

Chaos' Heir 381

Chapter 381 Theory

"[You are surprisingly bad at this]," Maban commented.

"Fuck!" Khan cursed as he stomped his right foot. "[Stop messing things up]!"

"[Don't blame your leg]," Maban scolded. "[The issue is in your approach]."

"[I know. I know]," Khan casually dismissed that line. He would never take Maban's advice lightly, but he had already heard those same words too many times.

Maban and Khan were still in the training hall. Maban sat next to a wall while Khan was near the center of the place. The former oversaw the training, while the latter showed nothing but failures.

Khan understood the theory behind Maban's technique but couldn't replicate it for different reasons. Some procedures went against the very teachings of the Lightning-demon style, while others directly opposed everything he had learnt before reaching Milia 222.

Maban couldn't teach Nele's arts to Khan. That topic was too complex for a novice, so he had limited his first lesson to a mere enhancement that could virtually work on any technique as long as performed properly.

The enhancement relied on something Jenna had explained to Khan while they were on the third asteroid. The Nele used that method in the absence of mana. They surrounded themselves in a fake environment to gain access to their normal techniques, and Khan had to create something similar around his legs.

Covering his legs in layers of mana wasn't too much of a problem. The Niqols' arts had made Khan able to perform something similar long ago. However, he couldn't simply throw energy there. He had already tried and failed.

The Niqols' arts wanted Khan to take control of the mana around him so that he could move and alter it freely. Yet, that approach made the energy heavy, turning it into a hindrance rather than an enhancement.

Khan could still force himself to sprint while retaining control of that mana, but the action wouldn't amount to anything. The energy around his legs would only slow him down.

The Nele's arts solved that issue with their overall lack of weight, but Khan had yet to master their basics. He could ask the mana to envelop his legs, but he struggled to voice clear requests that could help his sprint.

Moreover, the Lightning-demon style wanted explosive power. Even the softest steps required sharp gestures that could easily disperse the light mana around the legs.

Khan's situation was incredibly peculiar. His martial art was human, his knowledge of mana was mostly Niqols, and the technique required Nele's arts. He was in the middle of conflicting fields, methods, and approaches, and he had to find a common point to make them work together.

'Help my legs,' Khan thought as he closed his eyes and released a faint trace of mana into the environment.

The purple-red mana entered the symphony without destroying it, and slow reactions immediately happened as it dispersed. Synthetic energy flowed toward Khan's legs and enveloped them inside an invisible membrane that didn't carry any specific nature.

Khan moved carefully. He bent his legs and managed the mana inside them to perform his usual sprints. The technique succeeded, but the invisible membrane shattered before it had the chance to add any effect.

Another curse tried to come out of Khan's mouth, but he forced himself to remain calm. He was getting better, but that only revealed more flaws. The membrane's nature was a clear example of that. The synthetic mana didn't know what it was supposed to do since Khan was in the same situation.

"[How many times do I have to tell you]?" Maban exclaimed after witnessing another failed execution. "[The mana must work like additional layers of muscles. Merely stuffing it around your legs won't produce any result]."

Khan already knew that, but his knowledge had limits. Maban had his own idea of muscles, while Khan had yet to find one that could work for him.

'Do I need to replicate my legs anatomically or just figuratively?' Khan wondered. 'Should I even try to replicate them in the first place?'

Those doubts couldn't have solutions since a steep wall divided Maban and Khan's mindsets. The two could use the same words, but they would have different meanings inside their minds.

"[Can you show me how you do it]?" Khan eventually requested.

"[My martial art is different from yours]," Maban stated. "[Trying to copy me will only hurt your training]."

"[I need a visual example]," Khan continued. "[I'm quite lost here]."

Maban thought about the matter for a second before nodding and leaving the wall to stand up. Mana immediately left his figure and dispersed into the symphony to send requests, and Khan focused as much as possible to avoid missing details.

The synthetic mana moved while Maban put his weight on his toes and lifted his heels. He was slowing down his gestures on purpose to help Khan out, and the latter noticed how the technique felt a bit odd.

That stance couldn't possibly express much momentum. Everything about Maban was already tense and straight. He had no practical way to push himself forward, but Khan remained silent to study the scene.

The synthetic mana remained invisible, but Khan saw new shades appearing through his sensitivity. The energy that flowed toward Maban's legs replicated the natural influence they expressed during that stance and seemingly widened their size.

Maban was doing exactly what he had tried to teach to Khan. The synthetic mana was adding mass to his legs, but the process didn't focus on flesh or gestures. The synthetic mana was simply ready to echo the technique.

Maban let himself fall forward at that point. His toes remained his only connection to the floor, and his stretched feet made him unable to add any more strength.

However, Maban's feet suddenly trembled, and his whole figure slid forward. He was on the verge of falling, but an invisible force pushed his body and made him cover a long path in a single second.

Maban didn't speak after he planted his heels on the floor to stop himself. His eyes went on Khan, who was using every inch of his brain to study him. Words wouldn't be able to reach him in that state, so Maban didn't waste his breath.

Khan uncovered secrets of Maban's martial art during the inspection. The technique had high execution barriers, and the speed it generated didn't make sense. That momentum came from the synthetic mana. Maban simply wore a stance that could allow him to slide on it.

The enhancement had been impossible to notice even with Maban slowing down his execution, but Khan didn't need to divide the two procedures. One reflected the other, so he had seen what he needed to see.

'This is troublesome,' Khan thought as he sat cross-legged on the floor.

Maban had made the synthetic mana express his movement technique, but Khan couldn't use the same method. Maban's martial art was in line with the Nele's approach, while the Lightning-demon style remained very human.

'It might be possible to do something similar,' Khan concluded, 'But not at my current level. I definitely can't apply it to all my sprints. Maybe I should focus on one of them and add variations as I improve.'

The idea made sense, so Khan quickly moved to the next part of his plan. He needed to pick the sprint to enhance, but he required Maban's help for that.

"[Maban, how do Nele develop martial arts]?" Khan asked while raising his gaze toward Maban, who had remained still until now.

"[Do you want to become a Nele now]?" Maban mocked through his stern tone.

"[You couldn't have possibly retained your knowledge during your slavery]," Khan continued.

"[Milia 222 is a diverse environment with countless opportunities, but your martial art was in line with your approach to mana. Did the Nele develop it after their escape]?"

Slavery was a sensitive topic for the Nele, but Maban could remain calm since he acknowledged Khan's complete lack of malice. He was simply curious.

As for the martial arts, they were a secret topic that no outsider was supposed to learn. However, Maban had already accepted Khan, so keeping him in the dark didn't make much sense.

"[You are correct]," Maban announced. "[My species lost a lot during the slavery, including the records of our martial arts. Still, we evolved past that. Our approach is more personal now]."

"[Personal how]?" Khan wondered.

Maban remained silent for a second before spreading his arms and closing his eyes. Traces of mana left his body to fuse with the symphony, but Khan noticed something different in that energy compared to before or the general theory of the Nele's arts.

"[Mana is more than energy]," Maban explained. "[We can learn a lot by just observing its behavior. Its nature is almost instinctive, and it carries deep knowledge for those willing to listen]."

Khan took a while to realize what Maban had done differently. The mana sent into the symphony had been lighter than usual. There almost wasn't enough of it to carry requests.

Nevertheless, the synthetic mana reacted anyway. Seemingly random waves of energy flew toward Maban and attempted to push him around. They shattered before they could achieve anything, but Maban soon began to help them out.

Some waves converged toward the arms, so Maban moved them forward until the mana stopped targeting them. Other chunks of energy landed on his lower back, and he stretched himself to appease them.

The process wasn't intuitive, but Khan had already seen a slower version of the sprint, so he could find similarities. The mana was putting Maban into a specific stance. It was teaching him part of a martial art.

"[Is this enough]?" Maban eventually asked, and Khan didn't hesitate to nod.

"[The fake mana has limits with this practice]," Maban revealed as he abandoned his stance and relaxed his limbs. "[Even creating our roots is hard here]."

'So, they do create them,' Khan confirmed in his mind.

"[I think it's enough for today]," Maban continued. "[You need time to recover and grow used to our arts. Also, I suspect you have a lot of thinking to do]."

Khan could only nod again. He had to review his techniques and decide how to proceed. Maban's enhancement was something he wanted to master in a short period, but he couldn't neglect everything else for that goal.

"[Let's go]," Maban ordered as he approached the training area's entrance. "[Eat with me]."

Khan didn't hesitate to stand up and follow Maban. The two returned in the open and walked until they reached a relatively crowded area of the district. It was lunchtime, so many Nele had gathered to enjoy their meals together, but Maban led Khan to an isolated spot that offered some cover from prying ears.

A Nele quickly brought fuming bowls to the two, and Khan noticed how he didn't need intermediaries to pick them up at that time. He didn't know if Maban had that effect on his species, but he liked to think that everyone had started to accept him.

"[I can't see Jenna]," Khan commented while wolfing down his soup. "[Is she busy with the hunting season]?"

"[No, she has a more important task to handle]," Maban explained. "[It rare for us to have someone with her talent here. She isn't a specialist, but her understanding of mana makes her perfect for the various plants]."

"[Plants]?" Khan repeated. "[Like Caja did on the third asteroid]?"

Maban stopped eating to show a surprised face, and his words matched that expression. "[Did Caja show you her role on the hidden dome]?"

"[I happened to pass by while she was busy affecting the environment]," Khan played it nice.

"[I see]," Maban stated in an unconvincing tone.

The procedure was taxing for Caja, but she was a fourth-level warrior. She would have sensed Khan coming. The fact that she had kept her technique active meant that she trusted Khan with that information.

"[How long will she need]?" Khan changed the topic.

"[Probably the entire day]," Maban revealed. "[Even two if she finds problems. You can visit her, but I think you would distract her]."

"[I'll refrain from going to her]," Khan promised.

Silence fell between the two, but nothing about it felt awkward. Maban and Khan emptied their bowls and placed them at their side before losing themselves in the scenery.

"[The material you are looking for]," Maban eventually broke the silence. "[What is it]?"

"[Do you know] chameleons?" Khan asked as his eyes lit up.

"[Never heard the word]," Maban admitted.

"[I can give you more details later]," Khan declared, "[But I think it's better to focus on something else. The Bise deliver this material here, and someone, probably humans, buys it from them]."

Maban fell silent as he processed the information. Khan didn't give him much, but there was a vague foundation to exploit, especially with assets at hand.

"[You don't see Bise smugglers every day]," Maban revealed, "[But they aren't rare. Yet, adding human buyers might shrink the field by a lot]."

"[I thought you wouldn't split your forces for me]," Khan reminded.

"[I won't]," Maban confirmed. "[However, with the hunting season going, we are forced to keep an eye on the entirety of Lower Level 3. Adding this small detail to those deployed through the dock isn't a problem]."

"[Thank you]," Khan honestly voiced.

"[Don't get your expectations too high]," Maban stated. "[You aren't the priority around here. I'll just tell the others to pay some additional attention to your matters]."

"[It's the best achievement so far]," Khan chuckled.

"[That's how Milia 222 works]," Maban exclaimed as he picked up the two bowls and stood up. "[I have other errands to handle. You don't need me, right]?"

"[I'm fine]," Khan replied, and Maban nodded before turning to leave toward more peripheral areas of the district.

Khan watched Maban vanish in the distance before lifting his gaze. The ceiling was odd and clunky, but it remained quite cool and mesmerizing. Still, Khan barely looked at it as thoughts ran through his mind.

Maban's presence was truly unnecessary now. He could act as a supervisor, but Khan would never waste his time like that, especially since he already knew how to fix his problems.

Khan didn't only need to choose a specific sprint. He also had to improve his foundation as a whole. Maban's teachings were clear. Khan had to practice until establishing a conversation with the mana became as natural as breathing.

'I could spend the afternoon inside the training hall,' Khan considered before rejecting that tempting plan. He had something far more interesting in mind. It was time to see the Tors again.

Chapter 382 Tubes and pipes

Khan had never been the type to slack off. He could use the free afternoon to focus on his recovery, but Milia 222 made him restless. The dock offered so many opportunities that keeping his curiosity in check was simply impossible.

Maban had cleared one of Khan's main issues. The Nele knew Lower Level 3 way better than him, so he could leave Luke's mission to them. He would only get in the way if he started asking questions randomly anyway.

That left Khan with nothing official to do, which transformed into training time in his mind. Still, that field also offered many possibilities, and his priority was to get a general idea about all of them.

The Nele's arts were in line with what Khan had learnt from the Niqols. Their methods were different, but both species shared a deep understanding and reverence toward the mana.

Khan wanted to tread that path, but he couldn't close himself to alternative methods. The human arts had clear advantages that he was still exploiting, so it was safe to assume that similar approaches could offer equal benefits. They might also double down on them.

The Tors had hit a nerve with their mysterious and secretive methods. Their interest in the chaos element had also opened a path, and Khan couldn't refrain from attempting to explore it.

Khan stood up and walked past the Nele busy with their meal. Those various groups followed him with their eyes, and some even performed nods at his passage.

The scene inevitably warmed Khan's heart. He had a long way to go, but he had finally taken a step in the right direction. The Nele had started to accept him, but that happy event strangely gave birth to conflicting feelings.

Regardless of what Khan told himself, he still experienced burdens that only leaders would face. He virtually had no obligation toward the Nele, at least for now, but he had already begun to feel responsible for their well-being.

The Nele were the perfect target of Khan's selflessness. They had suffered a lot only to end up in an environment that never missed the chance to hurt them. The very universe seemed against those aliens, and Khan felt the need to balance things out.

Of course, those feelings were nothing but immature urges. Khan didn't have the power or knowledge to help the Nele significantly. He could make their life easier by facing some of the dangers pointed at them, but that was only a temporary fix.

'I wonder how high I should climb to improve their situation,' Khan thought as beautiful gazes continued to turn in his direction. 'Becoming a normal ambassador wouldn't be enough.'

The political ladder in the Global Army was hard to climb, and Khan predicted that his general stance toward the aliens wouldn't play in his favor. Reaching a point where he could change things wouldn't be easy. More battles and ploys were bound to arrive, and he had to be ready to face them.

'Power, knowledge, and political expertise,' Khan thought as the last streets of the district appeared in his vision. 'I need all three of them.'

Power didn't need explanations, and Khan was always working on it. Knowledge was also another obvious field that Khan had constantly expanded in the past years. The political expertise was the only significant issue, especially since his lying skill were bound to stop being enough at some point.

'Why am I thinking about her now?' Khan cursed as Monica's face appeared in his mind. 'Damn you, Jenna.'

Monica was the perfect ticket toward the actual political environment of the Global Army. Her family was important, and she had even received a thorough education when it came to that field.

However, Khan didn't want to use Monica's feelings for his own benefit. He was willing to go quite far in countless fields, but not there. He saw himself as a monster, but he had his pride.

'Damn it,' Khan cursed again as he recalled the kiss. 'I might like her temper.'

Luckily for Khan, the scene that waited for him at the end of the Nele's district forced him to put those thoughts in the back of his mind. Piran stood next to the last purple lantern together with a few second-level warriors. Even Branok and Tekka were with him.

"[Are you leaving]?" Piran asked when Khan got close enough.

"[I should get back in a few hours]," Khan announced. "[Is that a problem]?"

Piran shook his head before pointing at his companions. "[Do you need an escort? It might be dangerous out there, especially for you]."

Khan didn't expect that privileged treatment, but it didn't feel too odd when he thought about it. Most Nele moved in groups. Piran was only making him part of that system.

"[I need to do this on my own]," Khan partially explained. "[I think it will be safe as long as I'm alone]."

"[Sure]," Piran quickly accepted. "[Be careful. There are many eyes on us]."

Khan couldn't help but reveal a faint smile when Piran used "us". Things were really changing, which only intensified his desire to improve his influence, and getting stronger was the first step in that direction.

Piran and the others let Khan through and watched him leaving the district. Khan didn't look back, and his attention soon went to the symphony as he tried to come up with the shortest path toward the Tors.

The dock was the same as always, but Khan noticed its few peculiar features. Workers from various species occupied landing areas or other places on the main floor, but some were clearly pretending to focus on their tasks.

The hunting season had turned the Nele district and anyone coming out of it into the most exciting piece of news. Many factions were willing to pay good money for any relevant information about their movements, and the matter expanded to the other areas occupied by Nele.

Khan had already experienced that situation, and the week spent resting didn't improve it. Actually, there seemed to be more groups keeping an eye on the district now, and the assets inside them appeared more experienced in the task.

Being at the center of the attention was something that Khan had long since accepted as part of his everyday life with Jenna. The situation barely affected him. He actually turned it into part of his training since it allowed him to keep track of the groups following him.

Those spies never got too close to Khan, but they couldn't hide their presence from the symphony. Their steps seemed to follow Khan when he inspected the sounds carried by the synthetic mana, and he expected the real world to reflect that behavior.

The symphony depicted a crowded environment, but Khan's walk remained peaceful. No one approached him. Many even tried to avoid meeting his seemingly lost gaze as he moved deeper into the dock to reach an area that almost everyone avoided.

The return of the oily synthetic mana announced Khan's arrival into areas occupied by Tors. A darker environment unfolded in his vision as he strode forward. The same light as the rest of Lower Level 3 illuminated those buildings and streets, but they appeared blacker and dirtier through his sensitivity.

Khan tried to keep his gaze straight, but his eyes often fell on the guardrails. His senses were telling him that no one was hiding there, but he couldn't quell the worry that Tors would suddenly come out from under the street.

Nothing strange happened even after Khan dived deeper into the district. The same desolation witnessed during his first trip there welcomed him. The streets were empty, and no presence stood in his senses' range.

Khan could go deeper into the district, but his calculations told him that he had already crossed the area where the Tors had stopped him in the past. Proceeding even further might be disrespectful, but he didn't know how to summon the Tors otherwise.

'So much for coming back,' Khan sighed in his mind before sitting at the center of the street. He would wait there for a couple of hours and dive deeper into the district only if no one came to pick him up.

Meditating was always a good option, especially in that situation. Khan had yet to recover completely, and the time spent with Maban slightly delayed that process.

Minutes passed in complete peace. Those areas of the dock were relatively silent since the Tors didn't handle their activities in the open, so Khan had the chance to focus on himself and the symphony.

The synthetic mana revealed the presence of the spies. They were more distant than before, and Khan connected that issue to the Tors. Their fear of those aliens wasn't enough to scare them away, but Khan welcomed that slightly positive feature.

The wait turned out to be relatively short. A mass of energy eventually appeared under the street and made Khan jump on his feet. He didn't peek past the guardrails, and some hesitation spread in his mind when the presence multiplied.

'Three Tors, second-level warriors,' Khan calculated as he waited at the center of the street. He didn't know why the Tors were hesitating, but he wouldn't dare to make the first move in that situation.

The masses of energy were basically identical in their lack of peculiar features. Khan felt sure that the Tors were wearing their capes. He couldn't know if the aliens under the streets were aware of him, but their hesitation in showing their faces was enough as an answer.

"I'm the chaos wielder," Khan eventually announced. "You told me to come to make a deal."

The announcement produced the expected results. Three hoods peeked past the guardrails to inspect Khan. He found two Tors on his right and one on his left, and they all stuck out their forked tongues to examine him.

Khan showed his palm and released a bit of mana. The purple-red shades given by the mana anomaly made his element unmistakable, which finally gave the Tors a reason to abandon their hesitation. The three hooded figures jumped past the guardrails to land on the street, and they all approached Khan.

"Chaos wielder," The Tors on Khan's left exclaimed in a hissing voice, and its two companions quickly echoed the statement.

"We met more than a week ago," Khan reminded. "I've come with more chaos."

The three Tors oddly bent toward Khan to make their trembling tongues get close to his face, but they eventually recalled them and straightened their position. The aliens then turned to walk deeper into the district, and only one of them stopped to voice a few words. "Come, come."

"Wait," Khan called without making a single step. "I want to make the deal first."

"Not in the open," The Tors that had stopped said in a dismissive tone. "Come, chaos wielder."

The Tors didn't remain still anymore and followed its companions, completely disregarding Khan in the process. Khan didn't know what to do. Advancing into unknown territory was dumb from every perspective, but he had himself as leverage there.

Khan heaved a deep sigh before deciding to follow the Tors. The three aliens weren't hurrying, so he caught up with them in no time. A silent walk began, and scenes he had already witnessed during the previous week flowed through his vision.

The width of the Tors' district was unclear. Khan had to use the distance from the dome to gain an idea of the surface it covered. The area was quite big and probably contained all the Tors' forces in Lower Lever 3, but its streets remained empty.

Ideas popped in Khan's mind as he followed the three Tors. If his hypotheses were correct, the Tors had probably modified many buildings in order to have enough private locations for their arts. The presence of secret passages was also possible, so he didn't hope to see much from the walk.

Khan's expectations turned out to be on point. No matter how deep the group dived into the district, the streets remained empty. The whole area felt abandoned, but Khan knew that life had to exist somewhere, and the buildings around him were his best bet.

"Can we talk now?" Khan asked when he felt that the group had gone deep enough into the district.

"Still in the open," The same Tors that had spoken before said without bothering to turn.

Khan felt helpless in front of that dismissive behavior. He couldn't understand what the Tors thought, and following them remained his only option.

More streets and buildings went by until the three aliens finally stopped before a small structure. The place was nothing more than a tent-sized house, but Khan could see from the gaps in the streets that it stretched downstairs.

"Come, come," The same Tors said while its two companions approached the house. The entrance immediately opened, but its insides remained dark even after the two aliens moved in.

The house shared the same properties as the capes. The open entrance didn't even let out any mana. Khan couldn't understand anything from his position, and something told him that questioning the remaining Tors wouldn't lead anywhere.

"Inside, chaos wielder," The remaining Tors exclaimed before stepping toward the entrance.

"Are you sure we can't talk here?" Khan tried one last time, but the Tors completely ignored him and disappeared inside the tiny house.

'How do they expect anyone to trust them?' Khan cursed as he stared at the darkness past the entrance. 'Maybe they just don't care or fail to see the problem altogether.'

Only a crazy man would ignore all the red flags and step forward anyway, but Khan knew that he had already made his decision. Countless bad scenarios crossed his mind, but his curiosity was stronger than his fear. Besides, he could destroy everything at the first sign of danger.

Khan took a deep breath before stepping forward and entering the house. The darkness vanished as soon as he crossed the entrance, and an azure environment unfolded in his eyes. Tubes carrying synthetic mana filled the walls and illuminated a small, empty room.

The area didn't have anything except for the tubes and the three Tors standing at its center. The mana flowing through those narrow pipes didn't carry oily properties, but the energy inside the room did, so Khan naturally focused on the former, but the floor hindered his inspections.

Most of the tubes carried the synthetic mana in the areas under the room. The traces of that energy even disappeared after crossing the floor. It was clear that something was up in that building, but Khan's attention moved to the hooded figures as soon as the entrance closed behind him.

Khan couldn't help but grow a bit tense, but his expression remained calm. Even his arms remained in their place. The urge to reach for his knife became intense, but he killed it as he repeated his previous question. "Can we talk now?"

Three forked tongues left the hoods and began to tremble. The Tors remained silent as they inspected Khan, and he did the same while waiting for the situation to change.

"We want chaos," The closest Tors to Khan eventually announced without retracting its tongue.

"I won't give it for free," Khan responded.

"Make a deal," The same Tors replied. "Name a price."

"I don't want money," Khan revealed.

"What do you want?" The Tors continued. "Name a price."

Khan fell in a bit of a pickle there. He didn't have a specific target for his requests since he knew nothing about the Tors' arts. Yet, his social skills came into play at the right time.

"I want to learn your arts," Khan exclaimed, knowing that his request was unreasonable.

A series of incomprehensible hisses came out of the hoods. They resembled gasps, but they grew quieter when the Tors turned to face themselves.

'Do they have a secret language?' Khan wondered when he tried to make some sense out of the hisses the Tors exchanged.

Khan had yet to master the Tors' language. He had memorized most of their vocabulary and grammar on Earth, but the current scene hinted at a troublesome matter. It seemed that the Tors could communicate in ways that the Global Army wasn't aware of.

The matter was surprising but predictable at the same time. The Nele also had secret communication methods, and some other species on Milia 222 were bound to have similar tricks.

Still, the fact that Khan could remain calm after that discovery didn't speak for his situation. The Tors could converse freely right in front of him. The chances of getting scammed had instantly increased.

The Tors eventually stopped hissing among themselves and turned back to Khan, but only the closest spoke. "We don't reveal our arts."

Khan expected that reaction and immediately deployed his next move. "How can I pick something if I don't know what you can offer?"

"Credits," The Tors suggested.

"I don't want money," Khan repeated.

"We don't show our arts," The Tors reiterated.

Silence fell in the room. The negotiation seemed to have reached a wall, but Khan knew that he still had a chance. The Tors would have simply kicked him out otherwise.

"You don't need to explain everything," Khan declared. "I just need to see the basics to understand if you have something that might interest me."

The closest Tors wanted to refuse right away. A sharp hiss even began to leave the hood, but its companions promptly voiced softer cries that claimed its attention and made it turn.

Another secret conversation happened in front of Khan's calm eyes, but he inspected it with newfound confidence. The Tors were considering his suggestion, but he didn't call it a victory just yet.

The Tors turned toward Khan when their hissing whispering ended, and he prepared himself for the counteroffer. He didn't believe that those aliens would be convinced so easily, but the following line went against his predictions.

"We can show a bit," The closest Tors exclaimed, "For some chaos."

Wariness immediately overtook Khan's thoughts. He smelled a hoax, but he was also without alternative options. The situation wasn't too bad either. At worst, he would give some mana for free and abandon the idea of cooperating with the Tors.

"Okay," Khan said, and one of the Tors reached the room's back before bending toward the floor and knocking on it with its hood.

The knocking didn't have any specific rhythm, but part of the floor slid open anyway. A trapdoor with no ladder attached to it became visible in the empty room, and the Tors stuck its head inside it before voicing more incomprehensible hisses.

The symphony didn't change, so Khan focused on the bent Tors. The alien was still standing on the first floor, but almost three-quarters of its body had crossed the trapdoor. In theory, no humanoid creature could remain on its feet in that position.

The posture clearly wasn't a problem for the Tors since it easily pulled itself out of the trapdoor while holding a transparent container. The limbs weren't visible due to the cape, so Khan could only focus on the item's size. It was smaller than the one in the previous meeting, which reassured him slightly.

'This shouldn't be big enough for a scam,' Khan thought as the Tors placed the container on the floor and he approached it to send mana.

The three Tors bent toward the container and stuck out their tongues while purple-red mana flowed inside it. The process didn't take long, and the aliens straightened their position as soon as Khan was done.

Two of the Tors left the building right afterward. The scene surprised Khan, but he could only watch as the entrance opened and closed, leaving him alone with the alien that had spoken with him until now. The container was also still in the room, but he had already disregarded it.

"Just a bit," The Tors repeated before turning toward the open trapdoor.

Khan didn't know what to do, and the Tors didn't seem to care either. Most of its attention was on the full container, and its forked tongue shook to no end as it inspected it from different angles.

"What should I do exactly?" Khan couldn't help but ask.

"Look at our arts," The Tors stated without moving its attention from the container, "But just a bit."

Dots finally connected in Khan's mind. He carefully walked past the Tors to approach the trapdoor, and the continuation of the azure tubes became visible. The lower floor appeared identical to the first, but differences became clear as he tilted his head.

The trapdoor was too small to give a complete view of the lower floor. Khan glanced at the Tors busy with the container before kneeling and placing his palms near the hole's edges.

Khan used his sensitivity to keep track of the Tors as he bent forward and peeked past the trapdoor. A new symphony unfolded in his senses as soon as he crossed the hole, but the scene that filled his view left him too surprised to check the mana.

The lower floor featured a room with a tall ceiling. It seemed taller than four meters from Khan's position, but that was only a meaningless detail compared to the target of his attention.

Khan focused on the dark-orange scales and studied them as his eyes climbed through that strange body. A thick and coiled creature hung from the wall by relying on knobs and handles placed randomly over that surface.

Two short and slim arms grew from the scales and tinkered with an array of tubes that converged at the center of the room, and a reptilian head studied it carefully. Its dark eyes even landed on Khan for a second, but they quickly returned to the pipes seemingly hovering before them.

'That's how they truly are,' Khan exclaimed in his mind as his curiosity reached its peak.

The Tors were far from humanoid. They had the appearance of thick snakes with tiny and slim arms growing somewhere in the upper part of their bodies. Their aspect was monstrous and scary, but Khan only felt excitement at that sight.

Khan became able to see more details once his surprise waned. The Tors wasn't exactly naked. It had wires and tubes around its body, which all converged toward a mechanical structure tied to its back.

The machine wasn't complicated, at least in its appearance. It was nothing more than a flexible metal line with a few small flasks attached to its surface. Those items and the tubes contained synthetic mana, so Khan decided to see it as a weapon for now.

The synthetic mana inside the flasks and tubes attracted Khan's attention. Each item had a different type of energy that didn't limit its diversity to mere density. Khan noticed multiple behaviors and shades, which he instinctively connected to some elements.

'What is it doing with that mana?' Khan wondered, but another event claimed his attention and made him put those thoughts in the back of his mind.

The tubes before the Tors shared the peculiarities of the flasks. Different types of synthetic mana flowed through the array, and the alien paid great attention to them as it moved some pipes to connect them to other parts of the machine.

The process never leaked any mana. The tubes seemed to have protections against that potential issue, and the flow of energy resumed as soon as they found new connections inside the array.

The Tors played with the tubes until one of them grew brighter than the others. Its tail left the wall at that point and stretched toward the floor, where it wrapped itself around a small flask lying there.

The tail brought the flask into the slim arms' range, and the Tors grabbed it before putting it under the bright tube. The alien separated the pipe from the array, and azure drops slowly fell from it.

The drops were mana which didn't hesitate to regain a gaseous form as soon as they ended in the flask. The item prevented the energy from leaking into the room, so the Tors could continue the process until most of the tube became empty.

The Tors summoned its tail to grab the flask. The alien left the almost-empty tube alone as it lowered its head to let its limb place the container on an opening in the metal line. Adding that item brought new power to the machine, but Khan found himself distracted once again.

The almost-empty tube released its remaining synthetic mana and confirmed one of Khan's guesses. The new energy that joined the symphony carried oily properties. It clearly was the waste from the machine.

Nevertheless, being right didn't bring any joy. Khan only had room for surprise and curiosity now, but a clear question managed to get past those emotions. 'What the fuck did I just watch?'

Chapter 383 Orders

Khan had never seen himself as a great expert in mana. He had a broader mindset compared to most of humanity, but his knowledge remained relatively shallow. It simply involved multiple fields.

Nevertheless, despite the lack of deep and specific knowledge, Khan had seen his fair share of strange and peculiar stuff during his travels. He could immediately place the Tors with the humans and the Guko. Their approach to mana was clearly scientific.

As the surprise waned, Khan tried to make some sense out of what he had just witnessed. The tubes, the different types of synthetic mana, the Tors' appearance, and the machine on its back were too much to take in a single meeting. However, his curiosity still pushed him toward possible explanations.

The different types of synthetic mana were clues. The Tors was messing with that energy in ways that Khan couldn't fully understand, but he could still gain some surface-level knowledge from looking at the process.

The synthetic mana changed as it flowed through the tubes. Each pipe altered that energy differently, and rearranging the array allowed the Tors to generate what it needed.

Khan wanted to see the tubes as filters, but that description didn't include the entirety of their functions. Some pipes forced the synthetic mana to condense, while others made it expand. The process didn't even stop there since parts of the machine seemed able to add or remove structural qualities depending on where the energy flowed.

'It's like a small lab meant only to alter mana,' Khan concluded, 'But it's far from being perfectly optimized.'

The artificial alteration of the mana had benefits over the manipulation field. Khan couldn't even begin to imagine the level he would have to reach to affect that energy so deeply.

However, the process had drawbacks. The oily synthetic mana released by the tube after the transfer into the flask was a waste product that tainted the district as a whole. Khan didn't know the long-term implications of that pollution, but they couldn't be too good if even the Tors refused to use that energy.

The purpose of the alteration remained unclear even after that reasoning, but the metallic structure on the Tors' back was clearly involved. That dark-silver line tied to its body used the mana inside the flasks as fuel for something that Khan couldn't understand without actual examples.

Khan couldn't help but compare that metal line to the Fuveall's implants, even if they had noticeable differences. The Tors' machine wasn't nearly as invasive or sturdy. It actually resembled a weapon of some sort, and the flasks could change its power.

The Tors on the lower floor was a second-level warrior, and the machine on its back seemed to match the quality of Khan's knife. Yet, the mana flowing inside it put it far above average weapons.

'The flasks act as magazines,' Khan found himself thinking, 'But they do far more than providing bullets.'

Each flask carried a different type of synthetic mana. Khan also felt quite sure that the Tors had produced that energy through the array of tubes, so it was safe to assume that every container had specific purposes.

The matter didn't end with that diversity. The flasks didn't only carry specific types of synthetic mana. The metallic line blended them into its insides to create something newer and stronger.

Khan knew that he was out of his depths. Technology had never been his strong point, and that machine even went beyond anything witnessed on Earth or other planets. Only the Guko's lab came close, but the Tors' arts had something more peculiar according to Khan's guts.

Strangely enough, the Tors' appearance was the easiest part to accept. Those aliens were nowhere near humanoid. They were highly technological talking snakes equipped with small arms, but Khan quickly grew used to their features.

'What now?' That question inevitably popped out in Khan's mind once he completed his superficial inspection.

Khan had met the Tors for a reason, but the scene didn't provide him with anything close to useful. He barely understood what was going on. He couldn't possibly know what might help him.

"Just a bit!" The Tors on the first floor eventually announced. "Enough looking."

Khan wanted to remain immersed in the scene a bit longer, but contradicting the Tors wasn't smart. He put strength on his arms to lift his head and sit on the floor, and the caped alien didn't hesitate to approach the trapdoor to close it.

"Price now," The Tors exclaimed while its attention returned to the container full of chaos.

Khan struggled to keep his eyes on the hood after seeing what the cape hid. The cloaking fabric couldn't stop him from imagining the coiled snake behind it, but that didn't interrupt his thinking brain. He had to give an answer, but the truth was undeniable. His mind was blank.

"Explain," Khan uttered. "Explain what I just saw."

"We don't explain our arts," The Tors said without turning toward Khan.

"I can't name a price if I don't understand what you can do," Khan explained.

"Credits," The Tors responded.

"I don't want money," Khan repeated for the third time.

The Tors didn't add anything. It remained focused on the container. It almost sounded like the negotiations were over, but Khan was still there, and the alien wasn't kicking him out.

"I can come here once a week," Khan suggested. "I only need something in return."

The Tors retracted its tongue, but its hood remained pointed on the container. Silence regained control of the small room, and Khan waited until he felt the need to add something.

"What did I just see?" Khan eventually asked.

"Twice a week," The Tors bargained while finally turning to face Khan.

"Sure," Khan quickly agreed before repeating his previous question. "What did I just see?"

"Tors' alchemy," The Tors revealed. "Rearranging mana to produce various effects."

The explanation was beyond vague, but Khan was okay with that. He only cared about the Tors' willingness to open up. He had one foot in the door, so the time to push a bit had come.

"Why do you want chaos?" Khan questioned. "What's so special about it?"

An incomprehensible hiss came out of the hood. The Tors didn't like that prying question, but Khan was ready to justify himself.

"It would reassure me knowing that I'm not giving you a weapon," Khan lied.

The Tors remained silent. It turned toward the container before bringing the hood's opening back to Khan and uttering an explanation. "The chaos element is more flexible."

"That can't be it, right?" Khan pressed on.

"Very flexible," The Tors added.

Khan couldn't apply his social skills to the Tors. He didn't know enough about that species to catch them lying, and the hood prevented him from learning to recognize any expression depicted by the reptilian head.

Nevertheless, Khan was far from a fool. The Tors' fame saw them as a highly secretive species. They wouldn't open up for something as meager as flexibility. There had to be something else to the matter.

"We'll never get a deal done if you mix lies with your rare explanations," Khan declared.

The Tors fell silent, but its hood didn't return on the container. It was considering Khan's words, and another incomprehensible hiss resounded in the room once it accepted that he was right.

"Chaos is richer," The Tors eventually explained. "It's easier to alter, and it can create various mana."

"They might use it for a weapon then," Khan thought.

Khan felt able to understand something when he reviewed that explanation through his knowledge of mana, but the issue remained. He still didn't know what to ask in exchange for his chaos.

'Easier to alter?' Khan eventually repeated. 'The chaos wielders would have something to say about that.'

It was honestly strange seeing the Tors having that opinion. Khan would have understood if the statement came from a species with a deep reverence toward mana, but the Tors had a scientific approach. They couldn't possibly treat the chaos element lightly.

'Maybe they have special tools to contain it,' Khan wondered. 'Also, splitting it into different strands of energy might not be as dangerous as casting a spell.'

Khan accepted that something similar was possible. After all, the Guko could concoct and contain anti-mana. It wouldn't be strange for the Tors to do the same with the chaos element.

Still, a vague idea formed in his mind when he thought about the matter. The Tors could alter the mana to make it suit their needs, and Khan required a similar service.

"Can you alter spells too?" Khan asked once his idea fully formed.

The Tors remained silent before voicing a vague "maybe".

Khan joined his palms at that point. Mana flowed between them until it reached the intended amount and allowed him to separate his hands to generate the chaos spear.

The Tors remained strangely calm before the casting of such a dangerous spell. The cape prevented Khan from noticing any reaction or emotion, but the lack of tremors, gasps, or gestures as a whole hinted at the alien's confident mindset.

Soon, the purple-red glow took over the azure light in the small room. The chaos spear shone between Khan's palms, and a question left his mouth. "Can you make it smaller?"

The Tors finally moved. It bent toward the chaos spear and stuck out its forked tongue to inspect it. Its head moved left and right to study the spell from different angles, and Khan recognized the evident curiosity fueling those gestures.

"Just smaller?" The Tors questioned without interrupting its inspection.

"Weaker is also fine," Khan revealed. "I want shorter casting time."

The Tors continued to inspect the glowing spear until it eventually recalled its tongue and retracted its head. Mechanical noises came out from under the cape, but nothing strange happened on the outside.

"Come, chaos wielder," The Tors exclaimed as it ignored the container and approached the house's exit.

Khan turned the glowing spear into a harmless purple-red cloud before standing up and following the Tors. The two left the house and walked through the district's streets until they reached another small building that stretched on the lower floor.

The Tors entered the house without saying anything, and Khan followed. The building looked almost identical to the previous, but the alien didn't hesitate to take off its cape once the entrance closed.

The reptilian figure and the dark-silver machine attached to its back unfolded in Khan's view. He could see the entirety of the alien and the flasks connected to the structure tied to its body. The Tors only had two of them, and they justified the item's overall lower power.

'It's weaker than my knife,' Khan thought.

"Don't peek," The Tors ordered while tapping on the floor to reveal a trapdoor.

The Tors' was quite big. Its reptilian body was thick, but that didn't hinder its passage through the trapdoor. Its movements were actually pretty swift and controlled as it dived into the hole and occupied the lower floor.

Those movements were inhuman. Khan couldn't even think about imitating them. The Tors could lift most of its body by using only a small part of its tail, and the flexibility it could express wasn't something humanoid beings could replicate.

The trapdoor remained open, but no sound or unusual strand of synthetic mana came out. Khan felt the urge to look at the lower floor, but he held back to respect the Tors' orders.

A few minutes passed before the reptilian head peeked past the trapdoor and voiced another hissing order. "Come down, chaos wielder."

Khan followed along. The Tors left the trapdoor, so he could approach it and study how to handle his descent. That building wasn't made for beings with arms and legs, but a four meters drop was easy to handle.

Khan grabbed the trapdoor's edges before stuffing his legs past it. His lower body followed, and the same went for his torso. He soon found himself hanging from that opening, and the lack of footholds forced him to relax his grasp.

The ceiling wasn't too tall. Khan landed on the floor without touching any tube or item lying there, and his curiosity immediately took over. He had seen a similar room just a few minutes ago, but the different perspective created an entirely new scenery.

The Tors was hanging from a series of knobs placed on the wall. It was a whole meter above Khan, and its reptilian body allowed it to move freely even when relying on those small handholds.

Tubes covered the walls and left them to amass before the Tors. The same machine that Khan had seen previously hovered near the center of the room, but its layout was far different. The pipes didn't create a thick array. Instead, they left a vast open space among them.

"Summon the spell," The Tors ordered while making the last adjustments to the machine.

Khan executed the order. A chaos spear soon formed between his hands and filled the room with its purple-red shades. The Tors partially left the wall to stretch toward the spell and study it for a few seconds before returning to the machine to complete its layout.

Each tube typically carried a different type of synthetic mana, but all the energy inside them seemed to harmonize when the Tors finished tinkering with the machine. Low sounds joined the symphony inside the room, and even the spear between Khan's hands grew slightly more stable under their influence.

The Tors used its head to push the machine down. The tubes stretched and moved freely without altering their overall layout, and Khan soon found them standing above him.

"Put the spell inside," The Tors announced.

Khan couldn't help but glance at the Tors. Leaving the chaos spear unchecked would probably lead to an explosion, and the room didn't offer hiding spots.

Yet, the low sounds added to the symphony hinted at something, and Khan felt able to trust the Tors' expertise. He grabbed his spear and slowly lifted it until it entered the array of tubes, and new changes happened at that point.

The low noises had already made the spear more stable, and being among the tubes only intensified those features. Khan wanted to retain some control over the spell out of fear of an explosion, but everything remained calm even after he let go of the glowing weapon.

It felt actually strange to see the chaos spear hovering among the tubes on its own. Khan wasn't affecting it. Usually, the weapon would explode and release a destructive pillar, but it retained its stability inside that machine.

The Tors ignored Khan as it inspected the machine from different angles to gain a complete view of the spear. Faint hisses left its mouth during the process, and its tail eventually left the wall to search for items on the floor.

Khan performed careful steps left and right to avoid the tail and dodge any item lying on the ground. Still, it turned out that the Tors wasn't looking for any of that junk. A hidden drawer opened when the alien touched a corner, and a series of bright flasks appeared in the open.

The Tors didn't give Khan the time to study the energy inside the flasks. The alien used its tail to grab those small containers and attach them to the machine on its back. It even replaced the almost empty ones from before.

The dark-silver line grew stronger as the Tors added new magazines, but that wasn't the end. Something changed in the nature of the machine, and those effects spread to the alien. An azure light filled its vertical pupils before expanding through the entirety of its reptilian eyes.

Khan could sense the significant amount of mana flowing toward the Tors' eyes. He couldn't understand its effects, but it wasn't hard to come up with ideas. The situation and the scene hinted at an enhancement to the alien's sight.

The effects of the machine didn't stop there. More mana flowed out of the dark-silver line to reach the Tors' head. The alien stuck out its tongue, which glowed with azure light while shaking and sending tremors toward the chaos spear.

The spear's surface destabilized as tremors landed on it, filling Khan with the urge to run away. He eyed the open trapdoor and prepared himself to activate the [Blood Shield], but nothing dangerous happened.

Strands of mana left the chaos spear and began to float among the array of tubes. The machine contained Khan's energy while the destruction of his spell continued, and the weapon eventually transformed into a formless purple-red cloud.

The Tors used its tail to replace two flasks at that point. Its eyes continued to glow even after the dark-silver line sent its new energy, but its tongue began to release different types of tremors.

The new tremors forced the purple-red cloud to condense. The Tors handled the process slowly, focusing on a single strand of mana before moving to the next. Then, after a few minutes passed, Khan became able to recognize the silhouette of his chaos spear among the tubes.

The Tors was rebuilding the chaos spear from the same energy that had once made it, but Khan could see that the process wasn't seamless. Some mana inevitably dispersed even if the tubes tried

to contain it. Also, the spell lost many of its unique properties since the Tors couldn't replicate Khan's casting.

The Tors repeated the process after turning the entirety of the cloud into a spear. The weapon shattered and reformed, and the alien immediately broke it again to go over everything once more.

Khan waited patiently. The Tors was allowing him to watch everything, and he didn't complain, but the matter remained strange. That behavior wasn't in line with the secretive fame that enveloped that species.

'Is this not important enough to remain hidden?' Khan wondered. 'Did they partially accept me?'

The second guess sounded unrealistic. Khan would find it easier to believe that the Tors had gotten too immersed in the process to care about him.

'Maybe it doesn't consider all of this important,' Khan thought.

The Tors didn't turn at all. It kept shattering and rebuilding the spear until the entirety of its mana dispersed. The container made of tubes finally became empty, but the alien kept staring at it with glowing eyes.

Khan kept track of the consumption of mana. The dark-silver machine had never stopped pouring energy into the Tors' body, and the state of its flasks depicted the process since the fuel inside them had significantly diminished.

"It won't be the same," The Tors announced once its eyes lost their glow.

"What do you mean?" Khan asked.

"The spell needs to change," The Tors revealed. "Something is missing. It won't be the same."

Khan's face remained calm, but his thoughts were already on the matter. The Tors had sounded lost, and Khan could guess the reason why. The chaos spear wasn't the result of a mere gathering of mana according to a specific pattern, so it made sense for the rearrangement to produce inferior results.

"Can you do it?" Khan questioned.

"Yes," The Tors confirmed, "But it won't be the same."

"I'll choose that as a price then," Khan exclaimed. "We can find a new deal afterward."

"No new deal," The Tors argued.

"What reason would I have to bring you chaos after getting what I want?" Khan asked.

The Tors remained silent for a few seconds before voicing a warning. "We won't show more of our arts."

"I'll think about something before my next request," Khan reassured. "I won't pry any further."

"Twice a week or no deal," The Tors reminded.

"I already agreed to that," Khan declared. "How long will it take to alter the spell?"

"One or two weeks," The Tors revealed, "But it won't be the same."

"That's fine," Khan uttered. "We have a deal then."

The Tors didn't answer. Its attention went to the machine on its back, and its tail moved to remove some half-empty flasks. The energy flowing inside the dark-silver line changed, and its overall power fell.

The silence left Khan in a pickle. In theory, he had yet to plan a few details with the Tors, but the latter had completely lost interest in him.

"How do I contact you?" Khan decided to ask.

"You don't," The Tors stated. "Come to the district. Give chaos."

Khan gave up at that point. Trying to reason with the Tors seemed straight-up impossible. Their general lack of interest and secrecy made any attempt to start a conversation pointless.

The Tors didn't speak anymore. It sorted the flasks in its drawer before closing it and bringing its attention back to the tubes. More synthetic mana flowed through them after the alien pressed on a seemingly random spot on the wall, but it didn't modify the array.

"Leave now," The Tors ordered, and Khan didn't hesitate to follow the order. He performed a jump that made him reach the trapdoor, and the opening closed after he pulled himself up.

'I wonder how they really are,' Khan found himself thinking while leaving the small house and studying his memories to find a way out of the district. 'Maybe I'm overthinking this. They might be too inhuman for my understanding.'

The Tors' coldness and indifference reminded Khan about the Guko, even if the former weren't as emotionless. His curiosity wanted him to find out more about those aliens, but the environment didn't work in his favor. He actually had to consider himself lucky to have seen them without a cape.

'They can dismantle and reassemble mana,' Khan summarized as he walked toward less oily areas of the dock. 'That should be their foundation, so the machines on their backs should be catalysts.'

The Tors appeared physically strong, but their machines were the real deal. Those aliens could increase their power and alter their nature as long as they had suitable mana. Their potential was probably limitless.

A cold realization hit Khan during the walk. He recalled when a Tors sent back the shot from the sniper in the hunting team. The feat had been incredible, but it had also looked effortless.

'Did I just give them the chance to do the same with the chaos spear?' Khan wondered. 'They should be unable to explain many important details.'

Khan couldn't be sure about that, but it was already too late to regret his decision. The Tors had studied the chaos spear. He had only himself to blame if that species learnt to counter it.

Nevertheless, seeing the Tors in action made Khan desire to avoid a conflict against them. They felt too troublesome to fight, especially when given the time to prepare.

As for the negotiation, Khan was fine with getting a weak version of a lesser spell. His approach was different anyway, so he only wanted the Tors to develop a blueprint or general method. He would make the necessary changes by himself at that point.

Some mental exhaustion assaulted Khan while he walked toward the Nele's district. Training with Maban and dealing with the Tors while he had yet to recover fully had been tiring, and the plans that popped into his mind only added weight to that feeling.

The hunting season, Luke's mission, Maban's technique, the deals with the Tors, and the training in the Nele's arts were tasks that Khan didn't know how to fit into his daily routine. More problems were also bound to appear as some situations evolved. He had a lot to do, and all of that would take time.

'Well, I never liked sleeping anyway,' Khan mocked himself. He didn't mind being so busy. It actually reminded him of happier times in his life.

The walk back to the Nele's district featured the usual spies who kept track of Khan's movements. The symphony didn't reveal their exact position, but Khan sensed their attention on him. Still, he would ignore everything as long as nothing came on his way.

That strangely didn't happen. A familiar presence joined the symphony before moving toward Khan. He raised his gaze, and Sen-nu's smiling figure soon became clear.

"[My human customer]!" Sen-nu announced in the Nele's language while spreading his arms.

"[I thought you lived on that street]," Khan commented while showing a polite smile.

"[Even Sen-nu has to move at times]," Sen-nu laughed as he stopped and dropped his backpack on the floor. "[I have to show you something]."

"[Were you looking for me]?" Khan said through his smile, but his thoughts inevitably grew cold. His left hand even approached his sheath to prepare for the worst.

"[Look at this]," Sen-nu exclaimed after taking a screen out of his backpack. "[This is you, right]?"

Khan carefully approached Sen-nu and gave up on his polite pretense once he saw the scenes playing on the device. He knew that video. It was the recording from the Orlats' club.

"[So much for protecting your customers]," Khan insulted.

"[Don't blame Sen-nu]," Sen-nu stated. "[Even I have to follow orders at times]."

Chapter 384 Dumb

The fact that Sen-nu had gotten his hands on the video was quite surprising. Khan wasn't a high-profile figure in the dock, and Piran had even reassured him on that field.

Moreover, Sen-nu didn't have the appearance or bearing of a leader. His behavior could be a pretense, but the alternative explanation that formed in Khan's mind made more sense. Factions among the Fuveall had probably stepped in to purchase the video and reach out to Khan.

Khan could understand all of that very well, but he remained confused. He didn't see any real value in his figure. Threatening him with something relatively valuable made no sense in his mind unless Sen-nu and the Fuveall wanted to use his connection to the Nele.

Of course, the realization that the Nele were the only possible explanation for that event made Khan's thoughts even colder, but he refrained from violent outbursts. He didn't want to jump to conclusions, and the situation was far from terrible.

Khan had listened to the symphony during the entirety of his walk. His mind had been full of messy thoughts, but his attention had never wavered. The dock was keeping track of his movements, but he didn't sense anything too out of the ordinary.

Hunters could be waiting, and the Fuveall probably had technology that could defy impressive sensitivity to mana, but no one knew Khan's prowess in that field. It wouldn't make sense for those aliens to use advanced methods to counter something they weren't aware of.

In short, the symphony reassured Khan. He felt pretty sure that no trap was waiting for him. As for Sen-nu, the video was a threat but a weak one. He could spread it, but the interested factions had probably already purchased it.

"[What orders]?" Khan said in his best version of the Fuveall's language. He had no reason to use it, but he wanted to improve since he was at it.

"[Truly a resourceful customer]!" Sen-nu laughed while also switching to the Fuveall's language.

Sen-nu closed the video and bent toward the backpack to store the device, but Khan suddenly grabbed his left wrist, right at the end of the metal plate. Sen-nu turned and pulled his arm, but Khan stepped forward and forced his struggle to an end.

Khan was shorter than Sen-nu, and the Fuveall generally had stronger bodies. Their implants could even grant additional physical strength. In theory, Sen-nu had no reason to interrupt his gesture.

However, Khan wasn't restraining Sen-nu through brute strength. His right hand was on his wrist, but his left was on the knife's eccentric handle. He only had to draw it to reach Sen-nu's unprotected abdomen.

The tone of the conversation immediately changed. Sen-nu had tried to retain some friendliness, while Khan had held back his coldness. Yet, everything had grown tense and serious after Khan seized the initiative.

"[Come on now]," Sen-nu chuckled, but some nervousness fused with his attempted chill tone. "[Sen-nu came as a friend]."

"[What orders]?" Khan repeated, adjusting his accent according to what he was hearing.

The tense situation attracted some attention. Khan heard changes in the symphony while his gaze remained fixed on Sen-nu's golden eyes. Sharper tremors expanded through the synthetic mana due to the commotion that unfolded, but nothing came in his direction.

"[Sen-nu only needs to bring you somewhere]," Sen-nu explained as his tone grew calmer.

"[Where and why]?" Khan pressed on.

"[Sen-nu can't say]," Sen-nu replied.

"[Why would I follow you then]?" Khan asked.

"[Because we are friends]," Sen-nu joked.

The concern for the situation had disappeared from Sen-nu's tone at that point, and Khan couldn't understand why. Nothing had changed, but the alien had lost his anxiety.

Khan couldn't have missed a shift in Sen-nu's mana. Everything had remained still inside the alien, but the change in his behavior had happened anyway, and the lack of explanations forced Khan's hand.

"[What are you hiding]?" Khan threatened as strands of mana came out from the back of his right palm.

"[Nothing]," Sen-nu responded.

"[Why are you so calm then]?" Khan uttered while pulling Sen-nu closer to make the knife's handle touch his abdomen.

"[You don't want to kill Sen-nu]," Sen-nu explained as a smile broadened on his face. "[You want answers]."

Khan had spoken similar words to Maban that same day, but they sounded like insults when they came out of Sen-nu's mouth. Sen-nu didn't really mean any of that. Still, Khan couldn't let someone underestimate him so blatantly.

'Does he think that I won't kill him?' Khan wondered as his mindset made the synthetic mana around him reek of killing intent.

Khan had already concluded that Sen-nu and the Fuveall were after his connection to the Nele. He didn't know how accurate that guess was, but it sounded far more reasonable than any other explanation.

A similar connection would often create a halo of mystery and respect around Khan. He would basically inherit those features from the species backing him up. However, Sen-nu had approached him fearlessly, which had deeper implications.

Political maneuvers would typically involve proper members of the involved species, but Sen-nu had come to Khan. The gesture almost proved that the Fuveall saw him as the weak link in that faction, and he couldn't let that stand.

The Fuveall had a scientific approach to mana. They were different from the Tors, Guko, and humans, but they still belonged to that field. Sen-nu didn't have the means to notice the changes in the synthetic mana, but his vast experience with countless customers warned him.

Something was different on Khan's face. A cold determination had descended on his expression and had filled his eyes. Any trace of pretense or emotion left his gaze as he set his mind on sending a message that the entire dock would have to listen to.

"[Wait, wait]!" Sen-nu abruptly shouted as panic returned to his tone. "[Sen-nu meant no harm or offense]!"

The sharp change in Sen-nu's behavior dispersed part of the killing intent that had almost taken over Khan's actions. The latter had been ready to draw his knife to prove that no one could approach him so lightly, but the new development revealed a less bloody path.

"[Start speaking then]," Khan ordered.

"[Someone from my species wants to have a conversation]," Sen-nu explained. "[It's nothing dangerous. Sen-nu swears]!"

"[And why would I follow you]?" Khan continued. "[That video has already reached the dock. It poses no threat to me]."

"[Sen-nu wanted to show his connections]," Sen-nu revealed. "[And that we know about your value]."

'Did I misinterpret it?' Khan wondered.

Khan had done his research on Earth, but books and reports always failed to depict certain details, especially when it came to other species. The humans often missed some traditions and typical behaviors. Sen-nu might have really used the video as a simple greeting.

"[You still didn't tell me why I should follow you]," Khan pressed on, hiding the doubts that had spread in his mind.

"[Sen-nu thought you'd like to meet more Fuveall]," Sen-nu stated.

A careful person would immediately reject that offer and walk away, but Khan was weak when it came to different species. He might never get another chance to get closer to the Fuveall, and they were even an essential aspect of his original mission. Duty and curiosity blended in his mind until what he wanted became obvious.

"[I hope the streets there won't have ears]," Khan uttered before letting Sen-nu go.

"[We'll let you choose them]!" Sen-nu laughed as he picked up his backpack. He exchanged a meaningful glance with Khan before turning and leading the way.

The two crossed streets that Khan didn't recognize, but he remained aware of his general position in the dock. Checkpoints crossed his vision as spies followed along. It seemed impossible to get rid of them, but Sen-nu proved him wrong.

The sounds that Khan had connected to the spies retreated when Sen-nu led him toward a platform that worked as an elevator. The machine went only downward, into a series of narrow streets connected to multiple landing areas, and many Fuveall were visible from that position.

"[Wait]," Khan called before he could step on the elevator. "[Not down there]."

Khan was obviously curious about the Fuveall's landing areas, but his recklessness had limits. He couldn't follow Sen-nu in such isolated places before confirming his intentions.

"[Of course, of course]," Sen-nu laughed before putting his backpack on the floor. Khan took a step back when the alien drew something from the item, but he relaxed when he saw a device similar to his phone.

Sen-nu tapped on the device before grunting and slapping it a few times. Incomprehensible curses followed as he waved the item and lifted it as if he was searching for something, but a happy laugh eventually concluded the process.

"[Communicating in the dock is always a problem]," Sen-nu explained as he put the device back into the backpack. "[Even the Fuveall can only make the accuracy go up to seventy percent]."

"[Seventy doesn't sound bad]," Khan admitted.

"[It works only with other Fuveall's technology]," Sen-nu pointed out. "[Sen-nu might push it to seventy-five, or even eighty, but that would undermine its secrecy]."

Khan could only nod. Intercepting communications was a field too distant from his expertise, so he accepted Sen-nu's explanation without voicing any doubt.

Sen-nu stepped out of the platform, and the elevator went down. The symphony warned Khan about the arrival of a few Fuveall, and they only took a few seconds to appear in his vision.

'No third-level warriors,' Khan thought while he watched the four aliens stepping on the platform and activating the machine to reach the main floor.

The group only featured one first-level warrior. The others were as strong as Khan and Sen-nu, but that didn't reassure the former. Backpacks hung from their back, and one of them even carried a mechanical structure that featured six tall poles.

Khan inevitably took a few more steps back. Fighting the Fuveall and their implants was one thing, but he couldn't risk getting caught by one of their items.

The gesture told a lot about Khan's stance, and the Fuveall could only play along. The alien carrying the mechanical structure nodded at her companions, who promptly dropped their backpacks on the elevator and sent it down.

"We only want to isolate the area," The Fuveall with the machine announced while seizing one of the poles and placing it on the floor.

The pole's base expanded as soon as it touched the floor to create a stable foundation. Fissures even slid open at its sides, and a dark fabric came out of it.

The fabric didn't have anything special on the outside, but Khan's senses revealed its functions. That material partially hindered his sensitivity to mana. That quality would probably improve after adding the other poles.

Khan nodded while taking another step back to leave enough room for the machine. The Fuveall didn't appear too happy about his evident suspicion, but they still moved to complete their preparations.

The team placed the six poles on the floor and united the fabric coming out of them to create a hexagonal tent-like structure. The same isolating material got out of the item's top at that point and allowed the aliens to build a roof.

"Let's talk inside," The same Fuveall from before said while pointing at the tent's entrance.

Khan nodded at the other Fuveall before bringing his eyes on the speaker, and the latter understood what he meant. She pointed at the tent, and her companions went inside. She even glared at Sen-nu when he showed hesitation toward leaving his backpack behind, but he eventually accepted those terms.

"Is this enough?" The female Fuveall asked once her companions were inside.

Khan's paranoia would normally see him pick the Nele's district for those meetings. After all, the Fuveall weren't as distrustful and isolated as the Tors. Yet, compromises were necessary, and part of him preferred to leave the Nele out of eventual problems.

"[Let's go]," Khan exclaimed in the Fuveall's language while approaching the tent.

Khan remained wary since the tent hid its insides, but he relaxed a bit when he saw that the Fuveall weren't doing anything strange. Sen-nu and the others were standing in the back of the structure, and they showed faint smiles once their companion joined them.

Khan had the time to inspect the entire group during the building of the tent. There were two women and three men, but their bionic implants appeared quite plain. Sen-nu was the most peculiar among them due to his missing nose.

"You are a guest," The Fuveall who had handled the conversation until now said. "You don't need to use our language to please us."

"[I'm just trying to improve in it]," Khan honestly explained. "[I have no other reason for that]."

The answer sounded so dumb that the Fuveall didn't know how to react to it. That was a quasi-official negotiation. Risking misunderstanding something should be the main priority, but Khan didn't care.

"[Sen-nu told you that he was a tough customer]," Sen-nu laughed in the Fuveall's language.

"[For what it's worth]," The female Fuveall sighed while also switching language, "[Sen-nu takes his job very seriously. He told us about you because he had no other choice]."

"[About that]," Khan intervened. "[I still don't know what you want from me. I don't see how I can be worthy of so much]."

"[Let's start with the greetings]," The female Fuveall smiled. "[I'm Ta-ei, and I handle part of the landing areas below]."

Khan searched through his pockets before pulling out the silver card that generated random IDs. A name flickered on its surface, and he calmly voiced it. "Noah Balvan."

Sen-nu snickered, but the glares from his companions forced him to shut up. Meanwhile- Ta-ei retained her smile and tried to establish a conversation once again. "[We truly have friendly intentions]."

"[Tell me why I am here then]," Khan stated.

"[We]," Ta-ei began to speak before stopping for a second to sort out her thoughts. "[The Fuveall are concerned about the hunting season]."

Those words didn't surprise Khan. The most reasonable guess had turned out to be accurate, but Khan's paranoia pushed his thoughts toward dark areas.

"[Why]?" Khan coldly asked. "[Did you do something against the Nele]?"

"[Not at all]!" Ta-ei exclaimed. "[We have no business with them]."

"[Why are you worried then]?" Khan wondered. "[There is no reason for all of this if you are innocent]."

Ta-ei turned to exchange glances with her companions. Hesitation spread among the group, but Khan couldn't explain it. He couldn't be too scary for them.

"[We don't understand them]," Sen-nu eventually announced.

"[They might be jealous of our implants]," Ta-ei added.

"[And our technology as a whole]," Another Fuveall followed.

"[You can never know what they are thinking]," A fourth Fuveall said.

"[Who knows what their plants tell them]?" The last Fuveall stated.

The tension and faint killing intent that had risen in Khan's mind instantly dispersed at the sight of those honest nods. The Fuveall appeared genuinely concerned, but that wasn't the point. Their fear came from a fundamental lack of understanding toward a species directly opposite to them.

"[Why would their plants tell them to attack you]?" Khan couldn't help but ask.

"[Envy, obviously]," Ta-ei proudly announced.

"[Technology is the future]," Sen-nu continued, "[And the plants might not want that]."

"[Nature is flawed but resilient]," A third Fuveall announced. "[Wood and metal are bound to clash]."

"[Here he goes with his conspiracy theories]," Sen-nu laughed.

"[I'm telling you]!" The third Fuveall declared. "[A war is coming]."

"[Between plants and metal]?" Sen-nu snickered before turning toward Ta-ei. "[Why did you even bring him here]?"

"[His rank is pretty high]," Ta-ei revealed. "[You should check his new implant on the lower back. It's quite the work of art]."

"[Ooh]?" Sen-nu exclaimed before crouching behind the third Fuveall and lifting his T-shirt.

"[It can affect organs without touching them]," The third Fuveall proudly explained. "[I've achieved a two-point reduction in the organic matter turned into waste]."

"[Such efficiency]!" Sen-nu praised, "[And you even have room to replace the organs now]."

"[Indeed, indeed]," The third Fuveall laughed, and his companions murmured while also checking his exposed back.

Khan didn't know how to behave in that situation. His face was expressionless. The Fuveall were acting like a bunch of children in front of a new toy. Still, something in the scene made a chuckle rise through his throat.

Usually, Khan would have never let a similar reaction disrupt his cold face, but the previous conversation had completely dispersed any tension. The meeting barely felt like a negotiation anymore. Even his mind refused to take it seriously.

The Fuveall continued to check the implant, but Ta-ei didn't miss the chuckle. She brought her focus back on Khan, and words promptly left her mouth. "[We didn't forget why we are here]."

Khan glanced at the murmuring group before moving his eyes back to Ta-ei. She was the only one paying attention to him, but he didn't mind that. He actually preferred that type of laid-back and friendly negotiation.

"[You are quite dumb]," Khan declared as a laugh fused with his words.

"[What]?" Sen-nu shouted while peeking from behind his companion's back, and the rest of the group also moved their attention to Khan.

"[I meant no offense]," Khan laughed. "[I'm dumb too. I just have other interests]."

"[I really don't understand the nature-loving people]," Sen-nu whispered.

"[It's a war]," The third Fuveall also whispered, but one of his companions slapped the back of his head to make him shut up.

"[Did we prove our good intentions]?" Ta-ei asked since she understood the change in the atmosphere.

"[I guess you'll find out my name anyway]," Khan sighed while moving his eyes among the group. "[I'll give you the answers you want, but I need something in return]."

"[We expected that]," Ta-ei uttered.

"[I have questions about your technology]," Khan revealed, "[Many questions and some will involve illegal fields]."

Chapter 385 Conclusions

"[You only need to scroll through the list until you find someone suitable]," Sen-nu explained while playing with the screen in his hands. "[Pressing on one of them will reveal additional information as well as purchase options for additional tips and clues]."

"[Can you find me]?" Khan asked.

"[Your bounty is quite recent]," Sen-nu muttered while changing the filters on the list. "[Oh! Here you are. Twenty thousand Credits, dead or alive. Though it has bad reviews]."

"[Do people even leave reviews]?" Khan questioned.

"[Bounty hunters don't have it easy on Milia 222]," Sen-nu revealed. "[There often are countless complications attached to most targets, the Nele in your case]."

Khan read while Sen-nu scrolled through the reviews. Multiple anonymous accounts had left complaints about the reward for the bounty. Twenty thousand Credits were too few for someone with connections to the Nele.

A few reviews even complained about Khan's element, arguing that chaos wielders deserved higher rewards. Most recent critiques also involved Khan's successful escape from the first wave of bounty hunters and used the event to request better pay.

'It's so thorough,' Khan thought as he reached for the screen and swiped up until he returned to the main page. His face was there, and the same went for many details about his physique, element, and general battle style.

'Fast and deadly,' Khan read on the labels next to his picture. 'Avoid getting into melee range.'

"[You shouldn't be worried]," Sen-nu reassured when he saw how focused Khan was. "[This bounty has been received poorly, and the employer didn't raise the reward to match the critiques. It won't survive another week in the system's main pages]."

After the rocky start, Khan and the group of Fuveall had managed to bring the meeting under friendly terms, allowing him to ask pressing questions. Manners wanted to keep the illegal stuff for last, so Khan had begun his inquiries with the bounty system.

Sen-nu's backpack was outside the tent, so he had chosen to handle the explanation himself. He only had to bring the bag inside to show the item that could solve Khan's doubts.

It turned out that Milia 222 had a separate network for bounties. The hunters needed special items to gain access to it, but many Fuveall, humans, and Orlats sold them.

The system was far from perfect, especially on the dock, due to its many complications, but it worked, and some hunters could rely on it to make a living. The job was nowhere near easy, and many often lost more than money, but Milia 222 allowed its existence, even if not openly.

"[Could I also place a bounty]?" Khan wondered.

"[Every device comes with an anonymous profile]," Sen-nu explained. "[You'd need an additional tool to send and receive money on your real account, but nothing stops you from gaining access to it]."

"[What about the truly important figures]?" Khan continued. "[Can one of them end up on the list]?"

"[Milia 222's citizens tend to be smarter than your ordinary people]," Sen-nu declared. "[They won't go against powers that could destroy them]."

"[That's not what I've seen]," Khan admitted. Even if the situation had often been in his enemies' favor, many had thrown away caution in an attempt to make quick scores.

"[You are an unknown variable]," Sen-nu stated, "[And you don't stick to many rules. Even Sen-nu was surprised to find you hand in hand with a Nele. I can only imagine what the others thought at that sight]."

"[How long will this surprise last]?" Khan asked. He might have the chance to exploit the situation as long as Milia 222 remained unclear about his potential.

"[It's already waning]," Sen-nu laughed. "[This dead bounty proves that]."

'Pity,' Khan thought. 'I guess there is no helping it. The dock is bound to adapt quickly.'

"[There are other networks]," Sen-nu continued his explanation. "[Many only remain up for a few hours, and there is no limit to their topics. Auctions and bounties are only a few examples of the stable networks]."

Khan knew that technology was amazing, but he had no idea that it could be so deep. He had initially thought that mana could make it complicated and untouchable, but there seemed to be countless alternative paths in that field.

"[These temporary networks]," Khan announced, "[They can't be too safe, right? They would remain up otherwise]."

The group of Fuveall had partially ignored the conversation between Sen-nu and Khan. They were talking about topics that they knew far too well, and they had no interest in educating a newbie who had sided with a species with opposite priorities.

However, the announcement showed that Khan wasn't an idiot or a lost cause. His mind could make smart connections as long as someone explained the basics to him. His thoughts were strangely flexible, especially when it came to potential dangers or scams.

"[You keep surprising Sen-nu]," Sen-nu exclaimed. "[Yes, the networks are flawed. Technology as a whole is]."

"[Do the Orlats have separate networks]?" Khan questioned. "[I can't understand how they exchange information so quickly]."

"[No one truly knows]," Sen-nu laughed. "[Well, the Orlats know. It's an innate quality of their species]."

Khan heaved a sigh as he stopped looking at the device and raised his gaze. He was sitting on the floor, and the dark fabric of the tent filled his vision, but his eyes didn't really look at that. His thoughts ran wild as he absorbed that new knowledge.

The Slums had never forced Khan to face that reality, and Reebfell didn't have those issues, at least from his perspective. However, Milia 222 had multiple layers, and one of them existed only online.

'How long would it take me to learn this stuff?' Khan wondered.

Truth be told, Khan wasn't particularly attracted to technology. He respected it and acknowledged its greatness, but he liked the human side of life far more. Even after discovering how deep the networks could go, he didn't feel any curiosity toward them.

Still, remaining ignorant wasn't an option. Khan could decide not to learn how to set up a small network, but he needed to know the various implications to that field. His very future depended on it.

"[So]," Ta-ei joined the conversation during that silent moment. "[Are you sure that the Nele won't target us]?"

"[I told you already]," Khan repeated. "[Don't give them a reason to come after you, and they won't]."

"[But how can we know what pisses them]?" The conspiracy theory Fuveall asked.

"[You already know what they hate]," Khan uttered. "[Just don't get involved with that]."

"[Hmph]," The conspiracy theory Fuveall snorted. "[We don't care about flesh-based materials. Our alloys are far more val-]."

"[Atef, shut up]," Ta-ei interrupted. "[Don't share unnecessary information]."

"[I kind of wanted to hear about your important supplies]," Khan joked, and Sen-nu laughed.

"[Maybe one day]," Ta-ei declared. "[Depends on the terms of our cooperation]."

Khan only smiled. Ta-ei was being polite, but he knew he couldn't offer much. His connection to the Nele was the sole reason behind that friendly meeting.

"[Let's move to more interesting topics]," Khan announced. "[What do you know about the Tors]?"

"[What's there to know about the Tors]?" Sen-nu snorted.

"[They also have technology]," Khan vaguely revealed.

"[They are too secretive even to try to establish a conversation]," Ta-ei explained before bringing her meaningful red eyes on Khan. "[We were surprised to learn about your trip to their district]."

'I truly am an exception then,' Khan confirmed before deciding to change topics again. "[What do you know about security systems]?"

"[Security how]?" Ta-ei asked.

"[Cameras, scanners, and such]," Khan described.

"[We know a lot about them]!" Sen-nu snickered.

"[The Fuveall have the most advanced programs]," Ta-ei added. "[Only the humans come close, but many purchase them from us anyway]."

"[Won't that create security issues]?" Khan asked, but the Fuveall revealed blank faces at his question.

Ta-ei cleared her throat before explaining. "[They wouldn't keep them as they are. Many versions also exist. Vulnerability is a serious issue, so any buyer would improve on that]."

"[Let's say that these buyers are wealthy]," Khan stated. "[Which security program would they buy]?"

"[Depends on the task]," Ta-ei responded. "[Chime is great in general. Cozy is cheap but functional. Jinx is superb but complicated. There is no superior option]."

"[SegueX got a few interesting updates recently]," Sen-nu added.

"[The new Hex is also worth looking into]," Atef suggested.

"[It's not useful down here]," A fourth Fuveall commented.

"[But he might not have meant something for down here]," Atef pointed out, and all the eyes in the tent moved on Khan.

Khan was utterly lost. Words reached his ears, but they didn't turn into actual meanings. He could only keep a straight face while he mustered a question that tried to hide his ignorance. "[What's the best in your opinion? For general security purposes]."

"[Reverb, probably]," Ta-ei replied. "[It's flexible and hard to breach. It's definitely top of the line in that field]."

"[Would you be able to breach Reverb]?" Khan pressed on.

"[Sen-nu told you already]," Sen-nu intervened. "[Technology is flawed. Still, breaching something so advanced would leave tracks and lead to consequences]."

"[How long would it normally take to find these tracks]?" Khan asked.

"[Which version of Reverb are we talking about]?" Sen-nu asked.

"[Reverb 1 or 2]?" Ta-ei added.

"[Expanded or standard]?" Atef continued.

"[How many packages did the buyers add]?" A fourth Fuveall asked.

Khan's mind was fuming. He didn't know anything about that. The Fuveall had switched to a completely different language from his perspective.

"[That I don't know]," Khan managed to muster out of his mouth.

"[The version is important]," Ta-ei explained. "[Some tracks might remain hidden for multiple days depending on that]."

"[Wait]," Khan exclaimed. "[What do you mean by days]?"

"[An improved version of Reverb might uncover a breach in only a few hours]," Sen-nu said, "[But Reverb 1 might take days to find it]."

'Days?!' Khan shouted in his mind. He didn't know how long had passed since the first theft, but it had to be entire months, if not more than half a year.

'This doesn't make any sense,' Khan thought before bringing his attention back to the Fuveall. "[Are you sure that leaving tracks is inevitable? Is there no way around that]?"

"[With poorly programmed software, sure]," Sen-nu stated.

"[Is there no advanced breaching method that leaves no tracks]?" Khan tried again.

"[You need to study a program to create a suitable virus]," Ta-ei explained. "[As long as the program doesn't receive updates, it's possible to create something like that, but a wealthy buyer would know better]."

The matter sounded impossible in Khan's mind, but he couldn't contradict a species that replaced pieces of their bodies with metal. He had to trust their opinion, which led to a single, unbelievable conclusion.

'The theft didn't alert the security system,' Khan concluded. 'There has never been any breach.'

That conclusion sounded unreal. A security system couldn't accept a theft unless the latter weren't a theft at all.

"[If you are in control of a security system]," Khan questioned as his gaze fell on the floor, "[Could you remove records and similar stuff]?"

Khan knew that his language didn't fit the field, but he was doing his best, and the Fuveall understood that. Ta-ei's answer came quickly and confirmed what Khan was thinking. "[You can do pretty much anything if you control the software]."

That was it. That was the final answer. Khan had gone far away to search for it, but the obvious approach had turned out to be correct. The theft had never been a theft. Someone with control over the factory had seized the reinforced fabric and had deleted the event from the security system.

The realization forced Khan to reevaluate everything he had learnt about the mission. He had initially thought about spies or traitors with connections to the families involved in the factory, but the matter went far deeper.

A mere worker couldn't pull off something like that. Even one of the factory's leaders probably didn't have the means to alter the security system, and the same went for the other wealthy families.

The theft had to involve someone with influence over the entire factory, and only one name fitted that requirement. The Cobsend family had to be the culprit.

'How is this possible?' Khan wondered. 'How could Luke miss this?'

Luke was bound to know more about technology. He had to be aware of those implications with the security system. Still, Khan actually believed him, which left him with two options.

'Either Luke managed to trick me,' Khan thought, 'Or someone inside his family tricked him.'

Khan couldn't find a reason to back up the first option, but the second had its own set of problems. He couldn't tell Luke that his family was playing him. He didn't have enough proof, and going against his employer was far from wise.

'What do I do now?' Khan asked himself as he scoured his mind in an attempt to find a solution.

Going back to Luke to report that was out of the question. Someone convinced him about the presence of an external threat, and Khan couldn't change his mind with a mere talk with the Fuveall on his side.

The answer to those doubts arrived, and Khan didn't like it too much. Everything had changed in his mind, but his task didn't. He had to look for undeniable proof to make Luke accept his conclusion.

'And get the fuck out of this mission right afterward,' Khan exclaimed in his mind. He was a small fry caught in-between political maneuvers that involved wealthy families. He couldn't let himself or Martha remain exposed for too long.

"[Is everything okay]?" Ta-ei asked since Khan had remained silent for almost a minute by then.

"[Maybe he is finally welcoming technology]," Sen-nu laughed.

"[Yes, everything is okay]," Khan stated as he calmed himself down and raised his gaze to face the Fuveall. "[Let's change topics again. If you were humans and wanted to abandon the Global Army, what would you do]?"

Chapter 386 Pictures

'Merth 290,' Khan thought as he crossed streets that would bring him back to the Nele's district.

'That's not a place I can reach right now.'

The talk with the Fuveall had gone exceptionally well. No exchanges or trades had actually happened. The aliens were only interested in their safety, and Khan had vouched for that.

As for Khan's curiosity, the Fuveall had fulfilled it, but not completely. They had told him how to get around the control of the Global Army's network, but the process was quite convoluted, and Milia 222 couldn't provide a permanent solution.

'I'll need my own ship in the future,' Khan accepted in his mind. 'Though I don't know how soon.'

According to the Fuveall, hacking the Global Army's network was possible, but the humans were bound to notice almost immediately. That was why breaching it wasn't the right path. It was better to become a ghost who could still use that system.

The problems started there. Turning into a ghost of the network was a complicated process that required specialized experts and expensive technology. Ta-ei told Khan that Milia 222 didn't have them, and, according to her, meeting those requirements in legal areas was straight-up impossible.

Khan would have to reach a different lawless zone, Merth 290, meet the Fuveall living there, and pay for the process. That was one of the few methods to escape the Global Army's network's control without turning into a public enemy or losing everything in his account.

The problems didn't even stop there. Getting a ship sounded like a distant dream, but Khan could very well see it fulfilled. However, he would have to fly the vehicle to Merth 290, and that alone was dangerous since the Global Army was aware of what happened there.

'Can I trust them to do something so complicated remotely?' Khan wondered as he picked up his phone and studied the new contact.

Milia 222 couldn't solve that problem, but Ta-ei had given Khan the contact of someone who could. He would only need to call it and pay up to turn his ship invisible to the network and create a decoy that could cover him until he reached Merth 290.

Khan had heard about Merth 290 during his research of lawless zones, but his knowledge was shallow. He would need to study the matter thoroughly without stopping at the location. A trip like that required many preparations, and he was in no condition to perform or afford it now.

Of course, Khan had no intention to leave right away. He still needed the Global Army. Abandoning it now would just turn him into a lost human with no set path.

Finding the Nak, accumulating wealth, expanding his knowledge and connections, and growing stronger were matters that required the Global Army's incredible assets. Khan was working on becoming independent, but it would take him years to achieve something like that.

'I can only take it slow,' Khan sighed in his mind. 'I wonder what else I'll be forced to do.'

Truth be told, leaving the Global Army wasn't strictly necessary, but Khan had long since started to notice inconsistencies that pointed him in that direction.

The history of the First Impact had undeniable holes. The Global Army definitely had its reasons to keep part of the truth hidden, but Khan had seen enough to know that they couldn't be good.

The general attitude of the humans toward the other alien species wasn't in line with Khan's mindset either. In his heart, he knew he would never trust the Global Army. Also, his goal might go against it, so he had to prepare to leave. That was necessary.

Nevertheless, problems remained, and one of them stood above all the others. Khan was only eighteen. His age added value to his achievements, but he remained a kid. Part of his cluelessness went away every time he learnt something or improved, but he was nowhere near ready to start a journey on his own. Khan didn't even know where to go.

Khan saw problems whenever he thought about the matter, but he forced himself to focus on the positive aspects of his life. He was improving quickly, his knowledge was growing, and the same went for his connections. He wasn't in the position to establish meaningful alliances founded on his name, but he was getting there.

It was already late. Part of the dock had gone to sleep, but the spies were still there. The symphony carried their silent tunes, but Khan ignored them. He was tired, both mentally and physically, and his emotional state didn't help.

The sight of the purple lamps brought some reassurance to Khan's mental state. Beautiful eyes turned in his direction as he crossed the various Nele patrolling the district. The chance to socialize came up many times, but Khan ignored it as he hurried back to his room.

The trapdoor on the large structure on the lower floor opened as soon as Khan tapped on it, and a familiar aura joined the symphony. Khan couldn't help but smile before jumping through the opening and sealing the entrance above him.

"[You took your time]," Jenna complained in a sleepy tone as she stretched on the bed and rubbed her eyes.

Khan didn't speak. He was hungry, but he didn't want to eat. His clothes fell off as he walked toward the bed, and a warm figure snuggled into his arms as soon as he slipped under the sheets.

"[You sound tired]," Jenna whispered when she placed her ear at the center of Khan's chest, "[And lost]."

"[Sometimes everything is a bit too much]," Khan sighed as he closed his eyes to immerse himself in Jenna's warmth.

"[You can use me, you know]," Jenna teased, but her tone sounded completely serious, especially since her hands rubbed Khan's abdomen. "[Use me to stop thinking for a bit]."

"[I'll eventually give in if you keep asking]," Khan chuckled.

"[Well, get a grip on yourself because I won't stop]," Jenna pouted. "[I won't forgive myself if I became one of your worries]."

"[I won't give in]," Khan reassured.

"[Though you could call Monica]," Jenna suggested. "[I bet she would be happy to help]."

"[I could call Nessa too]," Khan joked, and a laugh came out of his mouth when Jenna pinched him.

"[What am I even going to do with you?]" Jenna softly cursed.

"[Stay like this]," Khan said as he brought Jenna closer. "[This is enough]."

"[What will happen once you are gone?]" Jenna asked. "[I won't be there to warm your nights]."

"[I'll cling to a distant memory]," Khan revealed, "[Like I did many times before meeting you]."

"[Like you still do when we are together]," Jenna pointed out, but her voice carried no jealousy. There was only concern in her tone.

"[I wish you could just run away]," Jenna continued, "[But your monsters live inside you, and I can't reach them]."

"[I will]," Khan swore. "[One day, I will reach them]."

"[What will you do then?]" Jenna asked. "[Once everything is over, what will you do?]"

"[I don't know]," Khan admitted. "[I don't have memories of a life without nightmares]."

"[You'll have to rediscover yourself]," Jenna stated. "[You'll feel lost again, but you'll eventually learn to live among peace]."

"[Peace, you say]," Khan murmured. "[Every step I take leaves a trail of blood behind me. I wonder if my life will have room for peace once I get what I need]."

Jenna opened her eyes, and Khan felt that, but he decided to remain immersed in her warmth. He knew what Jenna's gaze was radiating. He could sense her worry spreading through the synthetic mana, and he didn't want to see that.

"[Hey, Khan]," Jenna eventually called.

"[What is it]?" Khan asked.

"[I need you to promise me one thing]," Jenna uttered.

"[Anything for you]," Khan teased.

"[For me]," Jenna repeated. "[Once you defeat your monsters, look for your happiness. Use that stupid compulsion of yours for yourself]."

"[It takes me no effort to kill]," Khan announced. "[And that after less than three years in the Global Army. What else will become easy by the time I defeat my monsters]?"

"[Khan]," Jenna pleaded.

"[A man like that]," Khan continued, "[What will he be willing to do to achieve his happiness]?" .

"[What's necessary]," Jenna responded. "[Be it planting countless flowers or creating bloody rivers]."

"[You'd accept me in any form]," Khan sighed.

"[Yes]," Jenna revealed. "[And I'm not the only one, so don't fight it]."

"[I won't]," Khan gave in. "[I promise]."

"[That's my Khan]," Jenna happily exclaimed as she finally closed her eyes.

"[Let's sleep now]," Khan chuckled. "[I really need it]."

Days went by in the relative peace of the dock. The hunting season continued and ended without raising additional problems. The Nele hit hard and fast, and no one dared to retaliate.

Khan didn't join those attacks, so he kept his entire focus on his many tasks. He trained under Maban's supervision, delivered chaos to the Tors, and deepened his connections with the district as a whole.

Of course, those were only some of the major tasks that kept Khan busy. Khan had never liked wasting time, and he didn't lack ways to fill it. The flight simulator and the mental battle technique required constant effort to master, and Khan didn't shy away from that.

The problems that had appeared in Khan's mind after his talk with the Fuveall never disappeared, but Jenna did her best to help. Anyone would feel overwhelmed by the possibility of ratting out such powerful employers, but those problems had no real solution. Khan could only wait for more information to appear.

A few joint events happened. Maban summoned many high-profile Nele a couple of times, and Khan also earned a spot in those meetings. One of them involved the so-called update on the dock's

layout since the hunting season had changed the power balance in some areas, while the other merely made a point of the situation.

The Nele were to lay low for a while. That didn't involve actual hiding, but Maban stressed how they had to stay away from useless conflicts. Storing resources for the possible "imminent chaos" was the priority, and everyone complied.

Khan also laid low. His many tasks kept him constantly busy, and he didn't have anything special to do anyway. He only had to wait for the Tors to complete his commission and the Nele to bring back information about the Bise.

The Tors wasn't ready with the weakened spell even after one week passed, but Khan wasn't in a hurry. However, the Nele surprised him once the second week was coming to an end.

"[It does feel different indeed]," Piran commented after retracting his hand.

"[I told you]," Nessa exclaimed. "[It's quite the appealing sensation]."

"[You don't know the half of it]," Jenna proudly announced before moving to a scolding tone. "[Hey, enough already]."

Nessa giggled as she put her hand on Khan's head. She ruffled his short hair for a second, but her arm soon snapped back on her chest. She appeared both intrigued and scared of what she was feeling.

"[Can't you tell them something]?" Jenna complained.

"[This soup is so good]," Khan said while gulping down the last drops of food in his bowl.

"[I hate how this is becoming normal]," Jenna cursed.

"[Let them have fun]," Khan laughed. "[No one else is getting in my bed anyway]."

Khan had almost spoken casually, but the Nele around him took that as a romantic declaration. Jenna knew the truth, but she melted a bit anyway and jumped on his lap to express her feelings.

"[You never have enough]," Khan sighed as he held Jenna and adjusted her position to make her more comfortable.

"[You must take responsibility for making me like this]," Jenna replied.

"[Sure, sure]," Khan sighed while caressing Jenna's hair.

"[His scent changed]," Nessa whispered as she reached for Khan's head again, but Jenna slapped her hand before she could touch him.

"[You are getting more possessive lately]," Khan joked, but the arrival of a strong presence forced him to look away.

The Nele around Khan also sensed that new presence, and they all turned in his direction. Maban strode through the district's streets with a screen in his hands, and Piran stood up when he saw him coming toward him.

"[Take a look at these]," Maban ordered once he reached Khan and handed him the device.

Jenna knew when the situation was serious, so she left Khan's lap and let him inspect the device in peace. The screen featured a series of portraits to scroll through. Most of them depicted humans, but a few Bise, Orlats, and Fuveall also appeared from time to time.

"[We can't possibly have spotted all of them]," Maban explained, "[But they should cover a good part of the buyers]."

"[You sure are efficient]," Khan praised.

"[We became good at recalling faces]," Maban claimed. "[A couple of groups are more than enough to gather information]."

Khan could only nod. The citizens of the dock knew where the Bise handled their business. Actually, even Khan knew that due to the meeting. Everything else was a matter of finding out the landing time of various ships and intercepting eventual buyers.

The portraits were quite accurate. They almost resembled pictures, but Khan only skimmed through them. Mere faces couldn't tell him much. He couldn't possibly recognize those strangers, or so he thought.

'What?!' Khan exclaimed in his mind when the screen showed a familiar face. 'This shouldn't be possible. Am I seeing this wrong?'

Lying to himself had never been one of Khan's talents. He recognized one man depicted in the portrait. It just felt unreal to see Rodney's face.

Chapter 387 Spark

'How can Rodney be here?' Khan cursed in his mind. 'Shouldn't he be a normal guide?'

Khan smelled that something was off. It didn't make any sense for a prisoner to be allowed in such secretive areas. Rodney wasn't exactly in chains, but his presence on Milia 222 was supposed to be a punishment, and his access to the dock hinted at far different truths.

A headache tried to take control of Khan's mind. Memories from Nitis flowed in his vision and reminded him of awful moments, but he fended off most of them to focus on the few connected to his current issue.

'Sly, unpredictable,' Khan recalled what Professor Supyan said after Rodney went through the test in the lake. 'That might be the worst type of opponent in this environment.'

Rodney was smart, and he was bound to have deep connections on Milia 222. Entering the dock would have been impossible for him otherwise. The same went for dealing with Bise smugglers. Only a high-profile figure could get a similar job.

Khan would typically leave the matter alone unless his investigation pointed in that direction, but the situation wasn't so simple. Rodney had announced his enmity toward Khan, and he had to be aware of his presence on the dock. After all, Khan didn't exactly lay low.

'He must know about me,' Khan sighed as he stared at the portrait on the device. 'He is the type of person who would check bounties and temporary networks.'

Discovering that the Cobsend family had to have something to do with the theft had filled Khan with problems, and Rodney's presence only added issues to that pile. Khan felt his mind growing heavy, but some coldness straightened his thoughts and kept him focused on his goal.

The dock was dangerous, but Khan could see threats everywhere. He had to remain wary and ready to act, but that almost was his usual mindset.

However, the presence of an actual enemy pushed his mindset past that. Khan couldn't stick to remaining wary anymore. The dock had turned into an active battlefield, and he had to find ways to win or survive.

"[What is it]?" Jenna asked since she was the first to notice a change in Khan's mindset.

Khan didn't answer. Options flowed through his mind as he tried to find any possible connection or consequence to Rodney's presence. He even considered his potential involvement with the bounty, but that sounded like a stretch.

After going through the potential personal problems, Khan moved to the main issue. Rodney's presence in the dock was surprising and troublesome, but his connection to the Bise added deep layers to that situation.

'Rodney was important enough to get a spot on Nitis,' Khan thought. 'He might have the social connections necessary to get hired for the Cobsend family's dirty work.'

Luke didn't know everything. He might be aware of most procedures inside the factory, but there had to be a good deal of information that escaped his knowledge.

Khan felt almost sure that Luke was unaware of the matters in the dock. That was the whole purpose of the secretive location, and many crews involved with the smuggling also changed often. He couldn't know everything concerning the delivery and transport of the base material.

'Now that I think about it,' Khan realized. 'The smugglers and crews might change, but the Bise remain xenophobic. They can't trust every buyer.'

Khan was willing to reject that point, but he knew he was getting somewhere. There had to be a trusted figure between the arrival at the dock and the delivery to the factory. Something so secretive and valuable couldn't be left in the hands of random criminals that changed every month or less.

The problems started there. Khan couldn't confirm that Rodney was that trusted figure. It actually felt too coincidental that someone with whom he shared history had a part in his mission.

'Coincidence or not,' Khan thought, 'He is my only connection to the buyers. Even if he has nothing to do with the factory, he might know who does.'

Khan didn't like that option, but there didn't seem to be any alternative. He couldn't do much with the portraits of the buyers and stalking them one by one would create problems, especially since he would need to interrogate them eventually.

"[Khan]?" Jenna called again when she felt that Khan's internal struggle had ended.

"[I'm here, I'm here]," Khan reassured as he scrolled through the rest of the portraits. "[I just found something troublesome]."

"[It's nothing we can't fix if we are together]," Jenna warmly stated as she laid her head on Khan's shoulder.

"[I can't have you there]," Khan sighed before glancing at Jenna. "[I'll definitely make a mess if you are with me]."

"[You are always finding ways to remain alone lately]," Jenna pouted, but a cute giggle left her mouth when Khan wrapped his arm around her head.

Khan confirmed that Rodney was the only familiar face and reopened his portrait before handing the device to Maban and voicing a request. "[Can you keep an eye on this one? I need a chance to talk to him]."

"[Did you find what you were looking for]?" Maban asked while seizing the device.

"[Probably not]," Khan admitted. "[Can you continue keeping track of the buyers]?"

"[Surveilling one man won't affect our manpower]," Maban explained, "[But you know that we don't go unnoticed]."

Passing by the Bise's landing areas could remain a random event for the dock's citizens, but a group of Nele following a specific human would stand out. Khan quickly understood that the surveillance would probably expose him. It was better to handle the matter quickly.

"[Just tell me when I can approach him]," Khan changed his request. "[It doesn't need to be too safe]."

"[Why would our presence be a problem]?" Piran joined the conversation without hiding his coldness. "[Is he a potential enemy to our species]?"

"[I don't think so]," Khan replied. "[He simply knows how to make me angry]."

The matter was clearly personal, and the Nele around Khan understood that. No one probed any further, but Jenna made sure to snuggle closer to express her support.

"[I'll let you know if he goes somewhere safe]," Maban concluded the speech and left without adding anything else.

The happy atmosphere of the meal didn't return after Maban's departure. Khan was immersed in his thoughts, and Piran and Nessa didn't share Jenna's connection. Only she could remain in Khan's arms without becoming annoying.

Khan let the Nele leave without exchanging any formalities or friendly goodbyes. His mind was elsewhere. The entirety of his journey on Nitis occupied his thoughts and brought him to places that even Jenna couldn't reach.

Tragedies, love, friendship, and much more transformed into a movie that made Khan experience Nitis again. Almost two years had passed since those events, but they remained close. His right shoulder felt heavier as he recalled everything, and killing intent filled him as he accepted that the meeting with Rodney was inevitable.

"[How can I help]?" Jenna whispered once the couple remained alone on the street.

"[I'm fine]," Khan reassured. "[I just don't know what to expect]."

"[Maban will never admit it]," Jenna stated, "[But the Nele won't stay still if something happens to you]."

"[I'm not worried about my safety]," Khan explained. "[I'm not sure how much of a mess I'll do if he sets me off]."

"[I can prepare something to keep you calm]," Jenna suggested.

"[I am calm]," Khan responded. "[I'll remain calm, but that won't stop me]."

Jenna ended up laughing at that resolute declaration, and Khan couldn't help but show his frown to her. Jenna had gone back on his lap, and she looked at him from the comfort of his chest, but she only smiled.

"[I might start a war]," Khan pointed out, "[And everyone knows about my connection with the Nele]."

"[I don't care]," Jenna giggled, taking Khan's head in her hands. "[I like how you made up your mind]."

"[Shouldn't you talk some reason into me]?" Khan complained.

"[I'm not a human]," Jenna teased. "[If war is what you seek, start it without looking back]."

"[You are getting more unreasonable with each passing day]," Khan sighed.

"[Take responsibility for that]," Jenna voiced in a sensual tone as she drew her face closer to Khan's. Yet, a hand covered her mouth before she could kiss him, and a suppressed complaint came out of it.

Khan hoped that the Tors could complete his commission before the inevitable meeting, but the Nele's efficiency didn't give him the chance to attend his weekly delivery.

Only one day had to pass from the talk with Maban for a message to reach the district and spread among the high-profile Nele. It was late afternoon, so Khan was almost ready to make his trip to the Tors' area, but Piran intercepted him before he could cross the last purple lamp.

"[Maban sends words for you]," Piran announced once he reached Khan. "[Do you remember where the sixth quadrant is]?"

Khan looked past Piran to inspect the district. Maban's arrival would have definitely caused a commotion, but he didn't see anything similar. Yet, Piran pointed his finger upward to explain that the message had arrived through the synthetic mana.

"[How complicated can those messages be]?" Khan wondered.

"[He sent an image]," Piran explained. "[The image of a building in the sixth quadrant. It's a tall structure with a large square stretching from its back. You can't miss it, but I can send someone with you]."

"[Don't worry]," Khan replied. "[I should have an idea]."

"[Be safe]," Piran uttered.

"[I will]," Khan smiled, but his expression turned cold when he turned to leave. 'I can't say the same for the other.'

The meeting had given Khan a vague idea of the dock's layout. He didn't recall the exact spot where the sixth quadrant began, but he knew its general location, and that was enough.

The dock wasn't famous for its tall structures, so finding the intended spot couldn't be too difficult. Khan even confirmed that once he reached the sixth quadrant. He found a building that matched Piran's description quickly. Its outsides didn't reveal its purpose, but the line before its entrance marked it as a club.

Spies had followed Khan since his departure from the Nele's district, and he turned toward all of them before approaching the line. He couldn't see every group from his position, but looking in their approximate directions caused a reaction in the symphony, which satisfied him enough to move.

Relatively loud murmurs resounded as soon as Khan joined the line. Most Orlats knew about him, and even those unaware of his feats during the hunting season learnt about them during the wait.

The spreading of the rumors made the most fearful customers leave the line and depart from the area quickly. Khan had become a synonym for trouble, and his connection with the Nele only worsened his fame.

Khan ignored those events. His eyes remained fixed on the entrance, and he showed no reaction to the shortening line. Even the murmurs that reached his ears didn't affect his expression. His mind only had room for Rodney now, and he couldn't let himself be distracted.

The day after the meeting had given Khan the time to study his situation. Rodney was annoying to deal with, and Khan didn't exactly have complete freedom. He couldn't speak openly about the Cobsend family since the factory was a secret.

Not mentioning the factory wasn't a complete solution either since Rodney had seen Luke and the others on the first asteroid. Khan didn't know how much Rodney had investigated the matter, but he prepared to dodge eventual questions anyway.

Khan reviewed his strategy as the line shrunk, but he reached the same conclusions as the previous day. He had to adjust his questions and behavior to Rodney's reactions. He didn't have the upper hand there. He was actually exposing himself, but the task left him no other choice.

The guards in front of the club were human, and they only glared at Khan for a few seconds before letting him in as soon as he paid. A messy and loud environment unfolded in his vision right after he crossed the corridor that divided him from the main area, but he had grown used to clubs by then.

Deafening musing filled a large and crowded dancing area. Multicolored lights flashed on the mass of people and joined the bright accessories, dyes, and tattoos. Shouts and laughter fused with the chaos that was the symphony of mana, but Khan felt a bit at home in that mess.

His senses didn't share that feeling. Khan took careful steps around the dancing floor as he let his sensitivity get used to the chaos in the building. Countless waves of synthetic mana assaulted him, but he remained calm and let his mind do its work.

Meanwhile, Khan studied the general layout of the building. Its style heavily resembled the Orlats' clubs, but Khan couldn't find any secondary area past the dancing hall. He could only spot staircases leading to the upper floors.

After a quick inspection of the dancing hall, Khan decided to move to the upper floor. His sensitivity had yet to grow used to the mess, but he could still confirm that Rodney wasn't there.

The second floor was nothing more than a few streets with a clear line of sight with the dancing area. The building resembled the Orlats' clubs in that aspect, but Khan decided to climb a bit more after failing to find Rodney.

The chaotic illumination and general mess allowed Khan to go unnoticed. Most people in the club didn't even bother to inspect their surroundings. Yet, he still decided to send a vague request to the synthetic mana when he approached the passage toward the third floor.

"Hide me," Khan whispered while letting out a tiny whiff of mana.

The synthetic mana around Khan reacted to his request and enveloped him in a frail membrane that slightly darkened his surroundings. That energy even dampened the sounds created by his movements, but it didn't make him completely invisible. It only helped him go unnoticed.

The second-level warrior guarding the narrow staircase glared at Khan when he approached him. A ceiling separated the second and third floors. The upper areas appeared more secretive, but the man left the path open as soon as Khan completed the payment through his phone.

The expensive access to the third floor told Khan more about Rodney's financial situation. He was faring more than well on Milia 222, which spoke loudly for his importance in that environment.

The third floor was a vast hall filled with tables and comfortable armchairs. Human waiters walked calmly among them, and two desks occupied by bartenders stood next to walls on opposite sides of the room.

The area didn't match the dock's messy and often dirty environment. It actually carried some style, but nothing could surprise Khan after the dinner in the Kingsize.

Khan spotted a guarded staircase that led to the fourth floor, but he lost interest in it as soon as his senses warned him about the presence of a familiar aura. The music covered most of the voices echoing from the tables, but Khan didn't need them to spot his target. He only had to turn to find Rodney sitting at one of the tables.

'When did he become a second-level warrior?' Khan wondered as he walked among the tables without attracting anyone's attention. Even the waiters failed to focus on him due to the synthetic mana around him.

Almost two months had passed since the meeting on the first asteroid. Rodney had been a first-level warrior then, but he had also been close to advancing. Still, he looked a bit too strong for someone who had just improved, and Khan understood why once the table became close.

Rodney reeked of synthetic mana. Part of the energy inside him was messy and didn't follow the overall flow inside his body. Khan couldn't be sure, but that felt like the result of an injection Rodney had yet to absorb fully.

'Access to the dock, expensive clubs, injections of synthetic mana,' Khan thought. 'He is swimming in money.'

Rodney noticed Khan only when he reached his table, but no surprise appeared on his face. A knowing smile broadened on his calm expression as he brought his drink to his mouth and took short sips.

The table only had another chair. A first-level warrior, a beautiful woman, was sitting with Rodney, and she tried to turn when she noticed that the focus of his attention had shifted. However, a hand landed on her exposed right shoulder, and the chilling word that followed made her entire body freeze.

"Leave," Khan said while altering the synthetic mana around him to convey the seriousness of the situation.

The woman slowly turned her head, and her eyes widened when she noticed Khan. He wasn't looking at her, but she could feel watched. Something told her that she had to follow his order.

The woman shot a begging glance at Rodney, who limited himself to a simple nod. Khan let go of her at that point, and she jumped on her feet to hurry outside of the club. She even left her fancy drink behind.

Khan ignored the whole process and sat on the comfortable armchair as soon as it became empty. An interactive menu appeared on the table, and he took his time to study it before choosing an expensive drink.

Rodney remained silent, and his smile never left his face. The two seemed to have entered a diplomatic game that punished the first to speak. Still, Khan remained calm and brought his gaze back to Rodney only after completing his order.

The two fell into a silent stalemate. They simply looked at each other. Khan had a cold face, while Rodney appeared entertained by his arrival.

A waiter quickly reached the table to deliver Khan's drink, and he seized it without looking at the beautiful woman carrying it. He even took a sip from the glass while his eyes remained on Rodney.

"Nitis' customs would want our drinks to touch," Rodney eventually spoke in a tone that barely overcame the music's volume. "I thought you wouldn't forget."

"Are you sure you want to start this with an insult?" Khan asked.

"You ruined my plans for tonight," Rodney revealed. "I should be allowed to have some fun."

"Spending time with women," Khan commented. "I didn't expect that from you."

"I learnt from the hero of the Global Army," Rodney joked. "Though I'm still hesitant about aliens. Maybe you could convince me."

"I'd rather keep you among humans," Khan responded, "In far nastier places."

"You are no fun," Rodney chuckled as his smile grew mean. "Share some knowledge with your brother in arms. Should I go for the cold or warm species?"

A hammer landed on Khan's thoughts and tried to give birth to pure rage, but his face showed no reaction. Rodney had clearly hinted at the Niqols and Nele, and he had also revealed that he knew about Khan's current situation.

"You developed a twisted sense of humor," Khan uttered. "I liked how you were on Nitis."

"Loyal, brave?" Rodney guessed.

"In chains," Khan replied, and Rodney laughed.

"You truly became all-righteous," Rodney stated. "I wonder how you manage to convince yourself when you betray your species at every chance you get."

"The Niqols taught us a lot about feelings," Khan half-lied. "It's a pity you never listened."

"Feelings?" Rodney laughed. "You are truly heartless. Using your new girlfriend to corroborate lies. Maybe you don't love her like Liiza."

The interactive menus flickered, and a crack opened on the table's surface as soon as Khan placed his glass. He didn't put any strength in the gesture, but some mana had left him, and the synthetic energy had done the rest.

"Always so emotional," Rodney teased. "This club is owned by humans, important humans. I'm sure even you understand the value of keeping them on your good side."

"I'm sure you understand the importance of keeping your life," Khan retorted.

"Empty threats," Rodney snickered. "For what it's worth, your new girlfriend is definitely hotter. The Nele sure are a fine species."

Khan sighed before diverting his attention and inspecting the hall. The ceiling wasn't too tall, and an eventual fall from the third floor wouldn't be too hard to withstand. The resilient surfaces were a problem, but the chaos element could solve that.

"Pretending to be calm now?" Rodney asked. "Speak openly. What's the point of being old friends otherwise?"

"I was just checking the building," Khan explained. "I can kill you, blow a hole in the floor, and run away before getting into trouble."

"You wouldn't risk a political incident for a few jokes," Rodney calmly scorned.

"How can you be so sure?" Khan asked while bringing his cold eyes back on Rodney. "You know what I'm capable of."

Khan made the synthetic mana convey his killing intent. Rodney's sensitivity wasn't great, even by human standards, but a chill ran down his spine anyway. He hid any kind of reaction, but he knew that Khan wasn't joking.

"You are a mad dog on the Global Army's leash," Rodney changed the topic. "I guess humanity needs warriors like you."

"You must be really bitter at how things went down on Nitis," Khan insulted.

"I used to be," Rodney admitted. "Though they were an eye-opener. Tragedies have the strange habit of showing your true colors, and surviving them forge you in one way or another."

Khan hated to agree with Rodney, but both of them were clear examples of that statement. Rodney himself had gained a strange spark after Nitis' crisis.

Silence fell between the two. Their glasses became empty, and both of them ordered new ones. Khan felt happy that the crack didn't affect the functioning of the interactive menu, but his mood remained heavy due to the lack of progress in the conversation.

"I'm not going to say it," Rodney eventually announced.

"What do you mean?" Khan asked.

"You know what I mean," Rodney exclaimed. "You came all the way here to meet me, but that's none of my business. You'll have to expose yourself to claim my interest."

"Your words make no sense," Khan pretended ignorance.

"Please," Rodney scoffed. "Luke Cobsend, Bruce Eerly, Amanda Eerly, Monica Solodrey, Francis Alstair, Darrell Amend, Isaac Foreters, Claudia Palbeel, and Martha Weesso. There's also Ivor, the caretaker from the Cobsend family."

Khan fell silent. Rodney had listed the entire team for the mission, and Khan didn't know how to take that. It almost seemed that Rodney had more information than him.

"Don't overthink it," Rodney chuckled at Khan's reaction. "I could recognize them instantly. Those are important faces, except for the Weesso woman, but I know her for different reasons."

The silent implication was obvious, especially after the smirk that Rodney wore. Khan felt in a corner. He didn't know how to respond when his opponent knew so much.

"You didn't come here to follow your lovely girlfriend," Rodney continued after taking a sip from his new drink. "Choosing to meet me already exposed you, but that's it from my end. I want to hear what Lieutenant Khan has to say before moving on."

Chapter 388 Letter

Khan had walked into the club knowing that the situation wouldn't have been in his favor, but Rodney had only needed a line to show how bad everything was.

Monica had already educated Khan on that topic, so he found it easier to accept the situation. Rodney came from a wealthy family. He had received social and political training since birth. He was probably below Khan in terms of adaptability and cunning, but those types of conversations were his reign.

Khan felt cornered for obvious reasons. He didn't have any leverage, and Rodney knew basically everything. The specifics of Khan's mission might escape his knowledge, but they weren't important now.

Silent seconds went by as Khan tried to find a way to turn the conversation in his favor, but Rodney's stance had no flaws. Khan couldn't defeat him there, and only one move could create a crack in an otherwise helpless situation.

"I didn't think they made injections of synthetic mana on Milia 222," Khan changed the topic. "Isn't that dangerous? I would find it hard to trust the quality check."

"What a disappointing response," Rodney sighed. "Do you think you are the only one with talent? I was on Nitis, just like you."

"Ignorance sure gives a false sense of safety," Khan commented. "Your lies have no value when you reek of synthetic mana. Bold of you to be in the open without fully absorbing it."

Rodney couldn't help but freeze for an instant. He brought his drink to his mouth to hide part of his expression, but his gaze had lost its mocking confidence.

Khan could practically read the thoughts running through Rodney's mind. He knew he was reviewing everything learnt on Nitis to understand how something like that could happen. The coldness spreading inside Rodney even affected the synthetic mana and gave a clearer representation of that reaction.

"You should have really paid attention to the Niqols' teachings," Khan continued. "I can see the mana inside your body escaping your control. I'd say you have a twenty percent chance of failing to use it properly."

Rodney's surprise only intensified before that accurate evaluation. He was naked in front of Khan's gaze, but that wasn't enough to make him lose his cool.

"Alien tricks," Rodney finally spoke, but his smile didn't return. "Sure, I've received injections, but so what? Why would that matter in this conversation?"

"You claim that your presence here is a punishment," Khan announced, "But you have enough money to purchase injections and spend nights in expensive clubs. You also have access to the dock. Knowing your character, I'm pretty sure you are part of a shady business."

"Again, what's the point of this?" Rodney scoffed. "I might be the king of Milia 222. It still wouldn't matter in this conversation."

Rodney was right, and Khan knew that. His change of topic had been a diversion, but it had served its purpose. As long as Rodney lost some confidence, Khan could find the chance to come out on top.

"You said that you recognized the others immediately," Khan exclaimed. "You know, I'm still quite ignorant, and I only have my upbringing to blame, but you aren't. My companions must be truly important to leave such a deep impression."

"What are you trying to achieve?" Rodney chuckled. "Do you want to hide behind your companions' names?"

"Yes," Khan shamelessly stated. "I didn't want to mention them, but you did it for me. I should actually thank you for that."

"Fine, I want to hear this," Rodney responded. "You have important companions. So what?"

"Your family is important, but not too important," Khan declared. "I bet exposing your role here won't be a problem, especially when someone more important than you backs up those claims."

"Is that even a threat?" Rodney laughed. "This is Milia 222. Merely denying claims against me would work as a defense."

"You don't have the power or influence to be your own boss," Khan attacked from a different angle. "I don't want to imagine what would happen to you if you hindered your business. Well, maybe I'd like to see that."

"You'd go after your brother's wallet just to get what you want," Rodney sighed. "Truly a heartless man."

"You are right," Khan uttered, and a chilling sensation that even Rodney could feel enveloped the table. "I am heartless, so I suggest you stop with these jokes."

Fear inevitably spread in Rodney's mind. That reaction was a direct consequence of Khan's influence over the synthetic mana, and Rodney couldn't shield himself from it.

Nevertheless, Rodney found the strength to show his smirk and remain calm. He wanted to see if Khan had more to say, but it seemed that he was done, so the time to go over his words had arrived.

Khan's threat was quite empty. Luke and the others could definitely create problems for Rodney, but the process would take some time, enough for him to leave or deploy countermeasures.

Moreover, in Rodney's opinion, Luke wouldn't ruin his relationship with a fellow wealthy family for no reason. Khan would have to ask that as a personal favor, and Rodney felt that he wanted to avoid that option.

In short, Khan had a clunky weapon that he didn't want to use, and Rodney knew that. Yet, that threat existed, and Rodney didn't want to leave it unchecked in the hands of someone as crazy as Khan.

"You never told me what you want from me," Rodney decided to move the conversation to the main topic.

Khan revealed a meaningful smile, but Rodney showed no reaction to that gesture. Khan had forced Rodney to ask the reason behind his presence there. The event was a small victory, and both of them knew that.

'What now?' Khan thought as he brought his drink to his mouth.

Rodney was exactly where Khan wanted him, and the time for an offer had come. Khan had to choose his words carefully, and his thinking from the previous day helped in the matter. He only had to adjust a few things to match what he had learnt during the conversation.

"What are you doing in the dock?" Khan started with a vague question.

"That's my business," Rodney sneered.

"It must be something pretty specific," Khan continued, ignoring Rodney's contempt. "Building trust with the Bise can't be easy."

"That's what you are after," Rodney exclaimed. "You want the Bise."

"I couldn't care less about them," Khan calmly lied. "They just prove my point. You have hands in something important."

"For the third time, so what?" Rodney mocked. "Get to the point already."

"I want to know what you are doing here," Khan gave another vague answer.

"Why?" Rodney asked. "Why would you care?"

"That's my business," Khan replied.

Rodney scoffed and spread his arms. "I guess we have reached an impasse, but I'm not the one who needs something."

Rodney didn't make any mistake. He knew where he stood, and he never forgot to remind Khan. Exploiting flaws simply wasn't possible in that situation. Khan had to give out something.

"I want in," Khan stated. "I want to join your operation."

"Where did that come from?" Rodney laughed.

"You'll never reveal the nature of your business," Khan explained. "I wouldn't even trust you if you did. Getting on the field myself is my only option."

"Well said," Rodney exclaimed. "Your only option. I don't see how I fit in this plan of yours."

"You can vouch for me," Khan suggested.

"And why would I do that?" Rodney asked. "I'm doing quite well on my own. I have no reason to put my position at risk."

"This is the point when you name a price," Khan declared.

"What if I didn't want to?" Rodney wondered. "Trouble follows you. No price can cover for the damage you might do to my position."

Khan knew the lie that was about to come out of his mouth. Those words were the only price that could make Rodney bend, but he hesitated to say them. Part of him didn't want to give him that chance, and his killing intent made him aware of a far deeper truth.

"You don't want to remain in this shithole," Khan announced. "You want to get back on Earth and retrieve your privileges. I can give you that and more."

An official statement from Khan could free Rodney of every punishment, and Luke could help him climb the political ladder. Rodney had only to gain from an alliance with Khan and his companions. Most importantly, he could profit in fields that truly mattered to him.

Khan didn't want to see a redemption arc for Rodney. In his mind, he had already decided that the man had to die. That was the whole point behind his hesitation. Khan had lied, knowing that he would try to kill Rodney before the end of his mission.

"Lieutenant Khan!" Rodney voiced a surprised gasp. "I didn't expect this from you. Can you really ignore your anger and make such a deal?"

"You labeled me as emotional," Khan stated. "You might have failed to understand my true character."

"Maybe I did," Rodney replied before that complete lack of emotions.

Silence fell once again. Rodney studied Khan in an attempt to uncover his true intentions, but the latter was a wall. Khan's poker face was perfect. It was actually Rodney who showed his real desires during that exchange of firm stares.

The offer pleased Rodney, and Khan could see it. The few honest reactions on his face and the influence of his mental state on the synthetic mana created a picture that Khan could read far too well.

"You clear my name," Rodney eventually declared.

"That's a given," Khan replied.

"And you introduce me to your friends," Rodney continued. "I hope you know the kind of introduction I mean."

"Of course," Khan uttered. "They will see you as a friend by the time I'm done with them."

"I don't mind that heartless side of yours so much now," Rodney laughed as he went back to his drink.

"What about my side of things?" Khan asked. "When can I start?"

"Calm down," Rodney sneered. "Your promises are empty as of right now. I won't give you anything before confirming that you are willing to fulfill your end of the deal."

"Do you expect me to clear your name from Milia 222?" Khan wondered.

"Don't be stupid," Rodney retorted. "I want a handwritten and signed letter from you right away. That will show your goodwill."

The request made sense, but Khan needed to point out an issue. "I can't really write."

"What do you mean?" Rodney asked.

"I never truly learnt," Khan admitted, "And everything was interactive in the training camps, so...."

"You are hopeless," Rodney sighed. "Forget the letter. I'll write something, and you'll leave your genetic signature on it. Is that acceptable?"

Khan hesitated again. Leaving something like that in Rodney's hands wasn't ideal, but refusing would only cancel the deal. It was also impossible to change the terms now.

"It's acceptable," Khan agreed. "So, how will this work?"

"You've seen me deal with the Bise," Rodney exclaimed. "Go there next week, early in the morning. You'll sign the letter, and I'll introduce you to the crew."

'One week,' Khan thought. 'Plenty of time to prepare. Plenty of time for both of us to prepare.'

"I'll see you in one week then," Khan declared before emptying his drink and standing up. Rodney's gaze remained fixed on him while he left the third floor, but he didn't say anything about his missing payment.

Khan left the club in a hurry. He felt dirty. He had sealed another annoying deal, and he didn't know what he hated more about it. Rodney seemed able to come out on top easily, but Khan didn't like his killing intentions either.

The killing part wasn't an issue. Khan simply didn't like to have that hidden ploy in mind. He would rather be straightforward about the matter. Instead, he would have to cooperate with Rodney while searching for ways to dispose of him now.

'I'll be a fucking incredible ambassador,' Khan mocked himself. 'I'm already setting up political assassinations on my own. This should go on my profile.'

The spies joined the symphony as soon as Khan left the club, but he completely ignored them as he hurried through the dock's streets. He had one more place to visit before going back to Jenna's embrace.

Khan barely looked at the path ahead, but he reached his destination anyway. The synthetic mana grew oilier as he entered the Tors' district and sat at the center of a hidden street. He had done the same during his previous deliveries, so he knew he only had to wait now.

Presences soon entered the range of Khan's senses, and one of them peeked past the guardrails to inspect him. A hooded figure and a forked tongue pointed toward him, and the words he hoped to hear finally came out of it.

"Come, chaos wielder," The Tors said before jumping over the guardrails to land on the street.

Khan didn't hesitate to stand up and follow the Tors. That development was different from the previous deliveries. The Tors usually brought a container to him without leading him inside the district, and that change could only mean one thing.

As Khan had predicted, the Tors led him in front of the small house where he had sealed the deal. The alien left, and Khan entered the structure without showing any formality. He was sure the Tors wouldn't care about them.

The entrance opened on its own, and Khan found an unlocked trapdoor waiting for him once he entered the house. Jumping into it brought him to the lab, and the Tors hanging from the wall didn't even bother to turn at his arrival.

The lab had barely changed during those two weeks. Different junk occupied the floor, and the array of tubes had a new layout, but nothing major.

Only one bright detail created something that slightly changed the familiar environment. A purple-red glow tainted the azure illumination, and Khan found the source of that radiance at the center of the array of tubes.

"It's not the same," The Tors commented while keeping its glowing eyes on the item among the tubes.

A needle-like weapon floated among the array of tubes. Its purple-red halo was quite dim compared to the mana in the machine, and its overall power was also unremarkable. It barely resembled a spell worthy of a first-level mage, let alone Khan, but he could feel the chaos element inside it.

"Let me see it," Khan ordered, and the Tors used its reptilian head to push the array of tubes toward him.

Khan studied the needle from different angles, and his sensitivity revealed its secrets. The weapon retained some vague resemblance to the chaos spear, but the amount of mana inside it was simply too low.

"Something is missing," The Tors explained. "It's not the same."

"Don't worry about that," Khan reassured. "Open this up. I want to hold it."

"It will become unstable," The Tors warned.

"That's how chaos is," Khan whispered as he watched the Tors moving a few tubes and creating an opening.

A tremor ran through the needle's surface, but Khan inserted his hand without showing any fear. He didn't share any connection with the weapon, but the mana inside it was too weak to resist him.

A sizzling noise resounded when Khan touched the needle. The weapon tried to tear through his skin but doing that exposed it to Khan's influence. Needless to say, he took control of that mana before suffering any injury.

An urge whispered to Khan's ears. He felt the need to add mana to that weak spell. He wanted to make it reach its full potential, but that process was for another time.

Khan closed his eyes and focused on studying the spell. The Tors had created a balance that he would have never reached on his own. That structure and concentration of mana were a blueprint that carried valuable information. Khan only needed to translate them into images and emotions.

'A short burst of power before suppression,' Khan thought. 'A sharp pain that doesn't disappear. I know what to do.'

The needle dispersed when Khan opened his eyes. The inspection had destabilized it too much, but that didn't matter. He had obtained what he wanted.

"Give chaos," The Tors didn't hesitate to remind when it noticed that Khan was done.

"I believe you don't have spells of my element in store," Khan guessed.

"We won't show more of our arts," The Tors announced.

"I know," Khan sighed. "You are free to come up with something on your own then."

The Tors tilted its head and showed its tongue. It didn't speak, but Khan felt able to imagine its confusion.

"Invent a new spell for me," Khan explained. "It doesn't matter if I won't be able to use it."

"Twice a week," The Tors reminded.

"Of course," Khan agreed. "Our collaboration will continue."

Chapter 389 Window

Time always flowed fast when Khan was busy, and his number of tasks had only increased after the meeting with Rodney.

The Tors had completed the commission, but Khan had to spend time turning it into a part of his arsenal, and that didn't only involve finding the most fitting emotions.

Moreover, the deal with Rodney involved something technological. Khan didn't know the possible ramifications of leaving his genetic signature, but he had friends that could solve his doubts.

One week wasn't long, but it left room for some preparations. Khan only had to visit a familiar street to speak with Sen-nu and explain his doubts.

It turned out that Khan's worries weren't entirely unfounded. The right expert equipped with the right technology could hack the Global Army's network, so the same could happen with genetic signatures.

However, it was unlikely for someone like Rodney to have that. Sen-nu only had to warn about specific types of interactive letters to reassure Khan about the imminent deal.

The last day of the following week eventually arrived. The night almost turned into day, but Khan missed out on that. He had set the alarm and had pulled an all-nighter in the training hall of the Nele's district to prepare as much as possible, but someone joined him before his phone could ring.

Khan dispersed his mana when he heard the entrance opening behind him. He didn't need to turn to know that Jenna had come, and the appealing scent that reached his nostrils told him that she had brought something tasty with her.

"[Hey]," Khan smiled when he turned to greet his friend.

"[You are getting too good at leaving our bed silently]," Jenna complained as she approached Khan and handed him the fuming bowl in her hands.

The entrance closed, and Khan sat on the floor to enjoy the meal. Jenna reached his side and tried to hide her concern when she laid her head on his shoulder.

"[That's a lie]," Khan joked. "[You heard me tonight too]."

"[I was about to stop you]," Jenna revealed. "[It's not wise to tire yourself before a mission]."

"[But you let me go anyway]," Khan chuckled.

Jenna wanted to scold Khan, but her sensitivity revealed a surprising truth. She reached for his chest to check him once again, but the results were the same. Khan was a bit tired, but nothing too problematic.

"[I'm good, right]?" Khan asked even if he knew the answer to that question.

"[Your stamina is off the charts]," Jenna sighed, "[Especially when it comes to your mana reserves]."

"[I know what you want to say]," Khan reassured. "[It's fine. I sort of accepted it]."

"[Such odd combination]," Jenna commented as her hand reached Khan's nape. "[This sustain is not human]."

"[I'm not completely human]," Khan stated while taking the warm hand on his chest, "[Even at heart]."

"[You know, you wouldn't be able to stop me if I tried to kiss you now]," Jenna joked since both of Khan's hands were busy.

"[That's why you won't try]," Khan laughed.

"[You are getting too used to this]," Jenna pouted. "[Even the others are getting too comfortable around you. I want to go back to when you were only mine and couldn't refuse me]."

"[I still can't refuse you]," Khan pointed out.

"[But you are going away more often]," Jenna replied. "[And I'd only cause problems if I followed you]."

"[I'll be fine]," Khan reassured again.

"[I wish things were simpler]," Jenna sighed. "[I wish things for you were simpler]."

"[I wouldn't have learnt so much if they were]," Khan responded. "[Liiza, you, Milia 222. I would have missed so much if things weren't like this]."

"[Are you trying to find a positive side]? Jenna teased.

"[I guess it has become easier to accept everything]," Khan admitted.

Khan wasn't pretending or lying in an attempt to reassure Jenna. His feelings had truly changed, even if only partially. He was still desperate to find the Nak. He was still willing to do the unthinkable to fix his curse, but there was love among that darkness, and he couldn't reject it.

"[Talking to the mana changed something]," Khan continued.

Jenna smiled without adding anything. It was only normal for the Nele's arts to alter someone's mindset, especially Khan's. He came from opposite teachings, so that different approach changed how he viewed his situation as a whole.

Many of Khan's advantages came from his tragic experiences. It could almost be said that he had the Nak to thank for his current power and fame.

Khan's desperation had pushed him to train and struggle more than his peers. That had led to achievements and feats otherwise impossible for ordinary soldiers. His mindset had also allowed him to learn arts distant from the human teachings, which had only added more power to his figure.

That knowledge had initially soured Khan's thoughts, but he had slowly learnt to take some pride in his inhumanity, especially after Nitis. Still, talking to the mana had brought more changes, which deepened as he improved in those arts.

Khan finished his meal and placed the bowl on the floor before fixing his gaze on his open palm. A whiff of mana came out of it and remained above his skin without dispersing.

The mana's purple-red color revealed its element. That was the mark of a Nak, one of the proofs of Khan's mutations. He should hate that bright shade and violent nature, but he couldn't bring himself to do it anymore.

The source of that power, shades, and behavior might be hateful, but Khan only saw himself in his mana. He could feel it when he used it to make requests. That energy expressed himself, even if in ways and shapes he didn't fully understand yet.

"[Your path is still long]," Jenna commented. "[The Nak's influence and your upbringing hinder your introspection, but you'll get there. It's a pity I probably won't be there to see it happen]."

"[Jenna]," Khan called, but Jenna hid her face in his chest.

"[You know I won't forget you]," Khan called again. "[I won't forget the Nele. Maybe I'll even have enough authority to help you all one day]."

Jenna wanted to scold Khan again. She didn't want him to add her species' problems to his own, but his words carried an affection that made her melt. She found herself unable to speak, so she snuggled closer to express how she felt.

Khan wanted to laugh and cuddle Jenna a bit, but his phone rang, and his mindset instantly turned cold. He had to leave to meet Rodney now. The time for those nice moments was over.

Khan stood up, and Jenna followed him with her eyes before fixing them on a strange scene in the back of the hall. A few metal dummies stood next to the wall, and they all had holes and cracks. Some even had entire limbs or heads missing.

"[Your accuracy improved]," Jenna announced.

"[It's still hard to be precise]," Khan admitted as he picked up his phone and straightened his clothes.

"[You can't expect to be perfect in a single week]," Jenna declared. "[Did you try to use the mana to affect their trajectory]?"

"[I tried and failed]," Khan mocked himself. "[I'm getting better at your species' arts, but using everything together is still a problem]."

"[You'll get there]," Jenna stated. "[You'll probably do better in an actual battle anyway]."

"[Hopefully, it won't come down to that today]," Khan sighed.

There wasn't time for intimate goodbyes, and Jenna understood that. She remained on the floor, watching Khan leave the training hall and head for the district's exit.

Only a few Nele were aware of Khan's imminent meeting, but he could come and go from the district as much as he wanted. No one tried to stop him, and he crossed the last purple lamp after exchanging nods and short greetings with all the aliens on his path.

The outsides of the district brought the usual sensations. The spies were still wary of the Nele, and Khan was one of the main targets of that ongoing investigation. Yet, it seemed that some groups had abandoned the task.

'Maybe some of them were only interested in updating the bounty,' Khan casually wondered as he moved toward his destination. He had never seen the appointed landing area, but Maban had explained the path to him in the past week.

The dock was often busy in the morning, and that day wasn't an exception. Crews moved left, right, up, and down depending on their tasks, and multiple spaceships approached the landing areas or flew above the array of streets.

Many aliens and humans even used the elevators to reach Lower Level 3. Khan was in a hurry, but he could still separate the newbies from those who had been down there.

The stupor and cautious excitement depicted by the newbies' faces felt almost nostalgic to Khan. He had experienced similar emotions on his arrival, but they had waned during the past weeks.

Khan knew that the dock still hid many secrets. Any building in his vision could be the home to multiple illegal activities, and he wasn't even considering the various districts. That environment was truly unique, but he felt to have become part of it lately.

The appointed landing area became visible a few streets before Khan reached his destination. He only needed to peek past the guardrails to see a series of platforms hanging in the distance under him. They appeared pretty simple compared to others in different areas of the dock, but they probably did their job just right anyway.

Khan ignored anything that didn't concern his task and began searching for familiar faces. He didn't know if Rodney was already there, but he recalled most portraits. Some of them were bound to belong to the same crew.

Strangely enough, Khan didn't recognize anyone. A couple of crews occupied the long street connected to the landing areas, but they were only made of Bise. No buyer from other species was there, and Khan's arrival seemed to generate some tension.

Being the only human in an area owned by aliens wasn't ideal, especially when the Bise were the species in question. Their xenophobic stance was well-known on Milia 222, so Khan decided to wait for other buyers at the beginning of the street.

Khan and the Bise crews were relatively distant, but that didn't appease the tension. The aliens shot glances at Khan while murmurs resounded among them, but he pretended not to hear or feel anything. He kept his gaze fixed on a random empty spot ahead as he waited for Rodney.

Minutes passed, and the situation didn't improve or change. Rodney and his crew didn't arrive, and the Bise were growing restless, according to the synthetic mana. Spaceships were even landing in the areas below, but the aliens didn't move, which only added tension to the atmosphere.

Khan pretended to be outside all of that while his focus remained on the synthetic mana. He didn't like the situation. Part of him even began to believe that Rodney had set him up, but that didn't make much sense.

Still, reason had no place there. The Bise didn't dare to move with an outsider standing so close to them. Khan was actively hindering their business. It wouldn't be strange if they decided to attack to defend their territory.

More minutes had to pass before a familiar aura finally entered the range of Khan's senses. He turned his head in the direction of that sensation only to find a smiling Rodney and a human crew in the distance.

Khan ignored Rodney's smug smile and waited for his arrival calmly. The crew soon reached the long street above the landing areas before splitting into two groups. Some went toward the Bise, while others remained around Rodney and Khan.

"Did we make you wait?" Rodney asked in an evident mocking tone.

"I've just arrived," Khan lied as he separated his back from the guardrails and inspected the human crew.

The crew had some first-level warriors, but the humans around Rodney were all as strong as Khan. Moreover, Rodney's condition had greatly improved during that week. The mana inside him was far more stable, which felt quite surprising to Khan.

"Did they make trouble for you?" Rodney continued while glancing at the Bise. "Don't worry. They are always tense and grumpy."

"You have yet to tell me how you landed this job," Khan questioned, uncaring of the fact that he was virtually surrounded.

The men around Khan didn't like his relaxed behavior and direct questions. Everything in the dock was supposed to be a secret, especially something involving a collaboration between Bise and humans. Still, Khan didn't show any respect toward that.

"Go help with the cargo," Rodney exclaimed before the situation could become complicated. "I have to speak with our new companion in private."

Khan kept his eyes on Rodney and ignored the silent threats shot by the rest of the crew. Everyone eventually left to reach the Bise and begin the transaction, but Rodney waited a few more seconds before pulling out something from a large pocket in his short coat.

The item in Rodney's hands resembled a screen, but Khan couldn't see any interactive function. The device had a series of lines written on its surface and featured a glowing fingerprint in its bottom-right corner.

"I think I did quite a good job," Rodney said while handing the device to Khan. "You can review it, but I won't change it."

Khan snorted as soon as he read the first line on the device. Rodney had written an entirely different version of Nitis' events, and he had used Khan's perspective to do so. Yet, he had filled it with so many praises that Khan felt the urge to break the item.

The letter also put the Niqols in a bad light. Rodney had chosen not to be too explicit, but Khan could see how any ordinary soldier would appoint the Niqols as the true traitors after reading those words.

As for the explanation behind that different statement, Rodney used Khan's relationship with Liiza as an excuse. Through the letter, Khan would basically admit that his feelings had made him blame Rodney to protect his loved alien.

'He doesn't only want to regain his privileges,' Khan understood. 'He also wants to taint my reputation and insult my affection toward the Niqols. At least it should be safe to leave my signature here.'

"How does it look like?" Rodney asked, knowing far too well how Khan would feel.

"You are so petty," Khan sighed. "I almost pity you."

Rodney didn't like that compliance, but he lost the chance to say anything since Khan placed his thumb on the fingerprint. The letter recorded the genetic signature, and Khan handed it back to Rodney.

"You sold out your loved Niqols so quickly," Rodney exclaimed as he checked the letter and stored it in his pocket. "I'm surprised."

"Let's talk only when strictly necessary," Khan responded. "My ears deserve better than your voice."

Rodney fell silent, but he soon showed his smug smile. The two then turned toward the Bise since they had finally activated the elevator to reach the landing areas.

"So," Khan was the first to resume speaking, "Who is our boss?"

"You are too curious for your first day," Rodney chuckled.

"What are we buying?" Khan continued.

"Knowing isn't our job," Rodney replied.

"Where should we deliver the goods?" Khan wondered.

"You'll see soon enough," Rodney responded.

Silence fell between the two again. Khan didn't expect to receive any helpful answer, and the conversation matched his expectations. His thoughts moved to other fields, but he couldn't come up with solutions right away.

Khan had three main goals. Killing Rodney and retrieving the signed letter was mandatory, but he had to leave that for last. Now, he had to focus on identifying the purchased goods and gaining a precise picture of Rodney's organization.

The elevators eventually went up, and the Bise handed a series of metal boxes to the human crew. Those items were as big as a man's chest, and the second-level warriors could lift them easily, but they were uncomfortable to carry due to their shape and size.

The place had more humans than boxes, and it seemed that no one would give one of them to Khan. The crew began to move as soon as it seized the goods, and even Rodney turned to follow his companions in an unknown direction.

However, Khan stepped forward as soon as a first-level warrior entered his range and placed a hand on his shoulder. The sudden movement almost made the surprised young man drop his box, but Khan made sure to help him keep it stable.

"Give it to me," Khan stated once the man calmed down.

"But, sir," The man muttered, but Khan spoke once again. "You'll risk damaging the goods."

The young man glanced in his companions' directions until his eyes fell on Rodney. That gesture lasted for a mere second, but Khan didn't miss it. Rodney was a great liar, but his companions didn't share his talent, and the first-level warrior couldn't refrain from revealing his status.

"Khan, leave it to him," Rodney intervened to interrupt that meaningful glance. "Carrying boxes is beneath you."

"We must ensure the safety of the goods, right?" Khan asked without letting go of the first-level warrior's shoulder.

"Fine, give it to Michael," Rodney agreed while pointing at an empty-handed second-level warrior near him.

"No, I'll carry it," Khan said before taking the box from the first-level warrior's grasp and placing it on his right shoulder. "Is that a problem?"

Some hesitation spread among the crew, and Khan studied every reaction thoroughly. The humans were experiencing some discomfort before that scene, and more questioning glances converged on Rodney.

'He is indeed the leader,' Khan confirmed as he adjusted the box to make it more comfortable on his shoulder. The item was lighter than he expected, but carrying it like that kept his right hand busy.

"No problem at all," Rodney promptly announced while showing his usual smile.

Rodney turned at that point, and the rest of the crew did the same. The group walked in a messy line, and Khan limited himself to following his new companions as his mind recorded anything he deemed useful.

The crew had turned out to be a weakness since it had revealed its hierarchy. The events with the box had also tried to hint at something, but Khan couldn't jump to conclusions without proof.

As for the box, Khan had taken it for a couple of reasons. Testing the crew's reactions had been one of them, but he had also wanted to obtain some form of protection in that seemingly hostile

environment. Rodney's companions might not fear him, but they wouldn't do anything reckless when the goods could be at risk.

The march didn't last long. The group soon arrived in front of a short building that stretched on the lower floor. Its entrance was quite big, and it opened as soon as one of the humans knocked on its surface.

A large hangar unfolded in Khan's vision, and he even spotted a few open boxes near the walls. Those containers seemed empty, but he didn't get to inspect them since the crew went directly to the staircase at the bottom of the area.

Khan didn't like the idea of getting into a close area with potential enemies, but nothing blocked his sensitivity. The synthetic mana on the first and lower floor was clear to his senses, and he could confirm the absence of reinforcements or potential dangers.

In the end, Khan simply followed the crew inside while making sure to have an escape path open. He stood at the back of the group, and he was also the last to descend the staircase.

The lower floor revealed a surprise that Khan couldn't sense due to the turned-off engine. A poor-looking ship occupied the room, and one of the empty-handed men directly entered it to activate it.

The symphony recorded the presence of the ship at that point. Its engine ran on synthetic mana, so Khan heard its sound clearly. Still, his attention was on different details. After recognizing the model of the vehicle, he began to worry about its purpose.

"You can drop the box inside and leave," Rodney exclaimed before Khan could ask any question.

"Don't joke around," Khan responded. "I'm coming with you."

"As you wish," Rodney casually replied before pressing a button on the middle part of the ship to open its door.

The ship was a cargo vehicle that could carry up to twenty people, but the boxes made only eleven members of the crew fit inside. Khan and Rodney were among them, but they didn't speak even after setting off.

The entrance closed, so Khan couldn't see where the ship was going, and the lack of handholds made the flight messy, but it didn't last long. The central door eventually opened to reveal the vehicle's location, and Khan couldn't help but remain speechless for a second.

The ship had flown far above the array of streets. It was closer to Lower Level 2, from what Khan could see, and it hovered right before the dome. Moreover, an entrance was visible on that bright surface, and the vehicle was getting close to it.

"What's this?" Khan asked.

"One of the passages for the upper part of the dock," Rodney explained. "I hope you didn't expect everyone to come through the central elevators."

Khan didn't add anything. He picked up a box and waited for the ship to reach the opening. The crew began to jump into it at that point, and Khan followed when everyone had left the vehicle.

The passage was quite plain. A dim azure light illuminated its insides, but Khan couldn't see anything peculiar. The place was simply a corridor that ran inside the very dome.

The crew didn't waste time, and Khan followed along. The corridor went deeper into the dome until one of its surfaces became transparent and revealed a stunning spectacle. The window showed the outsides of the fourth asteroid. Khan could see the universe expanding in his vision.

"Don't get lost," Rodney shouted as the crew marched forward. "This passage has multiple branches. You should follow closely."

Khan could only hurry up to catch up with the others, but his eyes often fell on that transparent surface. He had believed to have gotten used to Milia 222, but that lawless zone still hid incredible surprises.

The passage wasn't a mere hole dug into the asteroid either. Khan noticed an important detail as he followed the crew. Some streets went up, but they became flat as soon as he stepped on them. The same went for those pointing down. The place had peculiar artificial gravity, so it was hard to keep track of the overall direction of the crew.

Khan had to admit that he was enjoying the experience. The hidden passage with the universe standing right outside wasn't something that normal planets could offer. The place was truly marvelous, but something eventually ruined his mood.

Rodney raised his hand when the crew reached a turn that featured two window-like surfaces. That part of the corridor offered a better view of the universe, but the mood that filled the area forced Khan to focus on his companions.

"What is happening?" Khan asked when his sensitivity told him that something was off.

"These are high-quality windows," Rodney announced while turning to face Khan, "But they aren't meant to endure spells. Normal attacks would probably only leave dents, but a chaos wielder would pierce through them at ease."

"What are you trying to say?" Khan coldly questioned.

"I'm explaining the situation," Rodney laughed. "You shouldn't use spells here. A single hole might collapse the whole structure and suck you into space. Mana won't save you there."

Rodney was ready to explain some more, but Khan didn't need anything else to understand. His gaze went on the transparent surface before going back to Rodney. He had fallen into a trap, but he didn't feel any danger.

"What are you even doing?" Khan casually asked while patting the box on his shoulder. "You can't catch me even if I'm carrying this."

Khan's confidence remained strong until a few presences joined the symphony. Distant and faint tremors ran through the synthetic mana and reached his senses, but he uncovered their source only when they got close enough.

"Thank you for showing me your progress in those alien tricks," Rodney said as the members of the crew that had remained behind appeared at the bottom of the corridor and blocked Khan's escape path. "It seems that I made them wait long enough."

The newcomers crossed the corridor and joined their companions to encircle Khan. He now had second-level warriors on two sides, the universe on his right, and a metal wall on his left.

"I don't get it," Khan admitted. "What do you want?"

"Don't play dumb," Rodney declared. "We both know how you want this cooperation to end. I'm just seizing the initiative."

"You won't get the rest of the deal like this," Khan pointed out.

"I can deal with that by myself," Rodney sneered. "The letter is all I need to gain an audience. Well, your disappearance will also help."

"I see," Khan voiced before bringing his attention back to the transparent surfaces. "Are you sure you want to do this here? I will blow everything up to catch you in the aftermath."

"I know," Rodney laughed before retreating to jump on the rest of the corridor. "That's why I'm leaving. You are free to blow everything up for all I care."

Chapter 390 Risk

"Don't forget the goods," Rodney announced as he hurried through the corridor, "And try not to damage Khan's box."

Rodney's voice echoed through the corridor while his presence grew distant. Khan had the urge to chase after him, but the second-level warriors tightened the encirclement as soon as he began to turn.

Khan's eyes darted left and right while his sensitivity to mana worked overtime. He had been on deadly battlefields. That situation was far from hopeless, but the threat of the windows shattered any idea connected to reckless behaviors.

The crew waited until Rodney became a faint presence in Khan's sensitivity before splitting into two groups. The second-level warriors carrying boxes also left to walk into deeper parts of the corridor and follow Rodney.

Soon, only seven second-level warriors, Khan, and his box remained in that turning point of the corridor. The crew's numbers had fallen drastically, but the situation didn't change too much. Those men still had the ability to stop Khan and force his hand.

Khan's calm generated some tension among the crew. Milia 222's smugglers weren't inexperienced soldiers who fell prey to fear easily. Still, even with the situation clearly in the second-level warriors' favor, Khan showed no fear at all. He actually appeared quite cool about everything, and that worried his opponents.

'Seven second-level warriors are a bit too much without spells,' Khan thought as he casually approached the transparent surface on his right.

Khan's movements intensified the overall tension, but his opponents didn't dare to move. They were also worried about the window, and that feeling became impossible to hide when Khan placed his free hand on it.

A tiny, incredible minute whiff of mana left Khan's forefinger. He summoned the entirety of his control to release the smallest amount of energy possible and make it hover above the transparent surface.

Gasps resounded among the remaining crew, but Khan ignored them as he kept his focus on the window. His eyes didn't reveal anything, but the symphony made him aware of tremors spreading through that surface.

Khan's lack of expertise in the field prevented him from reaching any definitive answer. He didn't know whether the tremors were the result of structural brittleness or intrinsic properties of that transparent material. Both explanations could be accurate, but one of them would lead to his death if ignored.

'I can't try my luck,' Khan accepted as he glanced at the other transparent surface behind the crew. 'This area should even be one of the most fragile in the hidden passage.'

"What are you doing?!" One of the men from the crew asked since Khan had yet to leave the window.

"I'm doing some tests," Khan honestly explained. "You don't expect me to trust Rodney right away, do you?"

"Your tests can kill all of us!" The man shouted.

"What?" Khan laughed while turning toward the second-level warrior. "Did you expect me to accept my death and make it easy for you?"

Khan shook his head and turned toward the window. His inspection had ended, but not looking at the men made some of them believe that he wasn't paying attention to his surroundings.

The synthetic mana was incredibly light. A mere gesture, sharp movement, or even intense thought could alter that energy. Khan's sensitivity was quite incredible, so he didn't miss the coldness that began to echo from one of the men behind him.

Khan promptly turned to glare at the man, and the gesture made the latter widen his eyes in surprise. Khan kept his cold face until some fear enveloped the second-level warrior before revealing a mocking smile and going back to the window.

The symphony changed again as the second-level warriors exchanged worried and meaningful glances. Many believed that their silence would protect them, but others began to fear Khan's alien abilities too much to join that process.

Khan doubled down on those worries whenever he saw fit. His face remained on the transparent surface, but his eyes moved to inspect those who expressed more confidence. Those men also happened to be the ones more direct in their silent gestures, so his actions appeared far from random in his opponents' minds.

That understanding brought new waves of fear. The crew's men had seen enough of Milia 222 to know that strange techniques and arts existed, but they had never seen a human wielding them so skillfully.

The worry that would typically appear only in the presence of a Nele or other unique species spread among the crew because of Khan. He seemed to have eyes on the back of his head, and his calm behavior hinted at more unknown and mysterious powers.

'They should respect me enough to hear my words now,' Khan thought once the symphony carried more fear than tension.

"Alright," Khan casually announced while turning to face the crew. "Rodney was right. This window will shatter if I summon too much mana."

Khan obviously couldn't be sure of that, but the same went for his opponents. Yet, his previous actions had created a situation where the second-level warriors would believe any word he said.

"Let's see," Khan continued while moving his eyes across his seven opponents. "Which one of you knows me?"

The question surprised the men, but Khan continued before they could answer. "I'm not talking about Milia 222. I want to understand if you know my profile."

The exchange of gazes that followed the question provided an answer. The crew didn't know about Khan, or, rather, didn't know anything about his achievements and fame.

"Rodney really tricked you," Khan joked. "How much is he paying for this suicide mission? I can offer double or even triple the amount if I feel generous."

Khan wasn't lying. A peaceful solution would solve all his problems and even advance his investigation. As for the money, he was sure that Luke could cover it.

Sadly enough, the second-level warriors didn't show the reactions Khan expected. They were worried, and doubts had filled their minds after the recent questions, but nothing on their faces pointed where Khan wanted. He actually saw some confidence returning in those expressions.

'I misinterpreted something,' Khan understood.

"Drop the box," One of the men eventually said. "We'll give you the chance to fight fairly."

"Fairly, you say," Khan chuckled. "You just don't want to damage the goods."

The taunt was on point, but Khan took no pleasure in that. The seven second-level warriors appeared truly set on pursuing that potentially suicidal mission. Money couldn't buy that determination, so Khan gave up on achieving a peaceful outcome.

Khan had done more than keep track of his surroundings during the past minutes. He had gone over his imminent battle, and a strategy had even formed in his mind.

Rodney had reassured his companions about the windows, but it was very likely that the second-level warriors would hold back from using spells. Their determination couldn't overcome their fear so easily. Khan believed that they would resort to dangerous attacks only if their lives were at risk.

Khan could exploit that edge, but the place still featured second-level warriors. He felt confident in his martial arts, but the relatively cramped area would inevitably make his opponents overwhelm him.

Using spells to survive sounded mandatory, and Khan had something that might avoid the destruction of the windows. His accuracy was an issue, but he could ignore it as long as he acted carefully.

'If only I had a few more weeks of training,' Khan sighed in his mind before voicing a silent request. 'Protect the window.'

A tinge of purple-red mana came out of the top of Khan's head and dispersed into the corridor. The atmosphere was so tense that the entire crew noticed the event, but no one had the ability to sense what happened to the synthetic mana.

The synthetic mana shook under Khan's request before flowing toward the window. An uneven and messy membrane covered the transparent surface and created a weak shield meant to block incoming tremors.

Khan didn't feel too satisfied with the barrier. Ideally, he would have gone for something specific for his element. He would have also chosen to deflect instead of block, but his skill still didn't allow that.

The size of the barrier was also a problem. The corridor wasn't tall, but the synthetic mana only stretched for a few meters and even left many open spots near the floor and ceiling.

The execution was far from perfect, but Khan couldn't linger too long in those thoughts. The distraction created by his release of mana was his chance to seize the initiative, and he didn't miss it.

Khan threw the metal box on his left before reaching for his knife and summoning mana. His right hand closed into a fist as energy gathered among his fingers.

Images appeared in his vision. Khan recalled the bird-like monster met in the valley on Nitis. He saw its bright feathers falling toward the ground and cutting anything in their path.

Meanwhile, a sharp pain invaded his mind. Khan used the sorrow that surged inside him whenever he glanced at his tattoo to fuel those memories and give shape to his new spell.

Three needles began to grow among Khan's fingers, and the process didn't stop even after they became longer than his hand. Their brightness also intensified as their surface shook due to the instabilities caused by their size.

The needles seemed ready to explode, but Khan waved his hand to throw them toward the men near the metal wall. The action matched the crash of the metal box on the second-level warrior, and Khan even added a sprint to that offensive.

The second-level warriors were two steps too late. The launch of the metal box had added another distraction that made them miss the creation of the needles. By the time they noticed them, they had already flown through half of the corridor.

Moreover, the location pushed the crew to abandon its experience and run away. Those men recognized the needles as a spell, so they expected the window to shatter.

Khan exploited every second of that chaos. The second-level warrior on his left had instinctively raised his arms to block the metal box, so Khan slashed at his exposed abdomen during his sprint.

Executing the Divine Reaper didn't slow down Khan at all, so he reached his second opponent while he was still in the middle of turning to run away. The man noticed Khan and raised his arms, but the knife cut through them and reached his neck.

The three needles reached the crew while Khan was busy cutting his second opponent's arms. He didn't have great control over his throw game, so the spell only managed to target two men, and one of them quickly ducked away from it.

The man still on the spell's trajectory tried his best, but he only managed to dodge one of the two needles flying toward him. The other hit his right cheek and pierced it without meeting any resistance.

The two needles that missed their targets landed on the metal wall and began to dig through it, but everything exploded at that point. The three bright weapons became too unstable to retain their shape and released their wild mana to create small, spherical versions of the Wave spell.

The needle stuck in the man's cheek ended up destroying three-quarters of his head during the explosion. The second weapon created a half-spherical hole in the metal wall, while the third turned out to be close enough to its target to touch him.

The second-level warrior who had dodged the needle was still trying to make a point of the situation when something exploded above him. The purple-red sphere touched his head and dug through his skull, destroying a part of his brain.

Khan didn't turn. He sprinted through the opening he created while listening to the symphony. Everything had turned messy due to his offensive, but he only cared about the sounds caused by his mana.

Deep and wild noises echoed through the symphony, creating bright shades that flew through the synthetic mana and expanded in the passage. Some reached the membrane on the transparent surface and pierced it quite easily.

The event filled Khan with panic and made him shout a desperate request that he didn't bother to keep in his mind. "Help my legs!"

Mana left Khan's body and fused with the synthetic energy, which moved toward his legs. He was ready to give his best attempt at Maban's technique, but he halted his steps when he sensed the reaction of the window.

The bright shades had lost some power during the clash with the membrane. Some had even changed direction, but something had definitely fallen on the window.

Still, the transparent surface endured the clash without suffering any damage. It trembled a bit, but it soon retrieved its stability.

Khan turned to check that his sensitivity wasn't lying to him before sprinting back toward his enemies. The window had been more than able to endure the aftermath of his small spell, so his approach to the situation instantly changed.

One second-level warrior was on the floor with his intestine coming out of the long cut on his abdomen. Another was trying to cover his open throat, but his maimed arms couldn't stop the bleeding.

Two corpses stood a mere meter from those men. One had so little of his face left that no one could recognize him, while the other had a gory hole on the top of his head.

The remaining three second-level warriors had run in the opposite direction of Khan but for the same reasons, and their panic took longer to disappear due to their weaker senses.

Khan could reach the box while his opponents were still making sure that the window was intact. They weren't distracted, but they weren't completely ready to fight either. Still, he decided not to pursue them.

"You can say that you killed me," Khan exclaimed as he placed his left foot on the head of the man with the wounded neck, "But I suggest you hide afterward."

"You-!" One of the men tried to say, but a cracking noise reached his ears and made him interrupt his line. His eyes inevitably went on Khan's left foot. His companion's head had turned into a gory puddle.

"Hurry up," Khan ordered. "Leave already."

The three men were stunned. The complete coldness behind Khan's actions froze their thoughts. He had crushed their companion's head without showing any emotion. The sheer lack of humanity in the gesture turned Khan into a fearsome monster in their vision.

Khan could see that the three men were on the verge of running away, but their eyes revealed the source of their lingering hesitation. His opponents glanced at the metal box before focusing on him again.

"This one stays with me," Khan continued. "You can say that it fell in space if you need, but I won't give it to you."

Something powerful had pushed the crew to accept that dangerous task, but Khan had destroyed that resolve with his actions. Defeating more than half of the group in a single offensive and his last chilling gesture had turned him into an alternative that the surviving men wanted to avoid at all costs.

The synthetic mana gave an answer before the three men could act. Khan kept his cold face on his opponents and watched them leave in a hurry. He didn't move even after they left his vision and waited until they disappeared from his senses' range before lowering his gaze.

Khan was no stranger to death and bloodbaths. He had seen far worse, but something in that scene made him pensive. He didn't know if Jonathan had survived, but that didn't matter anymore. He had undoubtedly taken human lives.

The situation was still far from ideal, so Khan pushed those thoughts to the back of his head as he lifted the box and threw it toward the metal wall. The man under it was still alive, and coughs came out of his bleeding mouth.

Khan ignored the man for now. His attention went to the box, and his knife lit up before digging a tiny hole in that tough metal. That dark material actually resisted the Divine Reaper for a bit, but it eventually pierced through.

Khan withdrew the knife and focused on his sensitivity. No energy came out of the hole, and nothing strange happened when the synthetic mana entered the box.

Those results gave Khan the confidence to open the box. His knife dug a square opening that fell off with a simple pull and revealed its insides. A few layers of insulating material hindered Khan's inspection but removing them granted a clear view of the actual goods.

Khan saw a stack of dark-green fabric tied to the box's sides. He could count nine sheets of that material, but something else attracted his attention, and touching it almost confirmed his guess.

'Dammit,' Khan cursed in his mind while pulling out one of the sheets, uncaring that his gesture could tear it.

The fabric turned out to be quite flexible. It stretched until the pressure reached the critical point and made it separate from the box. Khan ended up with the intact material in his hands, and his guess began to turn into certainty when he sniffed and licked it.

Khan had only used his methods on the final product of a long and thorough alteration. He had never gotten the chance to do the same on the original material.

However, the fabric in his hands matched what Luke had shown and explained. Moreover, Khan felt a vague and distant resemblance with the material studied in the factory. It really seemed that he had found the alien chameleon's skin, which put Rodney in the criminal organization in charge of purchasing it.

'This can't be a coincidence,' Khan thought as he rolled the fabric and stored it under his loose jumper. 'Still, I might have nothing to do with this. A member of a wealthy family is a perfect middle-man in this situation.'

A chilling feeling invaded Khan's mind as he adjusted his position and left the box alone. His gaze turned on the coughing man busy keeping his bowel inside his body. The resilience of a second-level warrior was preserving his life, but that didn't play to his advantage.