khan felt quite hungry. It was already past lunchtime, and the trip to that location had been far from relaxing. He couldn't wait to eat something, so he wolfed down the green soup while Jenna made herself comfortable on his shoulder.

Khan's lack of hesitation toward the food made the Nele more interested in his presence. Khan ate their food, wore their clothes, spoke their language, and had the trust of a member of their species. He was the oddest human they had ever seen.

The Nele who had run off before eventually returned and whispered something to the leaders' ear. The latter stood up and nodded at the remaining spaceship, which set off immediately while he approached Khan and Jenna.

"[This area doesn't have any special purpose in the dock]," The leader announced while staring down at the couple. "[It's not a problem for you to have crossed these streets, but you can't stay]."

Khan put the bowl aside and stood up. Jenna imitated him. The two understood that the time to leave had arrived.

"[Can you suggest a safe place where to rest]?" Khan asked. "[We might stay here for a while]."

"[I'm sure the humans can give you better answers]," The leader responded.

"[I asked you because of her]," Khan explained while pointing a thumb at Jenna. "[I want the place to be safe for her]."

The selfless answer startled the leader, and Jenna's affectionate gestures didn't make it easier for him to reply. Khan's complete focus on the conversation even added some awkwardness to the scene.

"[Money is not a problem]," Khan continued while taking out his phone. "[I just want to avoid putting her in unnecessary danger]."

The leader glanced at the phone, and his internal conflict finally ended. He turned to gesture at Nessa, and the Nele didn't hesitate to leave her group to reach him.

"[Take them to a trusted vendor]," The leader ordered. "[Bring some of the others with you]."

Khan didn't know what was happening, but the leader quickly explained himself. "[You should never purchase goods without protection, not here]."

"[Protection]?" Khan asked.

"[The vendor will explain this]," The leader responded. "[You must leave now]."

Nessa summoned two first-level warriors and began to walk toward the street from where Khan and Jenna had come. The couple followed that group, but Khan asked one last question before leaving the leader.

"[What's your name]?" Khan asked.

"[Piran]," The leader replied.

"[I'm Khan]," Khan added, but Piran turned to reunite with his group without saying anything.

Nessa and her companions didn't stop during Khan's question, so the couple had to accelerate a bit to catch up with them. The first-level warriors were wary about the human presence behind them, but they soon relaxed a bit since Khan had eyes only for Jenna and his surroundings.

Jenna was happy about the previous events, but she remained silent during the walk. Her cold face returned once the group left the streets illuminated by the purple lamps and forced the first-level warriors to light up their pendants and bracelets.

Khan did his best to memorize the streets in his view, but he didn't know how much that would help since the open area allowed him to find better markers. His attention often went to the structures under him too, but he didn't see anything flashy. Ships arrived, and crews loaded or unloaded goods.

The walk forced the group to cross different districts. Humans, Orlats, Fuveall, and Bise occupied sets of buildings above, below, and on the streets, and a few even had mixed species. Some places were messy and loud, while others were completely quiet. It was hard to put the dock under a single label, and Khan soon gave up on the task.

'It's as if Reebfell and the Slums had a child,' Khan eventually thought.

Strangely enough, Lower Level 3 lacked the chaotic anarchy of Lower Level 2. Khan saw some groups arguing and going over familiar messes, but there seemed to be a certain rhythm to everything. Many worked seriously, even if their condition never came close to Reebfell's lofty standards.

After a bit less than thirty minutes, the group reached a short street with a single Fuveall vendor sitting on the floor. A series of items that Khan didn't recognize stood on the blanket stretched before the alien, and a big backpack hung from the guardrail behind him.

The Nele approached the vendor without showing any hesitation, and Khan soon understood why they didn't worry about their pheromones. The Fuveall had a holed, flat, mechanical device instead of a nose, and similar openings filled the silver metal plates on his exposed forearms.

"[My dear Nele]!" The Fuveall exclaimed in the Nele's language. "[How can Sen-nu help you today]?"

"[The human needs the basic kit]," Nessa explained.

"[A human touching a Nele]," The Fuveall stated while inspecting Jenna and Khan with his lively golden eyes. "[What a sight]. You must be the luckiest man on this rock."

"[The Nele's language is fine]," Khan said since the Fuveall had changed language mid-sentence. "[What's the basic kit]?"

"[Didn't you tell him]?" The Fuveall asked while glancing at the three first-level warriors. "[The Nele can be so hard to deal with. They don't dare to get too close even when I have these amazing implants]."

The Fuveall lifted his arms and wore a proud expression. A short laugh even left his mouth and made his long dark hair flutter.

"[Sen-nu, don't waste our time]," Nessa declared. "[You can brag about your implants with the Orlats]."

"[The Orlats listen to me only to lower my prices]," Sen-nu snorted. "[Sadly for them, Sen-nu is too smart to fall for their tricks]."

"[Sen-nu]," Nessa repeated without showing any respect, uncaring that the vendor was a second-level warrior.

"[Alright, alright]," Sen-nu uttered before turning toward Khan. "[The basic kit contains a fake ID generator, a device to hide your purchases, and another tool that masks your location during public calls]."

"[Are they necessary]?" Khan asked.

"[Of course]!" Sen-nu laughed. "[Illegal stuff always exists within the loopholes of legality, but it must follow some of its rules, or at least pretend to. Purchases would leave tracks, so it's better if they happen under a false name, especially here]."