

Chaos' Heir 391

Chapter 391 Fun

"P-please," The second-level warrior weakly said as his hands tried to keep the long wound on his abdomen closed.

The blood coming out of the injury made everything too slippery, and the intestine pushed to come out without muscles and tendons to keep them still. The man often lost his grip, and a gory spectacle followed every time.

Initially, Khan remained silent. His cold eyes ran over the injured man without meeting his gaze. His inspection went past the mere flesh and tried to evaluate his opponent's condition. The second-level warrior could survive as long as he received medical attention.

"Do you want to live?" Khan eventually asked while crouching toward the man.

The man tried to say something, but blood accumulated in his throat and turned his words into a cough. One of his hands reached for his mouth, but doing so made the gap on his abdomen open.

The second-level warrior felt forced to bring his hand on his abdomen and catch his escaping bowel. As for the answer, he limited himself to a nod since his throat wasn't cooperating.

"Let's start with the basics then," Khan exclaimed. "Why did you accept this mission? How did Rodney convince you to fight in this dangerous place?"

The man wanted to answer, but he ended up coughing. The gesture spat some blood on Khan's clothes and face, but he remained utterly still. He didn't even blink as those gory drops fell on his cheeks.

"I-," The second-level warrior panicked. "I'm sorry!"

"Answer me," Khan calmly reminded.

The man needed a few seconds to calm down, and he also turned his head to spit the remaining blood in his mouth. His condition had temporarily stabilized when he moved back on Khan, but his voice still revealed his poor state.

"I don't know about the others," The second-level warrior explained, "But Rodney said that I could return to my family if I dealt with you."

"Is he keeping your family hostage?" Khan wondered.

"I-," The man began to say, but hesitation made him stammer for a second. "I can't return to Earth. I'm a criminal."

'So, that's how it is,' Khan thought. 'The others must be in similar situations.'

"What do you know about this business?" Khan pressed on without giving the man time to relax.

"Nothing, I swear!" The second-level warrior did his best to shout, but his weak state got in the way. "I just carry goods."

"Don't you know anything?" Khan continued. "What about the actual goods?"

"I've never opened a box," The man responded.

"And your boss?" Khan asked.

"Rodney handles that," The man replied. "I don't know who stands above him."

"Who established the connection with the Bise then?" Khan said, suppressing his vague irritation as much as possible. "That's not an easy thing to do. You must have noticed something strange."

"I swear, I didn't!" The second-level warrior begged. "I'm just hired muscle. I don't know anything."

The man believed that his ignorance could save him. His desperate attempt to convey it to Khan came from that conviction, but he was completely wrong.

Khan didn't care about the man's involvement in the business. He wanted answers, and he couldn't get any. He only confirmed that Rodney's status was quite high, putting him directly under the figure in charge of the entire illegal activity.

Pieces of a puzzle fused to create a picture. Dots connected in Khan's mind as everything he had learnt since his arrival on Milia 222 flowed through his thoughts.

Theoretically, Luke's mission was simple. Someone had stolen precious goods, and a team had to retrieve them while finding the culprits.

Nevertheless, the peculiar location added countless problems to the mission. Milia 222 had so many deeply rooted illegal activities that spotting a single theft in that sea of crime sounded impossible.

The details of the theft were also problematic. The factory was overly secretive, and some of Earth's wealthiest families backed it. Such importance required an equally important criminal since the theft had been a success.

The presence of a traitor or spy appeared necessary with those facts, but the Fuveall revealed a terrible truth. No thief could overcome those security measures without leaving tracks, so the culprit had to be among the factory owners.

On the other side of the matter, buyers had to deal with Bise smugglers to obtain the reinforced fabric's main material. Those crews often changed due to Milia 222's nature, but it made sense for a few figures to remain stable in such a secretive project.

Less than two years had passed since Nitis' events. Rodney couldn't have possibly been that stable figure, but his arrival on Milia 222 could match the beginning of the thefts.

Rodney was the perfect inside man due to his wealthy background and poor reputation. Someone from the Cobsend family might have contacted him to learn more about the reinforced fabric business without attracting attention. He might have even been planted on Milia 222 for that exact reason.

Khan couldn't confirm any of that. He had only found odd coincidences. The material in the box, Rodney's strangely high status, and the Fuveall's testimony created a picture, but Khan lacked key info to complete it.

'There are at least two unknown variables,' Khan concluded, 'And I can't be sure about the motives either.'

Rodney's boss and the traitor from the Cobsend family were the two missing pieces of the puzzle. As for the latter's motives, Khan couldn't ask Luke, but he had someone in mind who could help him. The promise he had made to her was the only problem there.

The mental summary only lasted for a minute in which the wounded men continued to shoot pleading glances at Khan. The gesture tried to appeal to Khan's mercy, but he still wasn't done with his opponent.

Khan diverted his gaze to inspect his sides. He had only two paths now, and both of them featured problems.

Continuing the march through the corridor would probably bring Khan to Lower Level 2. The path ahead also had to have multiple branches, but they were bound to lead to human structures. In the worst case, Khan might even reach Rodney and be surrounded by the members of his factions.

Instead, the path back to Lower Level 3 had one major issue. Khan vaguely recalled where to go, but returning to the beginning of the passage would leave him far away from the streets. He would need to fly to cross that distance, and he still didn't know how.

Khan partially cursed himself for refusing the unreliable devices meant to communicate on the dock. He believed that the passage would prevent that, but having something similar would give him hope.

The same went for his ability with the Nele's arts. Khan sort of understood the theory behind sending messages through the mana, but the distance from his allies' districts was too great. Also, he wouldn't know how to convey his position. The dome's light hid the passage so much that even he would struggle to find it again.

"What was the plan?" Khan eventually asked while turning back on the wounded man. "Were all of you supposed to join Rodney on Lower Level 2?"

The question sounded like a long shot, but it made perfect sense in Khan's mind. A limited number of witnesses was key to keeping a business secret, and a ship did bring reinforcements into the passage. That vehicle might still be there, waiting for the crew.

"We had to kill you and bring proof of your death to Rodney," The man said before coughing again. His condition was worsening, but Khan pretended not to notice that.

"What about after that?" Khan wondered.

"We had to return to Lower Level 3," The man explained while his eyes regained some vitality.

"The ship should come to pick us up in half an hour. I can talk to the pilot for you."

'The ship is coming back!' Khan exclaimed in his mind before showing his true colors. His cold face gained some threatening features that revealed his intentions, and the man didn't miss them.

"Wait!" The man begged, but a glowing knife stabbed his head and ended his life before he could add anything.

Khan retrieved his knife and waved it toward the floor. Some blood left its edge, and Khan handled the rest of those spots by wiping it on his jumper.

Thoughts ran wildly. Khan came up with a plan in no time before setting his priorities straight. The mission was important, but he had to find Rodney before he could make the letter public. That would prevent many headaches, and it would even give him the chance to interrogate him privately.

Clothes flew through the corridor. Khan undressed before seizing a grey tracksuit from one of the corpses. His baggy jumper and trousers could reveal his identity, and his disguise didn't end there.

Khan hid his sheath, knife, and alien chameleon's skin under his clothes before reaching for the fabric tainted by his opponent's escaping intestine. He tore away a long strand before putting it on his head like a hood.

The fabric couldn't cover Khan's entire head, but he didn't care. He only needed the dirty part to be in front of him. It would be easier to pretend to be injured like that.

Khan didn't waste any more time. He glanced at the corpses once more before hurrying through the corridor and doing his best to recall the trod path. A moment to think about the recent events would come, but that wasn't it.

The corridor had branches, but Khan had remained alert during the entirety of the march. He only needed a few breaks every time he was in front of multiple options to recall where to go, and the darker pale-blue light of the dome eventually appeared in his vision.

Khan couldn't see any ship hovering at the beginning of the passage, so he sat at some distance from it and waited. The bloodied hood covered most of his vision, but his sensitivity reached the entrance, and he relied on it while keeping his face hidden.

Tense minutes went by as Khan remained on the floor. He waited and waited until something finally approached the entrance. The symphony was the first to warn him about that change, but the familiar sound of an engine soon reached his ears too.

"Get moving already!" A shout resounded from the entrance and echoed through the corridor. "I'll leave you here otherwise."

Khan performed a weak gesture with his hand before slowly standing up. He pretended to be in terrible condition as he staggered left and right. He even crashed on the walls a few times to add value to his act.

Meanwhile, Khan used the narrow holes on his hood to study the situation. His sensitivity had already confirmed that the cargo area of the ship was empty, and his eyes helped him tread the path toward that place.

"Are you the only one left?" The pilot asked through his open window when Khan slowly stepped inside the cargo area. "That guy must have been a tough one."

Khan didn't answer. He let the cargo door close before removing his dirty hood and inspecting the pilot's cabin. He didn't know the specifics of the ship's model, but the engine and tank were on its back, so destroying a wall wouldn't make it crash.

The pilot sat on the ship's right side, so Khan drew his knife and dived deep into his memories while activating the Divine Reaper. He had seen similar vehicles during his simulations, so he could imagine the cabin's layout in his mind.

"Hey, what are you doing?!" The pilot shouted in confusion when he saw a glowing knife piercing the wall that divided him from the cargo area.

Khan acted as quickly as possible. He dug a rectangular hole into the wall before pushing himself through it. The severed metal layer fell on the controls, and the abrupt event allowed him to adjust his position inside the cabin before the pilot could react.

"What-?" The pilot tried to say, but a knife reached his throat and interrupted his line. Khan didn't stab him, but his mana created a shallow cut anyway.

"Easy now," The pilot said while moving his eyes between the knife and Khan's dirty face. "I will bring you on the dock. Just don't kill me."

The pilot was strangely calm. His aspect didn't give anything away. He was a plain-looking middle-aged man with short dark hair and an unkempt beard, but his gaze showed deep experience.

"You know what I can do, right?" Khan asked while sending as many chilling sensations as possible through the synthetic mana.

"I'm just a pilot," The man responded. "I fly people when needed without asking any question."

"I don't trust you," Khan warned.

"You don't need to trust me," The pilot replied. "You need me to fly you on the streets."

Khan would have usually pursued that interaction until he felt confident enough to accept the deal, but an idea slowly formed in his mind. The control desk had tens of keys, but he recognized many of them. A short inspection was enough to give him a vague idea of what they did.

"Stand up," Khan ordered.

"What?" The pilot asked, but Khan promptly pressed the knife to his throat. He had retracted his mana, so the weapon only slightly deepened the shallow injury.

"Okay, okay!" The man shouted. "I'm about to move."

The pilot slowly left his seat, and Khan guided him toward his left. A mere push convinced the man to crouch on the cabin's floor, and Khan swiftly changed the position of his knife to sit in front of the desk while keeping his opponent in check.

"What are you doing?!" The pilot panicked when he saw Khan using his free hand to tinker with the control desk, but another push from the knife made him shut up.

"This is the handbrake, right?" Khan asked while pointing at a red key near the top of the control desk.

The pilot wanted to voice another panicked remark, but Khan's cold gaze pushed back his words and turned them into a slight nod. Khan smiled and pressed the key, and a tremor ran through the ship.

"Please," The pilot begged when Khan grabbed the rectangular steering wheel with one hand. "I promise I'll get you where you want. Just let me drive."

Khan completely ignored the pilot. His knife remained on his throat while he gave a slight push to the steering wheel. The vehicle immediately accelerated forward, but its speed was barely noticeable.

'I can do this,' Khan thought before giving a sharp push to the steering wheel.

The acceleration was violent at that time. The ship shot forward before hitting the dome's curved surface and sliding through it. The screeching noises that resounded made the pilot close his eyes in fear, but Khan laughed as he steered away.

The upper part of Lower Level 3 was basically empty. The elevators connected to Lower Level 2 were too distant to be a problem, and no ship flew nearby. Khan was free to go where he wanted, and he used that chance to test himself out.

Khan accelerated and braked at will, turning, rising, and diving to see what the ship could do. The pilot opened and closed his eyes, but the knife on his throat put an end to any of his plans. He actually felt glad that Khan could keep his weapon still during that reckless flight.

'This thing is too stiff!' Khan cursed as he accelerated even more. 'How can they call this flying?!

The pilot opened his eyes again only to see the ship diving at full speed toward the streets. Confused words came out of his mouth until they transformed into a scream. The vehicle was about to crash, but Khan abruptly pulled the steering wheel when a few meters separated him from the surface.

The ship released a deep noise that resembled a metallic complaint as it tried to fend off the momentum accumulated during the dive. The few meters left from the street weren't enough to disperse all of it, so the vehicle landed violently.

The dock's streets were sturdy enough to remain in one piece, and the vehicle also bounced a few times while leaving deep holes or marks on the dark-grey floor. The multiple crashes eventually halted the ship, but the pilot was far from happy about that landing.

"Were you trying to kill the both of us?!" The pilot complained.

"Shut up," Khan laughed. "I haven't had so much fun in months."

"Fun?!" The man shouted. "You must have many loose screws to fly like this!"

"Well," Khan smiled as he stood up and forced the man to imitate him. "My teacher was an eagle."

The man was at a loss for words. He had somehow managed to stay alive during that messy flight even if a knife had remained on his throat for the whole time. Moreover, Khan sounded genuinely crazy. He could complain more, but he felt that his luck would run out if he did.

Khan opened the door and dragged the pilot with him. A crowd had already formed around the ship, and many groups inspected the damage suffered by the street. However, no one dared to reach Khan to complain.

"[Care to explain]?" A familiar voice resounded behind Khan while he was busy glaring at the crowd.

A purple halo filled Khan's vision when he turned. He had landed near the Nele's district, and his sensitivity had already warned him. He didn't feel any surprise seeing Maban, Piran, and a few other known faces standing behind him.

"[I'll explain everything]," Khan promised before pushing the pilot toward the Nele. [In the meantime, can you keep an eye on him? Also, I need to announce my imminent departure. I must return to the second asteroid]."

Chapter 392 Variable

The pilot had started to grow numb to surprises, but the purple light triggered the instinctive fear developed after living on Milia 222 for a while. Maban and his group didn't wear their spray, so getting too close would definitely cause problems.

Sadly for the pilot, Khan was in no mood to bother about those details. He pushed his prisoner into the purple light's range, and the Nele's pheromones took over.

The pilot tried to retreat, but intense urges filled his mind as soon as the purple light shone on him. Evident struggle appeared on his face as he mustered the entirety of his self-restraint to escape, but Khan pushed him again and put an end to that attempt.

"Please," The pilot begged as his internal struggle made him lose his balance and fall to the floor. "I would never-. I swear. I wouldn't-."

The pilot never managed to complete a line. A crazy smile appeared on his face whenever he glanced at the group of Nele. He was completely aware of what was happening, but his body reacted on its own.

Maban and the others showed nothing but disgust while watching the pilot crawling toward them. They knew that fending off their pheromones was no easy task. The man wasn't really to blame, but the Nele wouldn't forgive him anyway.

"[Piran, take care of the ship]," Maban eventually ordered. "[Khan, inside the district. Now]."

Khan happily nodded as he stored his knife and kicked the pilot to push him back on the floor. The latter's condition was worsening, and even his eyes were growing crazy, so Khan had to keep him in check.

The pilot didn't cooperate. He struggled whenever Khan delayed his crawling toward the Nele, and he even started to summon his mana at some point. The man was set on fulfilling his urges, but a precise kick on his nape ended all of that.

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Khan exchanged nods with Piran and the few Nele who remained behind to handle the ship before lifting the unconscious pilot. His smile remained on his face for the whole time, and he even turned to inspect the street while following Maban.

The crowd didn't disperse, but the arrival of the Nele made many groups retreat. Still, the scene was too interesting to ignore, so more people converged on the street to check the situation.

The crashed ship had suffered some damage, and the hole dug by Khan didn't help its state. Its engine had also turned off after the violent landing, but a lot could be salvaged there. The Orlats and Fuveall in the area didn't hide their interest in the vehicle, but the Nele's presence made them give up on any claim.

Instead, the street's condition was a completely different issue. The holes and overall damage involved the entire dock, and someone had to pay to repair them. Yet, Khan's involvement with the Nele made that matter quite problematic.

Khan knew that he had brought trouble to the Nele, but his mind couldn't stop cheering. Flying had felt too good. The wind didn't blow on his face, and the cargo ship wasn't great, but he had still enjoyed himself more than expected.

'I can fly!' Khan exclaimed in his mind. 'I need to start working toward buying my own ship now.'

The project was a distant dream. Khan needed to get better, and his problems didn't end there. Getting a flying license and the Credits to purchase such expensive items was no easy matter, but it didn't sound too unreal anymore.

The excitement couldn't last forever, and Khan wasn't the type to ignore his problems. His situation was far from good. Rodney had seen right through him and had decided to seize the initiative. His unexpected betrayal had almost cornered Khan, leaving him with limited time to prevent terrible outcomes.

In theory, Khan should leave right away. Each minute spent in the dock gave Rodney more time to secure his position. He wasn't even the type to relax at the news of Khan's death, so an immediate reaction would be the intelligent approach.

However, Khan had to take care of a few things first, and thinking about all of that soured his mood. Flying had made him ecstatic, but coldness soon returned. Luckily for him, someone didn't let his good feelings disappear so quickly.

"[That smile suits you]," Jenna commented while leaving the guardrails to approach Khan. "[You should wear it more often]."

"[I almost forgot how much I like flying]," Khan explained as Jenna reached his side.

"[I'm getting jealous of a ship]," Jenna giggled.

"[I took care of it for you]," Khan teased, and Jenna laughed again.

Jenna could immediately realize that something had gone wrong. She had learnt about the ship as soon as she left the room, and Khan's appearance only deepened her worries. Blood was on his face and clothes, but his genuine smile filled her with pure happiness.

That happy feeling didn't last. Jenna's expression turned cold when she glanced at the unconscious pilot on Khan's shoulder. The synthetic mana around her echoed her killing intent, which didn't disappear even after Khan took her hand.

"[They keep coming for your happiness]," Jenna stated. "[I can't forgive them]."

"[And the problems aren't over yet]," Khan sighed.

Jenna inspected Khan's souring mood before voicing a question. "[What do you need to do with him]?"

"[Him]?" Khan repeated while shooting a glance at the unconscious pilot. "[He probably doesn't know much, but I'm not sure]."

"[Leave him to me then]," Jenna requested. "[You can tell me what happened after meeting Maban]."

"[Jenna]," Khan called. He knew exactly what Jenna wanted to do, and he didn't like the idea of putting her in that situation.

"[I've already decided]," Jenna responded before showing her beautiful smile. "[You can only think of ways to make it up for me]."

"[You are truly impossible]," Khan joked, and the two moved toward a specific building without adding anything else.

The building opened as soon as Jenna approached its entrance. The prison-like area that Khan had seen after his fight against the bounty hunters unfolded in his view, and he proceeded inside to bind the pilot to chains.

A few Nele entered the building while Khan was busy taking care of the pilot. Nessa led a small group inside and nodded at Jenna before drawing her root.

"[Don't make Maban wait]," Jenna said while her eyes remained fixed on the chained pilot.

Khan couldn't find any fitting word. Seeing Jenna so angry hurt him, especially since he was the reason behind that emotion. He felt as if his presence was a terrible influence that darkened anyone interacting with him, but he didn't have the time to listen to those depressing thoughts.

"[I'll be back soon]," Khan whispered before pulling Jenna to leave a kiss on her cheek. The entire area immediately grew warmer, but he left the building before inspecting the various reactions.

Maban didn't mind Khan's short stop. He waited for him in the district's headquarters, and an explanation followed after they met. Rodney's business didn't involve the Nele, but knowledge was power, and Khan wanted Maban to have it.

"[I see]," Maban voiced once the explanation was over. "[You shouldn't waste time then. Leave already]."

"[What about the street?]" Khan asked. "[I can pay for that once I get back here]."

"[You damaged a street but brought back a ship]," Maban uttered. "[I say you have already paid what you owe]."

"[Won't my actions have political repercussions?]" Khan continued to voice his worries. "[The hunting season has just ended. The other species won't be happy about today]."

"[And what would change if you remained here?]" Maban snorted. "[Don't think so highly of yourself. Focus on your mess and leave Lower Level 3 to us]."

"[But-]," Khan tried to say, but Maban interrupted him. "[Enough! Do you want to be useful? Fix your problem before it ruins your career. I used my precious time for you, so you must become more than a simple soldier]."

Maban had tried to be rude, but Khan had begun to learn to see past his cold and stern behavior. The Nele was hoping for his success, and the event felt heartwarming.

"[You really are a softie]," Khan commented.

"[What]?!" Maban shouted.

"[Nothing]!" Khan laughed as he left the interactive desk to approach the entrance. "[I'll try to come back soon]."

Maban wanted to add something, but Khan left too quickly. Maban ended up heaving a helpless sigh, but the corners of his mouth soon turned upward to create a faint smirk. He even muttered the word "[softie]" before disregarding the matter and returning to his duties.

Khan hurried toward his room and jumped into the trapdoor as soon as it opened. The faint trace of natural mana brought some relief from the constant stench that the synthetic energy caused, but his attention directly went to the backpacks lying on the floor.

A quick search brought a square device into Khan's hands. The item was a screen with grey metal handles on its four edges. A few keys also occupied those areas, and Khan had to read the instructions left in the backpack to know what to press.

The device eventually lit up, and Khan browsed through the menus before pulling out the alien chameleon's skin from under his clothes. A cross appeared on the screen when he placed it over the dark-green fabric, and beeping noises soon came out of it.

'Dammit,' Khan cursed when he read the words that appeared on the screen. 'I really found it.'

The device confirmed that the fabric was indeed the alien chameleon's skin used in the factory. Khan had found the basic material and the buyers involved in its delivery to the second asteroid. He was closing in on the true culprits, which made Rodney's escape more troublesome.

The device's findings urged Khan to hurry even more, but he had one last thing to do before departing. He stuffed the item and the alien chameleon's skin into the backpack before leaving the room and marching through the district. The walk brought him back to the ship, where he addressed Piran's questioning face.

"[I'm going out for a bit]," Khan announced. "[I'll be back in no time]."

Piran glanced at the crowd busy inspecting the street before turning toward Khan. He didn't need to say anything to express his thoughts, and Khan addressed the topic right away. "[You can't follow me there]."

"[Alright]," Piran exclaimed. "[Be safe]."

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Khan nodded before listening to the symphony to find the least crowded street. Sadly enough, there were people everywhere, so Khan couldn't avoid interacting with the bystanders.

A group of Orlats and humans occupied the narrow street that Khan had chosen, and murmurs resounded as soon as he arrived. Khan could only make out the words "chaos wielder" before his cold expression made those bystanders split to let him pass.

Khan didn't run, but he still walked quickly. However, eyes and spies remained on him even after he left the crowded area. The groups who had decided to leave him be after the lack of changes in the bounty returned stronger than ever, and many curious parties also joined that effort.

Nevertheless, the Tors' district remained a must-avoid area even in that peculiar situation. Many groups retreated when Khan stepped on the streets immersed in the oily synthetic mana, but he also had to stop before diving too deeply into the Tor's domain.

Minutes had to pass for a few presences to enter the range of Khan's senses. Khan waited calmly until a hooded figure peeked past the guardrails and jumped on the hidden street to place a transparent container on the floor.

'One week was obviously too short,' Khan sighed as he stood up and poured his mana into the container. He had faintly hoped for his second commission to be completed already, but the idea had turned out to be too unrealistic.

"I need to leave the dock for a while," Khan exclaimed while continuing to fill the container.

"Twice a week," The Tors spoke from behind its hood. "That's the deal."

"Get me more containers now," Khan requested. "I'll pay upfront for the next weeks."

"Your new request will take a long time," The Tors pointed out.

"You can decide the number of containers," Khan responded. "I just want our collaboration to continue."

"You don't have enough chaos," The Tors commented.

"Test me out," Khan confidently replied. "I'll manage somehow."

The Tors was speaking about the limits of a second-level mage, but Khan felt more than confident. He only needed the alien to give him a chance, which happened right after his last line.

The alien approached the guardrail and peeked past it to voice a series of incomprehensible hisses. One of the Tors under the street left only to return a few minutes later with a few companions.

Khan didn't waste time being surprised or negotiating. A few Tors jumped on the street to place multiple containers in front of him, and he filled them without uttering a single word.

Soon, eleven full containers stood before Khan. His upfront payment could keep the Tors at bay for more than a month, and he limited himself to watch as the caped aliens brought them away.

Khan knew that giving so much without getting anything in return had been far from wise. The Tors could pretend not to care about his second commission now, but he couldn't find any other solution in that short time. If the Tors decided to betray his trust, he would simply have to accept his loss.

The street became empty, and Khan left it without looking back even once. The spies returned, and the same went for the crowd once he arrived near the Nele's district. Cold, scared, and curious faces followed his movements as he made his way through the groups, but he disregarded the mess as he hurried toward the prison.

The scene that unfolded in Khan's vision once the prison-like building opened matched his expectations. Jenna, Nessa, and a few other Nele stood around the chained pilot, who was begging for his life.

Khan moved his gaze over the roots stabbed in the pilot's legs before focusing on his face. Tears, blood, and utter fear fused to depict pure desperation. That expression announced defeat. The middle-aged man had probably revealed the entirety of his intel.

"[He doesn't know anything]," Jenna announced without turning. "[Your friend hired him without sharing any aspect of his plan]."

Khan kept his eyes on the pilot. The latter could barely see due to the tears that filled his eyes, but a begging expression took over his face when he recognized Khan's human features.

The pilot hoped that a member of the same species would show more mercy than the Nele, but he would shake in fear if he could hear Khan's thoughts. Khan was going over the matter, but everything pointed in the same direction.

'He isn't like the crew,' Khan thought. 'He is an innocent who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.'

Those thoughts would be enough to show mercy in the absence of other issues. After all, Khan didn't enjoy taking lives. It would actually make him feel better about his recent killing if he spared the pilot.

However, the pilot had seen the Nele's district and had gone through their torture. He was bound to develop hatred toward that species, and eventual enemy factions would benefit from that feeling. Even some of Khan's secrets could be at risk in that case.

The images of the human corpses appeared in Khan's vision. He had killed fellow members of his species without showing any hesitation. He had crossed a line, but he didn't feel any different.

'Humans, Nele, Niqols,' Khan thought. 'They are all the same.'

Khan had already reached similar conclusions, but he had confirmed them now. Doubts disappeared from his mind as he accepted what he had to do. Every life had the same value, so killing a potential enemy to keep his friends safe sounded completely reasonable.

"I don't know anything!" The pilot shouted when Khan approached him, but his suffering ended when a glowing knife pierced his brain.

"[I need to go back to the second asteroid]," Khan announced while cleaning his knife and putting it back in the sheath.

"[And]?" Jenna asked. "[This is the part when you try to keep me here]."

"[You know I don't lie to you]," Khan stated. "[It might be dangerous, but having you at my side might help]."

"[There is nothing else to say then]," Jenna smiled as she took Khan's hand and led him outside the building.

Nessa and the other Nele felt the need to remain silent, but a trace of envy surged inside them while they watched the departing couple. The feeling carried no ill intentions. The aliens simply wanted a similar relationship.

Khan summarized the recent events to Jenna, who agreed to move quickly. Rodney had proven himself to be a problematic opponent in that environment, so Khan needed Luke's support to come out on top, and having Jenna at his side could add value to his claims.

The couple didn't have time to be too thorough. Khan cleaned the blood from his face and hair before changing into some of the clothes in the backpack. Jenna also wore something elegant since she had to return to Lower Level 1, and she even donned the spray to avoid problems.

Jenna and Khan left the district in a hurry after those short preparations. The backpacks were with them, and no one hindered their departure. Maban, Piran, and a few others voiced quick goodbyes, but that was it.

It was past lunchtime, but the crowd was still around the district, and the couple's departure inevitably attracted a lot of attention. Still, no one dared to bother Khan and Jenna, so the two could reach the elevators and leave that messy situation.

Khan and Jenna knew which elevators belonged to the Nele, so their return to Lower Level 2 happened swiftly and without additional costs. The Nele on the upper part of the dock also greeted them as friends and led them toward hidden lifts that would bring them to Lower Level 1 without leaving the building.

The couple ended up in a small shop once the climbing was over. The place resembled what Khan had seen on the third asteroid, but more Nele guarded it. Still, it seemed that they knew him, and Jenna's presence made them leave without undergoing any additional security measures.

The return to the city dispersed the heavy tension that had accumulated during the stay in the dock. Khan and Jenna had almost forgotten about it, but the sight of peaceful and relatively safe areas reminded them that Milia 222 could be very different.

The dock wasn't always chaotic, but murders and fights could happen anytime. The factions down there had proper networks for bounties and other illegal activities, and all of them could happen in the open.

Instead, the cities offered some apparent safety. Murders mostly didn't happen in the open. The streets were full of ordinary citizens who did their best to avoid getting too deep into illegal businesses. Jenna and Khan could finally relax a bit, but that didn't make them stop.

The return to the city reestablished a good connection to the network, but Khan didn't see any message, and he took that as a good sign. Someone would definitely contact him if Rodney's letter became public, but that didn't happen.

A couple of cabs, a few elevators, and two crossings of the short-distance teleports brought Khan and Jenna back to the second asteroid. The strange sensation finally disappeared, but Khan didn't have the time to think about that. The hand-in-hand walk also attracted the usual attention, but the couple barely noticed it.

A third cab eventually brought the couple to the building owned by the Cobsend family. The afternoon had arrived by then, and some tension returned when Jenna and Khan approached the entrance. A potential mess was only a few steps away, and they walked toward it without showing any fear.

Crossing the entrance made Khan's sensitivity aware of multiple familiar presences. The couple soon entered the main hall, and a series of surprised faces turned in their direction. Bruce, Francis, Amanda, Monica, and Martha were sitting on couches, and their loud voices soon resounded in the area.

"Khan, you are back!" Bruce exclaimed while standing up.

"Khan!" Martha also exclaimed.

Monica opened her mouth to imitate her companions, but she quickly calmed down before voicing an elegant "welcome back". Needless to say, her eyes expressed different feelings that Khan understood far too well.

Gazes and expressions weren't the only clues that Khan could read. His ability in the Nele's arts had improved greatly, and his companions didn't know how to shield themselves from them. Their thoughts altered the synthetic mana and revealed their true feelings.

Bruce appeared slightly troubled, Martha was happy, and Monica shared that happiness, but some annoyance tainted it. As for the others, only Francis was interesting since he conveyed intense anger.

'Great, more problems,' Khan sighed in his mind while going straight to the point. "Where is Luke? I need to talk with him."

Mentioning Luke generated an unexpected reaction. No one answered, and they all sent the same influence to the synthetic mana. They were conflicted about something.

"Did something happen to Luke?" Khan asked.

"You see," Bruce began to say, but the elevator behind him suddenly opened and revealed two figures. Luke was one of them, but Khan didn't recognize the other. Still, he remained in awe of his power.

"Khan!" Luke shouted as soon as he noticed Khan. "I'm glad you are safe, and your timing is impeccable."

Luke and the middle-aged man at his side left the elevator, but the former took a few more steps forward before continuing with the presentations. "This is my uncle Raymond Cobsend. He landed on Milia 222 two days ago."

'Fourth-level warrior,' Khan thought as he fixed his eyes on Raymond.

Time seemed to stop in Khan's vision. One of the questions that had afflicted his mind since his recent discoveries found its answer. He felt almost sure that he was standing before one of the two unknown variables.

Chapter 393 Bold

Long strands of hair fell at the sides of a stern face, hiding ears and part of the neck. A bun kept the nape area uncovered, and two thick braids occupied the side of the head.

Raymond's hair shared Luke's distinctive grey color, and the same went for his brown eyes. Even his height was as remarkable as his nephew's. A lot about that appearance hinted at belonging to the same family, but some differences existed.

Raymond's facial features were sharper than Luke's, and he was also thinner. Still, his mid-grey suit and the black shirt underneath matched his size perfectly, granting him a smooth silhouette that expressed pure elegance.

A mere glance at Raymond was enough to convey his value. His expression, hairstyle, clothes, and demeanor created the picture of an important man, but Khan didn't stop at those superficial traits. He could see past them and gain insights into Raymond's actual character.

Fourth-level warriors typically had the power to affect all the synthetic mana in a room and more. Their presence was simply too heavy to prevent that outcome. Yet, Raymond barely left his mark in his surroundings, and Khan couldn't see any technique at work there.

The event was quite shocking. Most humans didn't know about the implications of their heavy presence, but Raymond avoided them anyway. He appeared in complete control of his mental state, and what Khan learnt partially confirmed that guess.

Khan couldn't study evident alterations, but something still seeped into the synthetic mana. His focus went there, and he immediately experienced some instinctive fear. Raymond's mental state resembled a bottomless and unreadable dark pit.

Human words couldn't describe that dark pit, and Khan didn't sense enough to try. Yet, his instinctive fear explained a lot and warned him about the potential danger standing mere meters from him.

Khan had always prided himself in his ability to read people, and the Nele's arts only improved that skill. That very experience told him that words and tricks wouldn't work against Raymond. The latter was leagues above him in political games and pretenses.

Raymond was similar to Rodney but had decades of experience and far more power than him. He was another example of a terrible enemy in that environment, so Khan moved to a defensive stand.

Khan let Jenna go and crossed his hands behind his back to perform a military salute. He had already shown some hesitation, so he sent stern coldness to the synthetic mana to stick to that act.

"It's an honor to meet you, sir!" Khan exclaimed in his most serious tone.

Raymond revealed a surprisingly gentle smile that was in complete opposition with what his mental state conveyed. Still, his performance was so perfect that even Khan wondered whether his sensitivity was tricking him.

"There is no need for such formalities," Raymond chuckled. "Lieutenant Khan, your achievements are well-known. I'm the one honored to meet you."

"Sir, I just did my job," Khan played it politely.

"Now, now," Raymond cheerfully scolded. "Humility is a commendable quality, but a young man like you should know when to brag, especially among friends."

"Sir, it would be disrespectful before a man of your caliber," Khan praised without abandoning his cold behavior.

"Stoic until the end," Raymond laughed. "I understand why Luke trusts you so much. You are the type of soldier who gets the job done no matter what."

Raymond moved his eyes on Jenna during the silence that followed, and Khan felt forced to speak again. "Sir, she is Jenna, a friend and a key ally in our current mission."

"And what mission would it be?" Raymond teased as his attention went back to Khan.

"I'm afraid I can't say, sir," Khan promptly responded.

"I'm one of the pillars of the Cobsend family," Raymond stated, and his smile abruptly transformed into a cold expression. "Are you implying that I can't question my nephew's team?"

"I'm sorry, sir," Khan uttered without showing the slightest trace of fear. "I report only to Luke."

A tense silence filled the hall, but Raymond quickly shattered it with his laugh. He nodded a few times and even clapped his hands before tapping Luke's shoulder and voicing his praises. "You know how to choose your friends. Your father will be happy to hear this."

Luke couldn't contain his smile. The matter seemed a great deal to him, but Khan and Jenna had completely opposite reactions. Khan saw Luke's respect toward Raymond as another ordeal to overcome while Jenna was busy containing her disgust.

As a Nele, Jenna didn't need to abide by social rules, especially when interacting with another species. Her detached behavior was more than expected, but meeting Raymond added more reasons to it.

Jenna wasn't as adept as Khan in spotting lies, but she had seen her fair share of ill-intentioned people. Raymond fit that description perfectly, even if she couldn't exactly point out why she thought that.

Luckily for the couple, Raymond didn't care about Khan's stern behavior and Jenna's lack of responses. His cheerful mood remained even after his interaction with Luke ended, and a series of polite goodbyes followed.

"I have some matters to handle," Raymond announced as he straightened his suit. "Lieutenant Khan, Miss Jenna, we'll have to continue this meeting another day."

"Safe travels, sir," Khan exclaimed while stepping on his right to clear the way, and Jenna promptly imitated him.

"You all keep up the good work," Raymond nodded as he walked past Khan.

"I'll come back soon," Luke quickly said as he followed after Raymond. In a few seconds, both men left the building and disappeared from everyone's view.

"Why is he here?" Khan wondered while his gaze remained on the entrance.

The relatively poor power of the team was the whole point of the mission. People would get suspicious if high-level and important warriors arrived on Milia 222, so Luke had handpicked an easily disguisable group of people for the investigation.

Those involved with the theft would obviously know what was going on, but the disguise could trick the rest of the asteroids. Luke could feign ignorance and pretend that everything was okay since his team didn't have any specialists or similar figures.

However, Raymond's arrival defeated that purpose. The man wasn't only an extremely important figure in the Cobsend family. His personal power would make entire crowds turn and escape.

Khan could link that event to plain stupidity, but Raymond had given him the opposite impression. Moreover, the man suited his theory perfectly. He could be one of the missing pieces of the puzzle, but only Luke could confirm those guesses.

"Khan, is something wrong?" Bruce called since Khan was still looking at the exit.

"No, no," Khan reassured, wearing a fake smile and turning toward his companions on the couches. "I was just surprised. He is a big shot, isn't he?"

"Indeed," Bruce sighed as he fell back on the couch. "His arrival was quite unexpected, but I'm sure Luke will explain everything soon."

"Wait, you have yet to talk with him?" Khan asked.

"Luke has been pretty busy since his uncle's arrival," Bruce explained. "Bureaucracy stuff mainly. The two of them have shown their faces only to leave the building."

"I see," Khan commented. "So, do you have other news? I've been away for quite some time."

"Do you think we spent the past month getting drunk?" Bruce joked.

"It sure looks like it," Khan pointed out.

"Come, have a drink," Monica joined the conversation. "Let's get you up to speed."

The table only had one free seat left, so Khan didn't immediately accept Monica's offer. Yet, Jenna left his side and walked toward Martha before anyone could call the waiters.

"Would you mind accompanying me to Lieutenant Khan's room?" Jenna asked while stretching her arm toward Martha.

The gesture surprised the group, and only Monica recovered quickly enough to look at Khan. He wanted to roll his eyes, but he ended up captivated by how Monica hid her amusement behind her drink.

"Sure," Martha voiced a confused reply as she took Jenna's hand and left the couch. Her questioning face pointed at Khan while she moved toward the elevator, but he reassured her with a nod and waited for the two to leave the hall.

An issue immediately appeared. Martha had left her seat, so Khan now had two options. He could choose the armchair and sit alone or join Monica on the couch.

Any reasonable man in Khan's position would choose the armchair, and even he was well aware of the best option. Francis' anger wasn't something he had to take lightly, and it didn't sound fair to give false hopes to Monica since he had yet to make up his mind.

However, Khan had gone through a strange day and had barely spent any time thinking about it. His growth in the Nele's arts had also brought changes to his mindset, putting him in a position where he decided to be selfish.

"I'm glad my tasks ended early," Monica teased when Khan dropped his backpack and sat at her side. "I would have missed this drink with you otherwise."

"Right, your tasks," Khan casually said while nodding at Bruce and pointing at the table. "How is our friend Awiza treating you?"

"Don't get me started!" Bruce snorted as he contacted a waiter through his phone. "She is always trying to renegotiate our deal. I swear. Every Orlats has serious problems."

"Did Luke deploy you too?" Khan wondered.

"No, I simply manage things," Bruce revealed. "Francis, Monica, and the others are in the field."

"Darrell, Isaac, and Claudia?" Khan asked.

"Still busy with their shifts," Monica explained. "They had a rough week."

"So, you actually did some work," Khan joked.

"We even achieved some results," Bruce pointed out.

"Such as?" Khan asked.

"We marked the buildings on Lower Level 1 used as warehouses," Bruce revealed.

"Wait, all of them?" Khan gasped.

"It was a joint effort," Monica continued. "The Orlats truly have countless connections. We might have gotten some buildings wrong, but we have a reliable layout."

"That's surprising," Khan admitted before smiling politely to the waiter who entered the hall and delivered a clean glass.

Khan remained silent until the waiter left the hall before resuming with his questions. "Do we know which ones are connected to the factory?"

"We isolated some promising options," Bruce stated as he pretended not to see Monica filling Khan's glass. "But you must understand that all of them might be innocent and completely unaware of our mission."

Khan's questioning face pushed Monica to explain even further. "The factory is isolated, but it still needs to purchase basic goods like food and water. It also has waste products that can't stay in the industrial district, so everything is quite complicated."

Khan nodded before taking a sip from the drink. It was safe to assume that no stranger got inside the factory, but that didn't apply to the industrial district. Even if it did, the area needed to import and export goods, which created a commercial array too complicated to study in that short time.

An investigation also sounded troublesome to accomplish. Most warehouses were bound to have illegal businesses, which limited the group's ability to spy on them. Monica and the others needed more time to gather better intel.

The news was surprisingly good. Khan could fuse the knowledge gathered in the dock with what his companions had learnt to add pieces to his puzzle. At that point, he would only lack the middle part of the operation, and closing on the culprits would become far easier.

Meanwhile, Khan rejoiced at the apparent absence of deeper problems. He had been in a hurry to catch up with Rodney, but his companions didn't mention him, and they wouldn't have forgotten such an important detail.

'He didn't come here,' Khan concluded. 'Where is he then?'

Raymond could be the perfect answer, but a high-profile figure like him couldn't venture into illegal businesses unnoticed. If Rodney wanted to share information with him, he had to resort to a middle-man, which probably was his boss.

Of course, most of that only existed in Khan's mind. He had confirmed Rodney's involvement with the alien chameleon's skin, but he didn't know if he had something to do with the theft. The same went for Raymond, even if his arrival sounded like a clue by itself.

Khan had noticed how Francis and Amanda had remained silent, but he didn't blame the latter. Amanda simply felt out of place in that important conversation. Instead, Francis' stance featured different reasons that Khan couldn't bother to address now.

'The third asteroid sounds unlikely,' Khan thought. 'Rodney won't go there since he is aware of my relationship with the Nele. It's either the fourth or the second asteroid unless I'm still missing something.'

"That's not fair, Lieutenant Khan," Monica teased since Khan was drinking in silence. "It's your turn to share information now."

Khan expected that question, but not from Monica. She knew about the dock, and the rest of the team probably shared her knowledge, but she was supposed to be on his side. She was aware that he couldn't speak freely.

"I might have found something," Khan played it vague while showing his fake smile, "But I can't say much without conferring with Luke first."

"You have been away for a month," Monica pressed on. "I'm sure you can give us something."

Khan wanted to frown, but he held back due to the many eyes on him. He didn't understand why Monica did that until she hid a pout behind her drink.

'Ooh,' Khan finally understood. 'She is pissed.'

"I really can't," Khan laughed, "Not until I talk to Luke."

"Maybe you are the one who slaked off," Monica guessed. "I wouldn't blame you. Milia 222 is an interesting place, and your company was peculiar."

Monica was only venting, but Khan wasn't the type to back down, and she couldn't match him in those topics. He would gladly accompany her if that's how she wanted to play.

"Miss Solodrey!" Khan called. "You couldn't possibly be jealous, could you?"

The reply was a bit disrespectful but acceptable among friends, especially since Monica had openly flirted with Khan multiple times. That interaction resembled a playful bickering rather than an actual fight, and Bruce even snickered during it.

Monica blushed a little, but her façade remained perfect. The synthetic mana betrayed her thoughts, but only Khan could sense that. Yet, someone on the table didn't like her intense look.

"Lieutenant Khan, I must agree with Monica," Francis joined the conversation. "We worked non-stop to push the investigation forward. We only want to confirm that you did the same."

Monica was playing around, but Francis had spoken out of spite. He probably also knew about the dock, which made him aware of the reason behind Khan's secrecy. His question only aimed to create trouble for him.

Bruce and Monica felt the need to intervene, but that wasn't their place. Getting in Francis' way would isolate him even further, adding fuel to his anger.

"I report only to Luke," Khan calmly repeated the same words used with Raymond. "I'm sure he'll set up a meeting where I can explain everything."

Francis wanted to add something, but Khan abruptly gulped down his drink and picked up his backpack before standing up. He was in no state to deal with such pettiness, so he opted to leave right away.

"I'm beat," Khan announced. "I hope you'll excuse me."

Khan didn't wait for his companions' answer, but Monica glared at Francis before standing up. Saying something would risk starting another petty conversation, so Khan remained silent while Monica entered the elevator with him and pressed one of its keys.

"I'm so sorry," Monica exclaimed as soon as the elevator moved. "I didn't think he would take it out on you."

"What's his problem anyway?" Khan cursed before shaking his head. "I can't bother with him now. I have bigger things to think about."

"I didn't want any of this," Monica added, and Khan finally looked at her. She appeared genuinely concerned, but he couldn't blame her.

"It's not your fault," Khan reassured.

"It might be," Monica whispered as the elevator opened. "I did eventually face him. It didn't end well."

"What?" Khan asked while following Monica out of the elevator. "What happened?"

"It wasn't my intention to escalate things," Monica explained as she started playing with her curls. "I began to refuse his drinks, thinking he wouldn't have the guts to talk about it, but I was wrong."

"Monica," Khan called since Monica kept walking forward without turning.

"Nothing serious happened," Monica reassured. "He just questioned me, and I spoke the truth. I used the mission as an excuse, but I think he blamed you anyway."

"Monica!" Khan called again, but he reached for Monica's elbow at that time.

Monica felt forced to turn, but she kept her face lowered. Her thoughts were obvious even without looking at the synthetic mana. She hated that her issues had gotten in Khan's way.

"I didn't want to cause trouble for you," Monica muttered.

"He would have found a reason to hate me anyway," Khan reassured.

"But then you sat next to me, and I recalled that you spent so much time with Jenna," Monica continued. "I wanted you to look only at me. I didn't expect Francis to use that against you."

"Hey," Khan said while reaching for Monica's chin to lift her face, "I told you how things are between Jenna and me."

Monica almost lost herself in Khan's serious face, but the situation reminded her of a specific event that filled her with shyness. She couldn't help but divert her gaze, and Khan smirked at that sight.

"Don't start already," Monica pouted. "I'm mad at you."

"Why would you be mad?" Khan teased.

"You know why!" Monica complained.

"Are you too shy to even say it?" Khan asked.

"The-," Monica stammered a bit. "You kissed me."

"I remember you kissing me too," Khan pointed out.

"That was different!" Monica almost shouted as she finally looked at Khan again.

"I barely knew where I was," Khan recalled. "You could have stopped me easily. I can't say the same for what you did."

"Shut up!" Monica blushed while leaving Khan and walking into the corridor.

Khan laughed, but a thought escaped his mouth when he noticed that something was off. "This isn't my floor."

"Stop speaking," Monica almost pleaded as she continued to walk. Khan had vaguely understood what was happening, so he followed her until they arrived in front of her room.

Monica unlocked the door and entered the room without saying anything. She didn't even turn as she strode forward until she reached the windows at the end of the place.

Khan hesitated a bit before crossing the entrance. The door closed behind him while he inspected the room. Additional mirrors and makeup filled a desk, and elegant sheets covered the bed. The place was quite girly and suited his idea of Monica.

Countless jokes and teases ran through Khan's mind, but he held back when he sensed how shy Monica had gotten. He couldn't see her face, but he knew that she was blushing to no end.

Khan looked around for a few more seconds before sitting on the bed and crossing his legs. The gesture finally attracted Monica's attention, even if her reasons made Khan laugh.

"Don't put your shoes there!" Monica scolded.

"I gave you my bed when you were dead drunk," Khan laughed.

"That was your bed," Monica complained. "Mine has different rules."

"Come on," Khan sneered as he threw his backpack at his side and lay down. "Let me rest a bit."

"Get out of my room already!" Monica shouted.

"You brought me here," Khan laughed again.

"I didn't-!" Monica was about to shout again, but she suddenly went silent. Her shyness overcame her anger when she looked at Khan's happy face, and strange thoughts seeped into her mind.

Khan was probably as confused as Monica, even if his reasons were far different. Too much had happened that day. He wanted to rest and maybe drink a little among people who didn't share his complicated life, but Francis had prevented that.

Thoughts kept Khan's mind busy until he sensed something odd. Monica slowly approached the bed and took a deep breath before sitting on his lap.

Khan lifted his head to show his frown. Monica was wearing one of her elegant skirts, but she had still spread her legs to sit on him. Her stance clearly aimed to seduce Khan, and she clung herself to her clothes to suppress her embarrassment.

"What are you doing?" Khan whispered as he straightened his back and tried to reach for Monica's chin. Still, she dodged his hands and kept her face lowered.

"Are you drunk?" Khan wondered.

"I'm not!" Monica complained while lifting her face before instantly lowering it again.

"Monica," Khan called.

"Give me a few seconds," Monica requested in a cute tone. "Now I regret drinking so little."

Khan complied. He waited until Monica calmed down and mustered the courage to lift her face. Her timid eyes fell on Khan and wavered many times, but she always brought them back on him.

"May I have an explanation now?" Khan smirked.

"I didn't want you to return to Jenna so soon," Monica whispered.

"That explains the room," Khan said, "Not this."

"This is me being bold," Monica explained. "Is it so bad?"

Monica was truly doing her best, and Khan could see her effort. A sigh left his mouth as he reached for her waist. Monica gasped when Khan pulled her closer, and her hands left her skirt to hold his shoulders.

"You said that we would talk once you came back," Monica mentioned in her timid tone. "You are back now."

"Did you plan this while I was away?" Khan wondered.

"I didn't think it through," Monica revealed. "I just thought that you would leave without saying anything if I didn't do something."

"Monica," Khan whispered before lowering his gaze. He could think of many ways to get out of that situation, but that sounded unfair. Monica deserved an honest answer.

"I didn't have much time to think about you," Khan admitted while bringing his gaze back to Monica. "It was mess after mess down there."

Monica remained silent, but her resolve wavered. She could understand where that speech was going. Yet, she steeled herself and decided to wait until Khan was done.

"My problems have problems," Khan continued. "I can't add you to my already messy life."

"Am I a problem?" Monica wondered.

"Don't be stupid," Khan stated. "Dating you would be difficult, especially for someone with my background. Imagine adding my problems to that. It's too much for me."

"Are you using my political baggage as an excuse?" Monica asked. "You can just reject me, you know?"

"That's not what I meant," Khan replied.

"And what did you mean?" Monica questioned. "Have the guts to tell me if you don't like me."

Khan felt slightly annoyed by that answer, but he remained calm and honest. "I do like you. It's just stupid to add more problems to my life."

"And here I thought you would consider me," Monica scoffed. "Instead, you have only taken my family into account."

"Look, what do you want me to say?" Khan asked while showing some of his annoyance. "I have countless problems that I can't fix, and they only increase as time passes. Becoming the target of not one but two powerful families isn't exactly the smart course of action."

"I really hoped you wouldn't care," Monica commented, "But fear got to you in the end."

"Are you insulting me now?" Khan uttered. "I get that you had it hard, but so did I. Yet, my life is on the line. You could destroy the Global Army, and your family would still make everything disappear."

Monica wanted to respond, but she ended up diverting her gaze. She was angry, but not at Khan. He was there, so she had vented a little, but her family was the source of her current feelings. She couldn't accept that her status was getting in the way of one of the few things she had desired in her life.

Khan had planned not to lose his cool, but the conversation had taken a different path. His mental state wasn't even great, so he had vented a bit. Truth be told, he wasn't happy about that conclusion either.

Then, new shades joined the symphony. Something had changed, and Khan found the source of that event in Monica. The latter turned to face Khan, but her head remained lowered as she muttered a few words. "Let's make this simple then."

"Monica?" Khan questioned before noticing how Monica left his shoulders to wrap her arms around his neck.

"We are not dating," Monica said, and her warm breath blew on Khan's mouth when she approached his face.

"That's not what you want," Khan whispered.

"Don't think about that," Monica timidly stated. "Keep it simple."

Khan could avoid what was about to come, but he didn't. He kept it simple and followed his desires without thinking about potential and obvious problems.

Monica used all her courage to lift her head and reach for Khan's mouth, and the latter helped her when only a few centimeters separated their lips. Khan gave one slight pull, and the two fell into a kiss.

Chapter 394 Idealist

Moments of pure relaxation had escaped Khan's life for many years. The Slums couldn't provide them, Ylaco's training camp didn't either, and everything past that had been a complete mess which had left him in a constant tense state.

Liiza had been the only true exception but experiencing that happiness had ended up cursing Khan. Reebfell should have given him peace, but he had never fully accepted it since he had always known that his departure was set in stone.

Jenna could come close to Liiza, but her relationship with Khan was complicated. He could completely relax with her, but he also had to put clear limits on his behavior. They both had.

However, when everything went away and the countless problems of the universe stopped shouting, Khan could see himself as an ordinary man. A man who happened to like a woman.

That perspective was a complete lie, but it offered unbound freedom. Khan's many problems still existed, but he could stop thinking about them while those timid lips rested on his mouth. The room had turned into a safe space, and he didn't want to leave it.

Of course, Khan couldn't simply stop thinking. He wasn't built like that. Explanations for that event formed in no time, but he left them in the back of his mind. He didn't want his problems to return just yet.

Monica slightly lifted her head to study Khan's reaction. She had spent all her courage, so she waited for Khan to do something. Her heart was in his hands, and he could shatter it with a single word.

Khan didn't speak. His hands left Monica's waist to run on her back and pull her again. The two fell into another kiss, and Monica couldn't contain her smile. The previous second had been terribly tense for her, but everything was fine now.

The second kiss lasted longer and allowed Monica to relax a bit. She gradually grew used to that situation, which made her reactions more honest. She even voiced a cute whimper when a tongue slipped inside her mouth.

Everything was cute, even romantic, but Khan had been beyond that for a few years. Kissing Monica felt nice, incredibly nice even, but he wanted more, and holding back would defeat the whole purpose of that safe space.

Khan rubbed his fingers on Monica's back before returning to her waist and reaching for the edges of her tight turtleneck sweater. His hands soon went under it to caress her bare skin, and he kept them there to wait for her to get used to them.

Monica had tensed up under that direct touch, but that reaction lasted only a few seconds. She soon relaxed again and immersed herself deeper into the kiss.

Khan saw that as the chance to move a bit forward. His hands crawled across Monica's back until they reached her bra. Finding the hook wasn't a problem, but Monica's arms abruptly left his neck and grabbed his shoulders to separate herself from the kiss.

"Wait!" Monica panicked before speaking again in a pleading tone. "Wait."

"Too much?" Khan asked, and Monica eventually nodded.

"I'm new to all of this," Monica explained as her gaze fell on Khan's chest. "I don't want to move too fast."

Monica was an open book to Khan. Her honest reactions and thoughts created a picture that was easy to read for someone like him. She was a bit scared, but not of him. She wasn't even thinking about her family. That simply was her first intimate experience, and she wasn't ready to go all the way.

A different type of panic replaced the previous. Monica shot a glance at Khan only to lower her eyes again. She didn't want to mess things up, but the same went for forcing herself.

"You truly are shy," Khan commented.

"I told you I'm difficult," Monica pointed out.

Khan ended up chuckling. Monica could go from utter shy to bold in a mere second. Her mood seemed impossible to predict, and Khan found himself liking that.

"What?" Monica complained.

"I found something else to tease you about," Khan smirked, fully expecting a loud complaint. Still, Monica surprised him.

"Don't make fun of me while we are like this," Monica whispered while lifting her head to match Khan's gaze.

Khan was ready to voice one of his many jokes, but his mind went blank. He ignored the bra and pulled Monica to kiss her again. She complied, and her hands left his shoulders to fondle his short hair.

"You cut it too short," Monica scolded when the kiss ended.

"I didn't have a choice," Khan revealed as he made their noses touch. "I had to cut away the burnt roots."

"Burnt?!" Monica exclaimed while retreating a bit to see the entirety of Khan's face.

"What can I say?" Khan laughed. "I faced some problems in the last month."

"How did you even burn your hair?" Monica asked.

"I got hit by a spell," Khan explained. "Then I proceeded to jump on it. That probably didn't help."

"Wha-?" Monica gasped. "What did you even do down there?"

"I'd rather not talk about it now," Khan stated. "I'm kind of in a different mood."

Monica recalled her current situation, and she couldn't help but panic a bit. Her position was so lewd, and she even noticed something new in Khan's groin area. Also, his hands were still under her sweater, which didn't help her mental state.

"That's enough for today," Monica announced while trying to push Khan away.

Monica wasn't putting any strength into her push, so Khan laughed and slipped one hand out of the sweater to reach for her cheek.

"Come here," Khan said in a serious tone, and Monica melted. The two kissed again, and Khan moved to her neck once their lips separated.

Monica seemed to like the kisses sneaking under the turtleneck. She nestled in Khan's hand until her common sense returned and made her push herself away for real.

"This is way too dangerous," Monica exclaimed. "You need to leave."

"We were just getting to the fun part," Khan teased.

"Fun?!" Monica raised her voice before jumping off Khan's lap and leaving the bed. "You definitely need to leave."

"But this bed is so comfortable," Khan complained, "And you are so soft."

Monica stuttered but didn't get fooled. She grabbed Khan's right arm and pulled him up before pushing him toward the door. He could oppose that, but it was funnier to let Monica get all worked up.

"Not even a goodbye kiss?" Khan laughed as the entrance drew near.

"Shut up!" Monica shouted as she opened the door and pushed Khan past it.

"I had a bag," Khan reminded while the door closed.

Only a second had to pass for the door to open again and the backpack to fly out. Khan grabbed it, and the entrance closed in that instant. Everything had ended far too soon, but he found it hard to wipe his smirk from his face.

'She has quite a temper,' Khan snickered in his mind. 'How fun.'

Leaving the room made the problems return. Khan was outside the safe space, so thoughts started to assault his mind. Sorting them turned out to be challenging since his mood didn't cooperate, but he eventually reached a satisfying result.

How did Monica manage to create that safe space? That was Khan's main question. His relationships after Liiza had never been able to isolate him from the outside world, and the matter didn't only involve temporary pleasure. He had tried that with Delia, which had felt completely different.

Khan could find quite a few explanations, but only one of them sounded reasonable. Maybe, just maybe, he had finally moved on. Maybe, just maybe, he was ready to give the entirety of himself again.

As for why, Khan blamed Jenna. She had pushed him toward finding himself and striving for something he truly desired. Her words alone couldn't accomplish that change in such a short time, but the Nele's arts had accelerated the process.

Khan's questions obviously didn't stop there. He couldn't take Monica's status lightly, and the two had barely talked about their situation. Khan didn't even know how he was supposed to act the next time they met. Yet, he looked forward to it.

'Is this how normal people behave?' Khan wondered as he strolled through the corridor. 'Doing what they want without caring about consequences?'

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Khan recalled the word heard during the fight against the third-level warrior. His mana wanted him to flow, and that probably didn't only apply to external influences. Maybe he had to follow his desires without locking them up behind paranoia and worries.

'You would want me to be happy, wouldn't you?' Khan sighed. 'You would want me to try, wouldn't you?'

Khan entered the elevator while his mental speech continued. 'Fine. I'll really try. I won't care if I end up planting countless flowers or creating bloody rivers.'

A tiny but significant change happened in Khan's mind, but he remained unaware of that event. That wasn't something he could sense. It was akin to a new posture developed after fixing an annoying injury. Some would simply call it growth.

A familiar presence touched Khan's senses before he reached his destination. Then, the entrance opened, and Bruce's figure unfolded in his view. The man was smoking a cigarette on Khan's floor, and his reasons appeared obvious. He was waiting for him.

"I was too late," Bruce sighed, blowing smoke out of his mouth. The grey gas didn't spread through the corridor. Instead, it moved toward the ceiling, where small openings sucked it away.

Bruce's timing was terrible. Khan was brimming with resolve and coldness, and his arrival hinted at his previous actions. He had left with Monica, but he had just reached his floor. Anyone could assume that he had been with her until then.

"Easy, soldier," Bruce joked while raising his hands. "I come in peace. I honestly thought you were in your room."

"What are you doing waiting here?" Khan asked. "You could have called."

"I wanted to give you some well-deserved rest," Bruce explained. "I can only imagine what you have been through in the dock."

Khan didn't falter at the mention of the dock, and his reply came swiftly. "Did you plan on waiting here all day?"

"Only a few hours," Bruce revealed. "Amanda would bug me if she found me in my room."

Khan felt inclined to believe Bruce. The building had no cameras, so Bruce couldn't have possibly known about Khan and Monica before that fortuitous meeting. Still, hesitation remained.

Luke had vouched for the Eerly family, but Khan's findings had put a target on the Cobsend family. Luke's reliability was more than questionable, so the same went for Bruce.

However, Bruce had just caught Khan red-handed, and his stance was unclear. It would only benefit Khan to have a talk and understand where his companion stood.

"What do you say about a drink?" Bruce asked before Khan could suggest anything. "I'll even pull out a nice bottle saved for special occasions."

Khan remained silent for a few seconds before accepting. "Lead the way."

Bruce crossed Khan and used one of the specific drawers inside the elevator to throw away his cigarette. Khan soon followed him, and the lift rose until the very last floor.

The corridor was a bit different there. It was larger and featured fewer rooms. Bruce walked directly toward one of them, and a beautiful meeting area unfolded once its entrance opened. The place was at the building's corner, so windows covered two of its walls and granted a fantastic view over Lower Level 1.

A long interactive table and multiple chairs stood at the center of the room. Some furniture occupied the metal walls, and Bruce opened one cabinet to take out a bottle.

Bruce drew two glasses from another cabinet before approaching the table and pouring the booze. Khan waited until the process was over to take his seat. The two men sat at the same edge, so only a meter divided them.

"I wanted to say something before you left," Bruce began to speak after taking a sip from his drink, "But I decided to stay silent. I didn't think you would have time for Monica between Jenna and the dock."

Khan would typically feign ignorance before moving to the main topic, but he was in no mood for games. "Something about what?"

"Francis," Bruce revealed. "It's never wise to go against petty figures who hold a stupid amount of influence and money."

"And how exactly am I going against him?" Khan wondered.

"Come on," Bruce said. "You two have flirted since landing on Milia 222. The dinner made things worse, and I'm not even mentioning what happened today."

"I wonder," Khan spoke. "What would you have done in my place? Being rude and endangering my relationship with the Solodrey family? Francis would have hated me even in that case."

"You know your way with words," Bruce praised. "You could have found a path that didn't put a target on your head."

"So, I'm a target now," Khan chuckled.

"You did this to yourself when you went out of your way to steal that damned bottle," Bruce scolded.

"Is my life worth less than booze?" Khan asked.

"As if you did that for the booze," Bruce scoffed. "I admit you fooled me back then, but everything became clear once Monica started refusing Francis' drinks."

"You are quite the observer," Khan mocked.

"That's my job," Bruce stated. "I let Luke handle the talks, but I'm also savvy in the political fields. Don't forget that."

"Forget," Khan repeated before emptying his drink. "I remember everything quite well. I recall how I saved everyone's asses on Istrone, and I definitely didn't forget how you awakened Martha just to get to me."

"I wasn't trying to belittle you," Bruce declared.

"What exactly were you trying to do?" Khan asked. "That Francis guy already hates me. I can't do anything about him now, which leaves me with only one question."

"Which is?" Bruce questioned.

"Will you side with him or me?" Khan asked, and his coldness tainted the synthetic mana to intensify the seriousness of his question.

Bruce revealed his political skills by remaining calm under that threat. He was scared, but he hid that feeling truly well. Still, he drew a cigarette from his pocket and lit it with his forefinger before answering.

"I can't side with you openly," Bruce calmly stated. "You are only one soldier, while Francis can almost speak for an entire family. Yet, I can keep an eye on him and warn you if something is wrong."

"How do I know you won't do the same for him?" Khan questioned.

"There are no reasonable ways to prove my stance," Bruce uttered. "Though I do have a line that might reassure you."

"I can't wait to hear it," Khan played along.

"You are only one soldier," Bruce repeated, "But that won't always be the truth, am I right?"

Khan stared deep into Bruce's dark eyes to search for any clue that could reveal his real intentions. The synthetic mana around him helped in the inspection, but Khan couldn't find anything out of the ordinary.

Bruce seemed to have spoken the truth, but Khan couldn't be too happy about it. The statement put Bruce on his side, but not as a friend. He was a political ally interested in Khan's future and nothing more.

Khan eventually moved his attention to the bottle and grabbed it to refill his drink. Bruce took that as an acceptance of his stance, and he wasn't wrong. Khan even recalled his coldness since that part of the meeting was over.

"Are you ready to tell me about the dock now?" Bruce snickered when Khan handed him the bottle.

"That intel is only for Luke," Khan explained. "Speaking about him, what's the matter with his uncle? Isn't our entire mission at risk now?"

"I told you," Bruce reminded. "Luke has yet to say anything."

"Luke trusts you more than anyone on Milia 222," Khan pointed out. "I know that you have something for me."

"You are overestimating me," Bruce exclaimed. "It's not about Luke and me. Mister Raymond is beyond my reach. Even if Luke knew something, he might be unable to say anything."

"I'm only worried about the mission," Khan responded. "I've already spilled blood for this investigation. Having bad intel might kill me."

"You shouldn't worry about that," Bruce reassured. "From what I've heard, Mister Raymond is an idealist. Money is the least of his concerns. He probably doesn't care about the factory at all."

Chapter 395 Families

'An idealist?' Khan wondered. 'That sounds completely wrong.'

Bruce's description of Raymond Cobsend didn't fit what Khan had sensed during their meeting. Someone with such a deep and dark mind couldn't possibly have good intentions unless everything about him was a façade.

"Idealist?" Khan felt the need to investigate. "What do you even mean by that?"

"The man is quite famous," Bruce revealed. "He is a known philanthropist and a certified genius, but all of this is no secret. You only need to type his name on the network to be overwhelmed by news and biographies."

Khan took a mental note without picking up his phone. The news was truly odd and required deeper investigations, but showing hesitation would only give clues to Bruce.

"Is that it?" Khan asked while taking care of his drink. "Do you really have nothing for me?"

"I know Mister Raymond doesn't sleep with us," Bruce added. "He is using another building, but that's not a secret either."

Finding Raymond's building without questioning Luke and the others wouldn't be a problem, so Khan dropped the topic. The conversation seemed to reach its conclusion, but both Khan and Bruce remained at the table and drank in silence.

"So," Bruce broke the silence once he grabbed the bottle to refill both drinks, "How was the dock?"

Khan waited until his glass was full before looking at Bruce and lowering his gaze again. He wouldn't give details, but he knew a few words that could describe his experience down there. "It's an interesting mess."

"I can't wait to hear your stories," Bruce announced. "I'm sure you have some."

Khan voiced a quiet chuckle but fell silent right after. He had gone through quite a bit inside the dock, but some of his stories would never reach the surface.

"What do you know about the fourth asteroid?" Khan casually asked. "I bet it has more secrets."

"I wouldn't know," Bruce replied. "You'd have to be a local to learn every custom and hidden area."

Khan nodded, even if a sigh resounded in his mind. Jenna couldn't sense anything odd on the fourth asteroid, so the strange feeling experienced there was definitely beyond ordinary citizens. The fact that Bruce couldn't add anything to the topic was more than expected.

Silence fell again. Khan had no intention of prolonging that conversation by coming up with random topics, but the booze was good, and he had a lot on his mind. Ignoring Bruce gave him the chance to review his situation in the company of a nice drink. Yet, Bruce had more to say.

"Do you want to talk about today?" Bruce asked when he threw his cigarette in one of the table's drawers. "I hope you don't see that as another interesting mess."

Khan didn't reply. He could feign ignorance or deny any claim. He could even come up with reasonable excuses, but his mood made him keep his mouth shut.

"The social implications can be massive," Bruce continued in front of Khan's silence. "A single wealthy family is too much to handle for anyone without a similar background. You might have to deal with many of them. She has many powerful suitors."

Khan's silence continued. He had already thought about similar problems, so Bruce's words didn't add anything new.

"Khan, I have nothing but respect for you," Bruce added. "You are the first ally I'd choose for any dangerous mission, but we are talking about a political battlefield here. Lies and a few smiles won't work there."

Khan knew all of that, but his mouth opened only when he had to drink. He remained silent even when he refilled his glass. He appeared unable to hear Bruce's warnings.

"Dammit Khan!" Bruce lost his cool for the first time. "Do you think so little of the wealthy families? Monica's father can get you killed for simply looking at her!"

"I don't get it," Khan finally spoke. "I thought we were past this topic."

"This isn't a topic I can just drop," Bruce explained.

"Talk about useful things then," Khan casually replied. "Your warnings don't help me."

"They might talk some sense into you," Bruce stated.

"I probably lost that on Nitis," Khan sighed as he lifted his legs to place them on the table. "Though you made me think. How high should I climb to earn the respect of a wealthy family?"

"You aren't being serious now," Bruce cursed. "You barely know her."

"I want to know when I can consider myself safe from the families," Khan requested. "What do I need to do to stop worrying about them?"

Bruce calmed down when he heard that. Khan wasn't talking about Monica. His interest was more general and involved topics that only someone with the right background could explain.

"The families," Bruce repeated. "You know how Earth's government works, right? The Global Army and the various families are deeply connected, but the latter can be more influential and powerful in many ways."

"I know about the representatives and diplomats," Khan confirmed.

"Perfect," Bruce exclaimed. "You only need to care about your rank inside the Global Army, but that doesn't apply to the families. Background, personal wealth, and assets are more important for them."

"Are you telling me that I'll never be safe?" Khan asked.

"It's more complicated than that," Bruce responded. "The families can't straight up put someone to death. Confirmed criminals are an exception, but bribes remain more common. They can ruin careers or send you into dangerous missions as long as you don't have allies on the inside."

"I bet the price changes depending on the achievements and rank," Khan guessed.

"Precisely," Bruce announced, "But there are exceptions. The noble families and those with enough money or connections can develop intricate ploys or fabricate false evidence. Anyone would have a hard time escaping that."

"Even generals?" Khan wondered.

"Khan, a general probably has more connections than me," Bruce laughed. "That's the whole point of the political game."

"But I am at a disadvantage there," Khan pointed out.

"The lack of background is a big issue," Bruce agreed, "But it doesn't doom you. Many families in decline or without worthy descendants would kill to have you."

"Would they buy me off just to carry their name?" Khan wondered.

"That's uncommon," Bruce revealed. "They usually rely on political marriages."

"I see," Khan commented. His understanding of the political field expanded when he absorbed those words. Bruce made perfect sense, and Khan had even seen a similar situation with Martha's family.

"You shouldn't think about marriage so early," Bruce continued. "I'm sure you'll get offers soon, but you should refuse them. If you make it to captain, some families might put you in charge of great places."

"What about colonel?" Khan wondered since he recalled a distant conversation with Lieutenant Dyester.

"They'd probably offer you a minor space station for that," Bruce laughed. "You might even end up controlling the entire family after a while."

The speech was quite simple to understand. A higher personal value would grant better benefits after joining a family, but Bruce failed to address alternative paths. Khan could only guess that they didn't exist.

'Marriage,' Khan scoffed in his mind. 'I need to stay away from Earth.'

"I hope this conversation gave you a better perspective," Bruce stated.

"It did," Khan uttered before emptying his glass and placing it on the table. "I think we don't have anything else to say."

"You don't need to be so cold," Bruce said.

"I do," Khan corrected as his legs left the table and reached the floor to make him stand up. "That's what you just taught me."

"I wasn't talking about Luke or me," Bruce explained. "Come on now. You know you can trust us."

"I can trust your interest in my value as a soldier," Khan spoke openly.

"That's part of our different statuses," Bruce tried to justify. "It doesn't prevent us from being friends."

"Using Martha against me does," Khan reminded. "You can speak about friendship once you make up for that."

"Luke granted your every wish," Bruce declared. "What else do you want? Name it, and I'll make you have it."

Khan began to leave without giving a proper answer, but something eventually popped into his mind and made him turn. "I'll trust you more if you truly help me with Francis."

Bruce and Khan exchanged a long gaze, and the former ended up nodding. Truth be told, Bruce understood Khan's perspective, but his hands were tied. He was also a young man doing his best with what he had.

"Take the bottle with you," Bruce said as he pulled another cigarette from his pocket. "This is the best I can do for now."

Khan wouldn't refuse free booze, especially of that quality, so he approached the table. Bruce ignored the process and turned toward the windows. His gaze wandered among the beautiful scenery, but he glanced at his glass when something poured inside it.

Bruce couldn't help but look at Khan while he refilled his glass. He didn't expect that kind gesture, and his expression gained meaningful tones.

"We are all prisoners of our duties," Bruce stated. "My cage simply looks better."

"I know," Khan nodded. "I hope you understand I'm only looking out for myself."

"Don't worry about that," Bruce reassured. "You are right, but my position requires a certain behavior."

"I don't envy you," Khan joked.

"And don't worry about the other thing either," Bruce continued. "I won't tell anyone about you and Monica. Just be smart about it."

"I never said I was with Monica," Khan smirked, and Bruce ended up smiling too.

Both men knew that the meeting was over. Khan turned and left the room while carrying the bottle with him. Instead, Bruce turned once again toward the windows to smoke and think in silence.

Khan took a sip from the bottle as soon as the door behind him closed. Picking up his phone came next, and the network opened with a few taps on its screen.

Another sip matched the arrival inside the elevator. Khan pressed the key connected to his floor without moving his eyes from the phone. He had typed Raymond's name on the network, and an insane number of articles had filled his vision.

'How many degrees does he even have?' Khan shouted in his mind when he found a summary.

The list of Raymond's accomplishments and studies seemed endless. The man had four different degrees connected to the mana's influence. Some were quite broad, at least according to their names, while others involved specific fields.

The accomplishments were no small thing either. Apparently, Raymond was behind the invention of many modern drugs that relied on mana to have better effects. He had also helped improve the safety of the infusions, and the list didn't stop there.

Moreover, the network stated that Raymond gave away most of his studies for free. He donated them to the Global Army even if their potential value was exorbitant. Khan could also find articles about attrition inside the Cobsend family due to Raymond's selfless behavior.

Raymond truly suited the description of a genius with no interest in money, but Khan found something odd. Some of Raymond's degrees involved the alteration of organic tissues with mana. He even had many studies connected to the topic, and the reinforced fabric fell perfectly in that field.

'Did Bruce lie to me?' Khan wondered, but he quickly disregarded that thought. He would have sensed an attempt to trick him, and it was possible that Bruce simply didn't know much.

Still, the matter remained suspicious. Raymond sounded like an expert that would suit the factory's experiment perfectly. The Cobsend family couldn't have ignored a genius of that caliber, especially since he was among its members.

'Idealist,' Khan recalled. 'Maybe he didn't like the financial purpose of the reinforced fabric.'

Khan could find other explanations. Raymond was a famous figure, so he couldn't be on Milia 222 for too long. His arrival in the industrial district would also tell everyone that the Cobsend family had an important project there.

The internal conflicts could also explain that oddity. Luke's father might have decided to keep Raymond in the dark on purpose due to his tendency to give away valuable stuff.

Yet, Raymond was bound to have a stupid amount of power in his hands. Khan didn't believe that a similar figure could remain in the dark for too long. His arrival on Milia 222 seemed to confirm that, which only added confusion to Khan's mind.

Khan was so immersed in his thoughts that he almost walked past his room. He had to thank the familiar auras inside it for the reminder, but they weren't enough to suppress the surprise caused by the scene that welcomed him.

Khan found Jenna and Martha on his bed. Martha had her eyes closed while her hands rested on Jenna's palms. She was immersed in a meditative state meant to focus the entirety of her thoughts on her mana.

Jenna wore a smile as soon as she sensed Khan, but her face showed a curious expression when he entered her vision. She could almost feel that something had changed, even if she couldn't explain what.

Khan rolled his eyes under that intense inspection. He would have to tell Jenna about Monica, and he didn't look forward to her comments. Still, he didn't want to disturb Martha, so he sat beside the wall and continued to drink silently.

Long minutes passed in which Jenna never diverted her attention from Khan. She could almost smell something, and her eyes eventually lit up. She found an answer, and Khan could only pretend not to notice her exploding curiosity.

Martha eventually took a deep breath and opened her eyes. A satisfied expression unfolded on her face before freezing when she noticed Khan.

"You are back!" Martha almost shouted.

"Did Jenna teach you her arts?" Khan laughed.

"Only some training drills," Jenna responded. "We spent most of the time talking about you."

"Jenna!" Martha scolded.

"What is it?" Jenna asked. "I tell him everything anyway."

"Everything?" Martha wondered.

"Are you thinking about something specific?" Jenna teased, and Martha blushed to no end.

"I have something to do," Martha hurriedly said while leaving the bed. "I'm happy that you two are back, but I must leave now."

"Don't let Jenna trick you," Khan chuckled as he stood up to reach the bed. "She has grown pettier in the last month."

Jenna instinctively moved to make room for Khan and sit on his lap. She showed no shame when she snuggled closer and laid her head on his shoulder. A giggle even left her mouth when Khan wrapped his arms around her.

Martha could barely bear looking at the scene. It was way too intimate for her standards, and a tinge of jealousy still existed in her mind. Yet, she had already left the bed, so approaching the entrance was the only reasonable action.

"Martha, wait a moment," Khan called before Martha could turn. "I need to tell you what happened in the past month."

"Did you find something?" Martha asked, revealing her interest in the matter.

"I found multiple things," Khan exclaimed while letting Jenna go to remove the backpack from his back and pull out the alien chameleon's skin. "You need to listen to this."

A long explanation began, and Martha never interrupted it. Khan told her about Rodney and the necessity of a traitor inside the Cobsend family without withholding his personal hypotheses. Both news obviously stunned her, and questions followed once the speech ended.

"Do you really think Raymond came here because of his connection to the factory?" Martha asked.

"It would make sense," Khan replied. "I still can't see the bigger picture, but everything else seems to point in that direction."

"A spy inside the Cobsend family," Martha commented. "How do we even convince Luke of something like that?"

"Leave that to me," Khan reassured. "I plan to keep that intel for myself until I find more clues anyway. Rodney is my priority now."

"The descendant of the Semmut family," Martha sighed. "To think that you would meet again under such circumstances."

"I should have killed him when I had the chance," Khan cursed as he lay down. Jenna took his head and placed it on her lap, but her thoughts couldn't focus on him. She was also set on killing Rodney.

Martha didn't know what to say. She had seen that part of Khan in Milia 222's prison, but she had yet to grow used to it. He was casually talking about murdering a fellow human, and it even sounded normal to him.

"Tell me if I can do anything," Martha eventually decided to say. "I should be able to help with Rodney too."

The changes in Martha's mindset didn't escape Khan and Jenna's senses. They had noticed her sadness, so they appreciated her resolve even more. However, they also knew what she truly wanted.

"She is so cute," Jenna exclaimed. "She should sleep with us."

"You are a pervert," Khan sighed before glaring at Jenna. "And don't add anything else."

"I should really go," Martha managed to say among her blushing.

"Martha, there is nothing wrong in belonging to a different world," Khan announced when Martha turned. "You should treasure your ability to feel disgusted about some stuff."

"You should too," Martha stated as she approached the door and left the room.

Only a second had to pass from the closing of the door for Jenna to voice a comment. "[She is way too cute. I'll make her stay for the night the next time]."

"[I'm glad that you are spending time together]," Khan revealed as he adjusted his position on Jenna's lap. "[I can't do too much for her at this point. She needs a friend without complications]."

"[Did you forget that I'm an alien for her]?" Jenna joked.

"[She doesn't mind]," Khan laughed. "[You wouldn't like her so much if she did]."

Jenna liked how deeply Khan knew her, but she couldn't let him win that round. Moreover, she had yet to question him about the sensation perceived earlier.

"[What are you doing]?" Khan asked, but his head landed on the bed by the time his question ended. Jenna sat on his chest, and she grabbed his arms to immobilize him.

"[You have something to tell me]," Jenna uttered.

"[Do I]?" Khan teased.

"[I can feel it]," Jenna nodded. "[My Khan has become more attractive]."

"[Your Khan is about to make you very jealous]," Khan responded.

"[You need to tell me everything]!" Jenna declared in an excited tone. "[I want to know every detail]."

"[Don't you want to bathe first]?" Khan asked since Jenna had yet to remove the spray.

Jenna and Khan had gone through similar interactions countless times in the last period. They had become so used to each other that Jenna couldn't help but notice a slight increase in Khan's resolve.

"[What is it]?" Khan questioned since Jenna let go of his arms to place a hand on his chest.

"[You sound a bit different]," Jenna explained. "[No. This is you, just more of you]."

"[I didn't do anything special]," Khan revealed.

"[And yet something changed]," Jenna pressed on. "[How do you feel? Lighter, heavier, happier, sadder]?"

Jenna was concerned, so Khan took her question seriously. He closed his eyes and immersed himself in his thoughts to think about the recent events. As he reviewed his situation, problems piled on, and an urge eventually became clear.

"[I feel like smashing anything on my path]," Khan admitted while opening his eyes and finding Jenna's warm smile.

"[Chaos yearns for freedom]," Jenna commented.

A meaningful silence fell in the room. The two didn't need to add words to explain what they thought, but the buzzing noise of Khan's phone distracted them.

Khan picked up his phone, and Jenna jumped off him to check what was happening. An excited cry left her mouth when she read who had contacted him, and her enthusiasm only intensified when she read the message.

'Do you hate me already?' Monica said through the message.

'When can I see you again?' Khan promptly responded.

'I'm sure Luke will summon everyone once he returns,' Monica said.

'I can't pick up from where we left off in public. Unless you like that,' Khan texted.

"[You never say this stuff to me]," Jenna complained while waiting for Monica's reply.

"[Because I know the answer already]," Khan joked, but his phone buzzed again, and the two's attention returned to the screen.

'Early morning should be safe,' Monica replied.

Khan smirked in satisfaction, and his fingers moved to plan the next date, but Jenna grabbed his hands before he could complete the message.

"[Bath first]," Jenna ordered, and Khan complied, even if he managed to send one last message before entering the bathroom. Jenna obviously noticed that, so the shower ended up lasting far longer than usual.

Chapter 396 Connections

Khan left wet footprints on the floor when he left the bathroom. Drops ran down his body, and drenched strands of pale-green hair fell from his shoulder to cover part of his chest. Jenna had asked Khan to piggyback her to the bed, and he didn't refuse.

A tempting scene unfolded when Khan dropped Jenna. She crawled on the mattress to reach the pillows, and her sensual moves kept Khan's eyes glued to her naked beauty. He knew she was doing that on purpose, but nothing came out of it. That simply was one of their intimate games.

"[Is your newfound freedom giving you strange thoughts?]" Jenna teased once she reached the pillows and turned toward Khan.

"[I've always had strange thoughts]," Khan pointed out before addressing a serious topic. "[How are you holding up? You know it will get worse]."

Khan had described what happened during the bath. Jenna had mostly been happy for him, but he knew she experienced emotions she couldn't control.

"[I can't have the good without the bad]," Jenna giggled. "[That's exciting too]."

"[You can't wait to cause problems]," Khan scoffed.

"[I might not be the only one]," Jenna explained. "[I wonder how Monica will behave from now on]."

"[Her family educated her thoroughly]," Khan stated. "[She won't lose her cool over us]."

"[Who knows?]" Jenna snickered. "[She might be more similar to me than you realize]."

Khan didn't even want to think about that outcome. Dealing with two jealous women was too much even for him, and he worried about the potential consequences of that situation.

Jenna's jealousy was somewhat harmless. It couldn't hurt Khan's relationship with her, but Monica was different. Her unexpected explosion might endanger the mission and ruin her potential future with Khan.

Talking about Monica made Khan search for his phone. Jenna's crawling had hidden it under folds in the sheets but finding it didn't take long. Khan could see that Monica had replied when he unlocked the screen, but another message ended up claiming his attention.

The day had been beyond tiring. Khan had survived Rodney's trap only to meet Raymond and remain entangled in a few meetings. He was ready to hit the bed, but the universe had different plans.

'Luke,' Khan thought before reading the contents of the second message. 'Meet me on the last floor. I'll probably be there all night.'

Khan heaved a sigh and dropped the phone on the bed before going back to the bathroom to pick up some towels. Jenna read the contents of Luke's message in the meantime, so she felt no surprise when Khan returned to the room and started dressing up.

"[Luke won't give me anything about his uncle with you there]," Khan announced when he approached the bed to stuff the alien chameleon's skin into the backpack.

"[I figured]," Jenna replied, showing her warm smile. "[Eat something while you are away, and don't make me wait too long]."

"[Right, food]," Khan cursed. "[Did you get any]?"

"[I ate with Martha]," Jenna revealed, "[While you were getting all naughty with Monica]."

"[I get it]," Khan chuckled. "[I'll come back soon]."

"[Be safe]," Jenna stated. Khan wore the backpack and picked up the almost-empty bottle on the floor before nodding and leaving the room.

Khan's mood changed as soon as the door closed behind him. The imminent conversation was dangerous, and he had to approach it carefully, but he had to face it to decide what to do.

Some hunger showed its presence after Jenna's reminder. Khan had skipped lunch, and dinner time had already passed. He was actually starving, but his mind barely had room for that problem.

Simulations of the imminent meeting played in Khan's mind and led to a single conclusion. He couldn't devise a proper plan until he saw what Luke was willing to reveal. In short, he would have to improvise.

The tension around Khan appeared unbreakable, but some warmth managed to seep through it when he entered the elevator. After pressing the last floor's key, he read Monica's message and recalled a world without those problems.

'I'll see you tomorrow then,' Khan read the message and smiled. He wanted to answer and tease Monica a bit longer, but the elevator opened and put an end to that break.

A familiar presence had touched Khan's senses while the elevator was still moving, so seeing Master Ivor standing right before it wasn't a surprise. The old man had waited for Khan, and he stored the phone to exchange polite greetings.

"I'm sorry for making you wait so long," Khan announced.

"Not at all, Lieutenant Khan," Master Ivor reassured. "It's nice to see that you are back. The group missed you."

"I heard the others did a good job," Khan commented before emptying what remained of the booze.

"We made some progress," Master Ivor confirmed while beginning to lead the way across the corridor. "I'm sure your findings will help even more."

"That's the goal," Khan laughed, and the two fell silent as they approached the end of the corridor.

Master Ivor led Khan inside another room at the corner of the building. Windows covered two of its walls, but the place lacked the long meeting table. Instead, a big, square, interactive desk stood at its center, and holograms came out of it.

Luke and Bruce lifted their gazes from the table when Khan and Master Ivor entered. Except for them, the room was empty, so Khan concluded that the meeting would only have four people.

"Thank you for coming with such short notice," Luke exclaimed after the door closed. "You must be tired."

"Just hungry," Khan stated before placing the bottle in an empty spot near the metal wall.

"Bruce?" Luke called.

"Already contacting the kitchen," Bruce responded while tapping on his phone. "I'll have them deliver some snacks too."

"Don't forget the drinks," Khan reminded as he approached the desk. "What do we have here?"

The azure holograms depicted a series of buildings that Khan had never seen. He could guess their purpose, but Luke's explanation made those thoughts pointless.

"This is a replica of Lower Level 1," Luke explained while performing a command with his fingers. "It's easier to keep track of everything with it."

The holograms reacted to the gesture and shrunk. More buildings filled the new empty spaces until structures that even Khan could recognize joined the scene. The process continued until the entirety of the city stretched over the desk.

"Seems useful," Khan admitted, "And illegal."

Maps weren't illegal outside the dock, but Khan could predict why Luke had something so detailed. Luke smiled when he heard those words, and a few buildings turned red when he interacted with the desk.

The process didn't end there. Red shades stretched from the marked buildings and covered multiple streets before converging into the industrial district. The holograms highlighted the warehouses and the path they took.

"None of this will ever leave the building," Luke declared, "But we still need to be certain before acting. We'll expose ourselves as soon as we make a move, so we can't make mistakes."

Khan could only nod and focus on the holograms. It was safe to assume that they depicted every connection between the industrial area and the rest of the city, so the alien chameleon's skin and the reinforced fabric must have passed through some of them.

The high number of routes and warehouses was an issue. Khan could count at least fifteen structures meant to store goods, and they used even more streets to deliver or retrieve them. Finding the culprit among that array would be a challenge.

"Can you connect any of them to your findings?" Luke asked.

"I need more details," Khan replied. "You have more than this, haven't you?"

"It's better to wait for that part," Bruce pointed out.

Khan dropped his backpack during the wait. Master Ivor remained silent near the entrance while Bruce and Luke continued to play with the holograms without adding anything valuable.

A few minutes had to pass before a buzzing noise came out of the entrance. Luke immediately turned off the table, and Master Ivor crossed the door to pick up the meals left by the waiter.

Master Ivor pushed a metal table that hovered a few centimeters above the floor inside the room, and the three men quickly approached it. Khan found himself in front of a tasty steak, and he ate it all in a matter of seconds. His performance even made Bruce and Luke stare at him in surprise.

The hovering table had much more. Junk food and a few bottles occupied its surface, and Bruce took care of pouring the drinks. Master Ivor also had one, but he approached one of the metal walls right afterward.

Khan didn't miss that gesture. Master Ivor was privy to the investigation, and his experience could grant valuable insights, but he didn't approach the desk. He was distancing himself from that meeting, even if only slightly.

'Is this a matter of status?' Khan wondered while enjoying the booze and his full belly. 'Does he want me to know that Luke is in charge?'

Khan wouldn't usually care about those political games, but Master Ivor had become a suspect. He probably didn't have the authority to join the theft, but he could act as a spy for other members of the Cobsend family, members like Raymond.

"Okay then," Luke eventually exclaimed as he returned to the desk and reactivated the holograms. "I'll give you everything we have."

The city on Lower Level 1 returned, and the same went for the red shades. Yet, azure words appeared on them, and Khan learnt secrets when he read them.

The holograms didn't have too many details, but the group had done a good enough job. Each red building and path featured descriptions of the species using them, and some even had short lists of the known transported goods. Khan could see the results of the last month of investigation, and he didn't feel disappointed.

"You really did investigate," Khan couldn't help but praise. He could already spot a couple of buildings that matched what he had found, even if none of them had illegal goods listed on the holograms.

"The connection you created with Awiza gave us a great chance," Luke explained. "The fact that she is an Orlats also allowed me to use my wealth. I could accelerate promotions and grant authorizations."

"I believe you all have decent roles in your respective activities," Khan guessed.

"Monica and Francis had an easier time getting there due to their power," Bruce revealed. "Martha works with Monica, so she is also there. Instead, the others are taking longer shifts to gain favors."

Khan rejoiced at that news. He liked hearing that Martha wasn't alone on the field, and learning that Monica was sort of looking out for her added some warmth to his mind.

"We can't move toward these targets yet," Luke continued, "And we don't have the manpower to investigate all of them at the same time. The slow approach can work, but I hope your findings will avoid it."

Those words brought the focus to Khan. Luke and Bruce had shown their cards, so it was Khan's time to give them something, and he knew exactly what.

Khan reached for the backpack on the floor and took out the alien chameleon's skin before throwing it on the desk. He even picked up the device that could confirm his claims and activated it under Luke and Bruce's attentive gaze.

When the device gave its results, Luke and Bruce couldn't help but gasp. The dock was famous for its secrecy, but Khan had surpassed their expectations. He had found the basic material for the reinforced fabric without any apparent lead.

"How did you-?" Luke asked before stopping to change his question. "Did you find any connection between this and the surface?"

"That's hard to say," Khan exclaimed. "I found the buyers, but I don't know how far their faction stretches."

Once the surprise waned, Luke and Bruce revealed some slight disappointment. Khan had accomplished an incredible feat, but that alone didn't help the investigation.

"The buyers were human," Khan added, without mentioning anything about the Bise since he didn't know how much he could say in front of Bruce.

"They must be important then," Luke promptly followed as he added new filters to the hologram. "We should definitely focus on the warehouses owned by human factions."

Some red shades disappeared, but they remained too many to give a clear direction to the investigation. The second asteroid saw a majority of human citizens, so it made sense for them to own most businesses, and the hologram reflected that.

"Is that all?" Luke questioned once he realized that it would still take a long time to narrow down the list of targets.

Khan sighed in his mind. He had reached the part he didn't want to reveal, but his hands were tied. He had to give away something, especially since he had found valid clues.

"Rodney was among the buyers," Khan uttered. "He even looked like the leader of the group."

"Wait," Luke exclaimed. "Rodney Semmut? The guide?"

"Yes," Khan confirmed. "He is one of the reasons why I found this skin so quickly."

"I see," Luke voiced as he brought a hand on his chin. "This changes something. He isn't exactly a common figure. The guides might be a cover-up for his actual role on Milia 222. I'll tell someone inside my family to investigate."

"Are you sure?" Khan asked. "Won't that create friction between your families?"

"We had no reason to do it before," Luke explained. "We do now."

Khan had studied Luke thoroughly after his revelation. He was ready to pick up any clue that hinted at his awareness of Rodney's situation. Yet, Luke had passed the test. He appeared entirely in the dark.

"Did Rodney recognize you?" Bruce questioned.

"Worse," Khan replied. "He recognized all of us."

"That can't be helped," Luke reassured. "Someone was bound to recognize us. I bet Rodney wasn't the first."

"Do you know where Rodney is now?" Bruce asked.

"I thought I'd find him here," Khan admitted.

"Why is that?" Luke wondered.

"He should think that I'm dead," Khan smirked. "I guess he didn't fall for that."

Bruce and Luke didn't know how to address those words, but they understood their hidden meaning. Khan didn't want to explain every detail of that topic, and they would respect his wish.

"Well, tell me if I can help," Luke eventually announced. "Anyway, good job. We will plan our next move once I hear from my family."

The meeting could very well end there. Khan only had to remain silent to return to his room. He could keep the stuff related to the traitor and Raymond for himself as he had planned, but he wanted to push a bit more. His curiosity desired answers, and the investigation also needed more intel.

"Luke, can we have some privacy?" Khan politely asked without adding anything else.

Surprised faces unfolded at that unexpected request. Even Master Ivor lifted his head to focus on the desk, but Luke showed his political skills by recovering quickly and exchanging a few nods.

Bruce and Master Ivor left the room without voicing any complaint. Only a few seconds had to pass for Khan and Luke to remain alone in the room, and the latter even turned off the desk at that point.

"Don't keep me on edge," Luke joked.

"I need to choose my words wisely," Khan spoke openly. "I can't sound even remotely disrespectful."

"I thought we were past that," Luke laughed.

Khan heaved a sigh before fixing his gaze on Luke. He really didn't want to talk about that, but it sounded necessary.

"Your uncle's arrival," Khan mentioned, "Won't it ruin our initial plans?"

"Oh, that," Luke replied. "I didn't expect his arrival either. I won't lie to you. It might be a problem."

"Luke, we are talking about someone who I believe has more authority than you," Khan pointed out. "This is way beyond what I signed up for."

"I get you," Luke agreed. "I can adjust your payment due to the recent developments."

"It's not about money," Khan declared. "I'm already risking my life to make the investigation advance. I can't have your family going against it too."

Luke noticed how Khan spoke more openly than usual, but he failed to connect that new behavior to his mana. He simply believed that the dock had brought its share of traumatic experiences, so he decided to reveal the truth.

"I didn't want to mention this," Luke voiced, and the synthetic mana echoed his concern. "You are the reason behind my uncle's arrival."

"What?" Khan exclaimed. He would typically go in full battle mode after similar revelations, but the synthetic mana reassured him enough to avoid falling for his paranoia.

"Sending someone in the dock is a big deal," Luke explained. "The news reached our friends' families, which started to question mine. I don't hold enough authority to reassure everyone, so my uncle decided to step forward."

The explanation left Khan speechless. He had never considered that option, but it made sense. Monica had also mentioned something similar during the dinner at the Kingsize. Raymond could have simply come to reassure the other families.

Of course, Khan didn't give up on his original theory. Raymond had the perfect alibi, but that didn't remove him from the list of suspects. Actually, his decision to step forward could very well be a clue.

'Did I get close enough to worry him?' Khan wondered while he processed that new information. 'Did he come here to make sure that no one gets to the culprits?'

"Don't blame yourself," Luke reassured since he misunderstood the reason behind Khan's silence. "It's my job to call the shots, so I'm the one who has to deal with the consequences."

"I read about your uncle on the network," Khan partially changed the topic. "Did he help with the creation of the reinforced fabric?"

"This is a bit of a family secret," Luke sighed. "The factory used some of his studies to kick-start the experiment."

'Revenge can be a motive!' Khan exclaimed in his mind as he carefully concocted his next question. "How did he take that?"

"My uncle doesn't care about who uses his studies," Luke laughed. "He isn't your ordinary politician. From what I managed to gather, he argued with my father about the financial goal of the factory, but nothing came out of it."

The casual tone that Luke had used didn't hide any lies. It really seemed that the argument between those two powerful figures had not been a big deal, which defeated Khan's last guess.

'Am I trying to force my ideas into this situation?' Khan ended up wondering. 'Did I get everything wrong? It can't be. There must be some truth in it.'

Khan didn't want to abandon his hypotheses, but both Luke and Bruce had spoken against them. Still, he couldn't reject what he had discovered and felt either. Moreover, common sense pointed toward a connection between Raymond and the reinforced fabric.

"Is something wrong?" Luke asked since Khan fell silent, but the latter decided not to speak.

Khan was actually conflicted. He had yet to reveal a few pieces of information, but he wanted to keep them for himself, at least for now. Still, that left him without anything to add.

"Khan, do you have something else for me?" Luke pressed on.

"I might," Khan spoke the truth, "But it's better if I don't say anything now. I can't back it up with proof, and I don't want to create unnecessary panic."

"You shouldn't stress out so much," Luke advised. "What you brought back from the dock will already accelerate the investigation. It's only a matter of time before we find the leak."

'Finding it might not be a good thing,' Khan thought. 'If Raymond has something to do with the theft, we'll have a fourth-level warrior as an enemy in a place where murder comes easy.'

All in all, the situation had yet to become too tragic. It was even quite good for Khan. Rodney didn't reach out to Luke, and Khan only had to wait to find the organization connected to the buyers. He would get to the unknown central pieces sooner or later.

'I might be able to take it easy for some time,' Khan realized. 'I only need to find Rodney, but I can use Milia 222's channels for that.'

"Right, I should probably mention this," Luke continued while Khan was still silent. "My uncle expressed his desire to meet you properly. He made it sound like a whim, but you can think about it if you don't have anything else to do."

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"Why me?" Khan couldn't help but ask.

"I told you, it sounded like a whim," Luke repeated. "Knowing my uncle, he might simply be interested in Nitis' events."

Khan voiced a faint "oh". Luke had politely decided not to add anything, but it wasn't hard to connect the dots. Raymond's expertise dealt with alterations caused by mana, so the mutations experienced by Nitis' lifeforms had to be an interesting topic for him.

Still, it became impossible to stop Khan's paranoia. The Global Army didn't make most of Nitis' events public, but someone like Raymond Cobsend was bound to have access to accurate reports. He could probably get detailed explanations written by fellow experts through his position.

Khan's thoughts ran wild. A meeting with such an important figure could benefit his career, but it could also be a trap, and a fourth-level warrior was simply too much for him. He even imagined an outcome where he found Rodney and Raymond waiting for him in that meeting.

However, the matter had an even greater problem. Luke had made it sound like a trivial request, but Khan's background remained quite poor. He didn't know if his refusal would bring negative consequences. He wasn't even sure if he could make that decision.

Once the paranoia waned a bit, Khan managed to notice other emotions. He was worried and scared, but some curiosity existed inside him. He wanted to learn more about Raymond, and missing out on the chance of finding clues would be an insult to his recent struggles.

'Am I really going to accept?' Khan wondered. 'When did I get so reckless?'

Of course, recklessness wasn't the only force involved in that decision. Khan's doubts created some leeway. Raymond could be awful, but his behavior toward Khan might not reflect that.

'Dad would probably know more about him,' Khan sighed in his mind. Problems he didn't want to face revealed their presence as soon as he thought about Bret, but he fended them off by restarting the conversation.

"He came here because of me," Khan announced. "Fulfilling his whim sounds proper."

"Are you sure?" Luke asked.

"Sure, set up a meeting," Khan confirmed. "I can only wait at the moment anyway."

"Perfect!" Luke exclaimed before moving to a previous topic. "As for the panic you mentioned, does it involve my family?"

"Luke, don't put me in this position," Khan responded while retaining a perfect poker face. "It's too dangerous to throw around accusations. It would be even if I had proof."

Luke was nowhere near stupid. He had understood something, and the matter troubled him. His expression didn't show his feelings, but Khan saw them reflected in the synthetic mana.

"Alright," Luke eventually announced. "I'll trust you on this one."

"Thanks," Khan weakly voiced before gulping down his drink. "I guess we are done here."

"Yes," Luke replied. "I'll let you know when my uncle sets up the meeting."

Khan nodded as he left his drink on the interactive desk and picked up his backpack. He was ready to go, but he felt that a warning was necessary. "You know politics better than me, so don't do anything reckless."

"Khan, I'll do what I have to," Luke stated. "My position comes with obligations."

"You hired me to do the dirty work in your place," Khan declared. "Jumping in the fray would only make it harder for me."

Luke wanted to reject that statement, but Khan was right. Staying still was challenging but also necessary at times, especially when the issue involved something as complicated as a wealthy family.

"I'm entrusting you with something extremely precious to me," Luke uttered.

"Maybe I will take that raise," Khan laughed before finally turning and approaching the entrance.

Luke's eyes never left Khan during his departure. He didn't like to remain in the dark, but he was getting something in exchange. Khan was turning into the exact soldier he wanted into his personal force.

Khan left the meeting room without addressing those gazes and finding Bruce and Master Ivor in the corridor didn't change his mood. He was done for that day.

"I'm hitting the bed," Khan exclaimed while waving at Bruce and Master Ivor.

"Goodnight, Lieutenant Khan," Master Ivor politely said.

Bruce limited himself to a nod, and Khan smiled before crossing the two men to stride to the elevator. A sigh left his mouth when the lift began its descent, and his cold expression broke due to the thoughts assaulting his mind.

'What a mess,' Khan cursed.

Raymond, Rodney, the Cobsend family, and Francis created a troublesome picture that would make anyone run away. The job was too complex for a mere second-level warrior, and the problems didn't even end there.

Khan could accept Rodney's situation. He was a criminal who had chosen to spend his punishment doing an illegal but financially remunerative job. There could be more behind it, but that was enough to explain his motives.

The same went for Raymond. Khan was almost sure he was hiding something, but his alibi was solid. On the surface, Khan could believe that Raymond had flown to Milia 222 just to reassure the families involved with the factory.

The unclear general motive of the theft was the greatest issue. Money seemed a reasonable explanation, but flaws existed. The reinforced fabric would have probably already left Milia 222 in that case.

Khan didn't know how long it would take to reverse engineer the reinforced fabric, but months had passed since the first theft. It would make sense for something to pop up in that period unless the lab was on Milia 222.

Even if that explanation made sense, Khan couldn't completely believe it. His guts were telling him that something was off, and only further investigation could reveal the truth.

'Meetings, lies, and money,' Khan mocked himself. 'That's the life I'm trying to build.' READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT FREEWEBNOVEL.COM ONLY.

Those thoughts would usually generate sour feelings, but Khan had reached his room by then. Jenna's sensual figure welcomed him with a warm smile, and all of that vanished as Khan jumped in her arms.

The alarm cut the nightmare short. Khan woke up early and silenced his phone, only to hear Jenna's groan. He could almost predict the torrent of complaints about to fly on his way, so he left a kiss on her forehead to put her back to sleep.

Khan dressed up in a hurry and left the room to head for the elevator. Problems tried to show their presence, but they failed to take control of his thoughts. He had something very different in mind, and a smirk even made its way onto his face.

A short walk and a knock on a door made a splendid figure appear in Khan's vision. Monica stood before the entrance with her shy expression and her lovely clothes. She was wearing a skirt again, but she had opted for a shirt that morning.

"Don't just stand there," Monica complained before grabbing Khan's right wrist and pulling him inside the room.

Khan voiced a laugh while the door closed behind him. Monica left his wrist, but he grabbed hers before she could fall prey to her shyness. The gesture forced her to face Khan, and she lowered her gaze to mutter another complaint.

"You came earlier than agreed," Monica muttered.

"I wanted to catch you by surprise," Khan teased, "Maybe without these fancy clothes."

"I needed to prepare for work," Monica pointed out. "I have to attend my shift today."

"What's your job?" Khan asked.

"Bodyguard," Monica explained. "I surveil warehouses or shipments."

"And you go dressed like this?" Khan joked.

"I will change into a tracksuit," Monica scoffed while raising her gaze before realizing that she had committed a mistake. She lowered her face again, but it was too late by then.

"So," Khan stated while pulling Monica's arm to place it on his shoulder, "You wore this for me."

Monica slowly lifted her gaze while doing the same with her right arm. She wrapped herself around Khan's neck before whispering a question. "Do you like it?"

Khan could tease Monica a bit longer, but his mind went blank. He lowered his head, and the two exchanged a deep kiss in which Monica managed to be bolder than before.

That kiss felt better that day. Monica was more at ease, which allowed her to become completely immersed in the intimate interaction. She tightened up the embrace to keep Khan close, and she even dug her fingers into his hair to enjoy the moment as much as possible.

Of course, the kiss couldn't last forever, especially with Khan wanting more. His hands went on Monica's waist and stayed there for a while before descending a bit.

Monica let out a faint moan under Khan's caresses, but she recalled where she was when he gave her butt a light squeeze. She didn't mind that, but she still decided to push Khan away before things could get too dangerous.

"You always stop me before the fun part," Khan groaned while Monica pressed on his shoulders to prevent him from getting closer.

Monica gulped and lowered her gaze only for an instant. When her eyes returned to Khan, her voice became serious. "Is that a problem?"

Khan frowned and brought one hand to Monica's cheek before questioning her. "What's the matter?"

Monica's resolve wavered. She nestled in Khan's hand and even left a kiss there before showing her puppy eyes and explaining her fears. "Am I going too slow? I don't want to bore you."

'Oh,' Khan thought while a warm smile forced its way on his face.

"Say something," Monica pleaded since Khan continued to smile at her in silence.

"Are you telling me that you'd do more than kissing?" Khan teased while pulling himself toward Monica. She could oppose him, but her arms carried no strength.

"I didn't-," Monica said before a kiss sealed her lips. The short gesture relaxed her and left the two's faces extremely close.

"It's pointless if you have to force yourself," Khan whispered. "We'll get there when you are ready or when you find me worthy of a descendant of the Solodrey family."

Monica's eyes widened. The last part of Khan's line was extremely embarrassing for her. She wanted to explain that her family had nothing to do with the matter, but the laugh that reached her ears told her that Khan already knew that.

"You always tease me," Monica pouted, and Khan simply kissed her again. A smile appeared on her face after reaching that understanding. She felt lighter, which reminded her of another issue.

"Khan," Monica called when the kiss ended. "Do you plan on letting go of my ass eventually?"

"Maybe we are going too slow," Khan joked, and Monica giggled as she grabbed the hand still clinging to her butt to place it on her waist. Then, she pulled him to resume the kissing session.

Peaceful days followed Khan's return to the second asteroid. His companions were often busy with their shifts, so he had a lot of free time and no actual tasks to attend to.

Monica couldn't fill those gaps. Visiting her room early in the morning was safe since everyone else was asleep, but the night could be dangerous. Her shifts occupied the rest of her day, so Khan had to settle for stealing a few minutes of her time before seeing her off to work.

The group gathered in the main hall late in the afternoon or after dinner, which gave Khan a chance to relax, but he opted to avoid those meetings. He wouldn't hold back from flirting with Monica there, and adding fuel to Francis' anger wasn't ideal.

The decision didn't come easy. Khan's new mindset would probably push him to face Francis. Yet, he had Monica to think about, and avoiding the meetings was the best option.

Martha visited Khan at times, but she mostly spent time with Jenna. Khan left his room whenever that happened to give the two women some privacy, and the event never bothered him too much. He simply entered a different room to continue his training during those moments.

Khan's training ended up occupying most of his days, except for one instance when he and Jenna left the building to visit members of her species. The couple handed Rodney's portrait to the Nele so that they could start a side investigation and involve the Orlats if necessary.

The investigation worked on three different layers at that point. Luke questioned his family and used its connections to find how Rodney had scored such an important job on Milia 222. The Nele searched for him through local methods, and the team continued to narrow down the suitable warehouses.

Another layer existed, but only Khan could pursue it, and the chance arrived quite soon. By the end of the week, Luke notified Khan that his uncle finally had some free time, so the meeting could happen.

Khan ate dinner in his room before wearing the fancy clothes Luke had prepared for him and leaving the building. The main hall was luckily empty at that time, so Khan could directly reach the ride waiting for him on the street.

The car set off almost immediately, disregarding the street and flying above the buildings to cross the city faster. The vehicle didn't actually have to go too far. Raymond's building turned out to be only a few blocks away from Luke's.

The vehicle didn't return to the street. It landed on top of the building before letting Khan out. The place didn't have much except an incredible view and a circular platform.

The rider had given Khan some instructions, so he stepped on the platform and remained still while it descended. The cylindrical metal wall didn't reveal anything, but an opening appeared when the lift stopped.

Khan found himself in an immense flat once he crossed the opening. The elevator behind him climbed back to the roof, and its entrance closed, but Khan barely paid attention to it while he studied the area.

The flat seemed as big as a floor in Luke's building, and most of its walls were transparent. Khan noticed a pool in a corner, a bath with a small waterfall coming from the ceiling, a giant meeting area, and various rooms filled with couches or desks.

Some areas had metal walls that shielded more than Khan's vision. His sensitivity couldn't go past them, and he didn't let his curiosity take over. He was in the middle of a giant foreign environment, so he remained still while waiting for someone to summon him.

No summons happened. Instead, the lift behind Khan started to move again and made him turn. Its metal surface soon slid open and revealed Raymond's smiling figure standing on a circular platform.

"Sir!" Khan exclaimed.

"Let's drop that, shall we?" Raymond laughed. "Mister Raymond and Mister Cobsend are both fine in public, but you'll use only Raymond when it's just the two of us."

Anyone would remain a bit speechless after that statement, so Khan took the chance to study Raymond. He was wearing a different suit, a black one with a grey shirt underneath. He had a bottle in one hand and two glasses in the other, but his mental state remained his most peculiar quality.

Khan sensed the same dark and bottomless pit when he inspected the faint changes in the synthetic mana. Raymond was giving off the exact vibe perceived in Luke's building, which was impossible even for skilled Nele. Only a true expert could have such thorough control, and it seemed that Raymond was one of them.

"Raymond," Khan eventually announced without even trying to come up with pretenses. "It's an honor to meet you again."

"That's it," Raymond laughed again. "I hope you don't mind if I drop the Lieutenant."

"Not at all," Khan responded. "I admit it gets annoying after a while."

"That applies to most rules in the Global Army," Raymond exclaimed. "Still, let me tell you a secret. The families are far worse."

Raymond winked at Khan, and the latter could only nod. The scene was genuinely odd for Khan. His sensitivity painted a worrisome picture, but his eyes saw the very opposite scene. Raymond was both dangerous and amiable, and Khan didn't know how to take that.

"Oh, where are my manners?" Raymond stated when he noticed the bottle in his hand. "Come into my office. Let's have a drink there."

Raymond crossed Khan before he could give any answer, and he followed him without adding anything. The two left the place with the elevator and walked until they reached a room next to the immense meeting area.

"I'm not the first to offer you booze before a meeting, am I?" Raymond joked when he placed the bottle on the desk at the end of the room. "The network is a pain. You say you like something, and anyone interested in you will bring it to the meetings."

"I don't complain," Khan played along.

"I bet," Raymond chuckled as he started pouring the booze. "Nitis must have left a deep mark for you to like it this much."

'We started already,' Khan thought before giving an honest answer. "It did."

"I'm sorry for how things went there," Raymond stated while handing a half-full glass to Khan. "No one should go through so much in such a short time, especially at your age."

Khan revealed a helpless smile before taking the glass. He didn't have answers for that statement. Sometimes the universe was simply a terrible place.

"Cheers," Raymond voiced as he brought his glass to his face. He kept it under his nose to sniff the booze inside it before taking a short sip, which left him quite pleased.

Khan didn't have such elegant manners. His sip was far longer, but his eyes widened in surprise when the booze's excellent taste invaded his mouth. Warmth spread through his throat and filled his chest with a cozy feeling without bringing any burning sensation. That definitely was one of the best drinks he had ever had.

"Ah! You like it," Raymond almost shouted when he noticed Khan's reaction. "I'm glad. I picked it up myself from a canteen in this very building."

"I'd better drink a lot then," Khan shamelessly announced.

"I'd be offended otherwise," Raymond responded. "Anyway, I won't pry on Nitis' matters any further. You can relax."

"I thought you wanted to hear my reports," Khan revealed.

"I have a library of those reports," Raymond uttered. "Mutations with random mixtures of mana are an interesting topic, but humans have learnt to trigger similar reactions long ago. It's not even a special field anymore."

"Then, why am I here?" Khan expressed his doubts.

"It's really rare for me to get laid-back meetings," Raymond explained as he moved toward one of the couches in the office. "I barely caught any sleep since my arrival here. I wanted to have something I might actually enjoy."

"I hope I'm good company," Khan voiced.

"You are already the high point of my week," Raymond laughed. "Sit now, and don't forget the bottle."

Khan complied. He took the bottle and approached the couch in front of Raymond. The two sofas didn't have any table between them, so Khan left the booze on the floor when he sat.

"My nephew has nothing but praises for you," Raymond revealed. "I hope you are taking good care of him."

"I'm doing my best," Khan replied, "But Luke also knows his stuff. I wouldn't have gotten anywhere without his financial and logistic support."

"Of course, he does," Raymond exclaimed. "He is a Cobsend. He must know how to deal with political and social issues."

Khan couldn't use his sensitivity, but his experience remained deep. Raymond had used a mocking tone, which probably was on purpose.

"Don't mind me," Raymond said when he noticed Khan's hesitation. "My brother and I have very different ideas on how to raise a descendant and on many other topics."

"But you did come to Milia 222 to reassure the families," Khan pointed out. "I hope that wasn't too troublesome."

"Khan," Raymond smirked, "There is a difference between political duty and familiar affection. On the surface, I came here as an envoy of the Cobsend family, but I'm only buying Luke time. I won't steal any merit from him once he completes the mission."

The opposite aspects depicted by Khan's senses only deepened as the conversation continued. Raymond wasn't only cheerful and open-minded. He also sounded like a caring uncle.

"Where is the source of his darkness?" Khan wondered, even if he knew he wouldn't get answers.

"Maybe I lied a bit," Raymond announced, interrupting the silent moment. "I did want a break from my meetings, but there are other reasons."

Khan nodded, and Raymond continued. "You are a living example of one of the few mutations humans can't recreate. I wanted to see you with my eyes."

"Is the Nak's mana so rare?" Khan wondered while choosing words that might answer some of his oldest questions. "I've always thought that the Global Army had samples or similar items."

"The mutation isn't the main point," Raymond explained. "I'm more interested in the process. You know, many call me a genius, but your father was simply better, and I can't find any record of what he did to save you."

Chapter 398 Important

Khan couldn't help but fall silent when Raymond mentioned his father. His reaction was obvious, but he didn't care. The topic was too close to his heart to hide his feelings.

Three years had passed since the last meeting with Bret. Khan had grown a lot during that time, and not only in personal power. His knowledge had deepened, especially in fields connected to the Global Army and the mana.

At first, Khan had simply believed that the scientific department of the Global Army didn't need high-level warriors. Studies and experience could theoretically compensate for an eventual lack of personal power.

Yet, getting stronger was relatively easy for accomplished soldiers. The injections of synthetic mana could make up for a lazy character or a busy life, so only an idiot would believe that Bret had reached his previous position while remaining a first-level warrior.

Talent could offer an alternative path, but Bret could implant mana cores even after spending years as a drunkard in the Slums. He had summoned enough mana to perform surgery. Regular first-level warriors couldn't do that.

'How deep are your lies?' Khan wondered as memories of his father ran through his mind. 'How much did you hide from me? Why did you even do that?'

"I was only a kid back then," Khan eventually managed to muster.

"Did he mention anything about the event?" Raymond asked.

"The Global Army placed restrictions on him," Khan explained. "He couldn't even if he wanted to."

"That's sad," Raymond sighed. "What they did to your father was despicable. Locking such a great mind in the Slums is idiotic."

Raymond's phrase didn't reveal anything, but Khan added it to the list of Bret's lies anyway. The Global Army would support one of its best scientists, so being forced to move to the Slums due to mere bankruptcy didn't make any sense.

"Did you know my father well?" Khan asked.

"We've only met a couple of times," Raymond revealed. "His character was quite peculiar. I think gruff describes him well."

"He is still the same," Khan sighed.

"I didn't expect anything less from him," Raymond exclaimed. "It's still surprising how he managed to get Elizabeth with that personality. I never thought he had the time for relationships, let alone a family."

"Did you know my mother too?" Khan asked without hiding his surprise.

"I knew her pretty well," Raymond revealed. "She was an incredible woman. Her death shook us all."

'Us all,' Khan repeated in his mind before voicing his doubts. "Was my mother important?"

"She was definitely famous," Raymond laughed. "No one could tell her what to do. I guess her character matched your father's perfectly."

"Did she cause problems?" Khan questioned. He didn't remember much of his mother, so he couldn't contain his curiosity.

"She was a rebellious soul," Raymond reminisced as he lifted his gaze to stare at an empty spot on the wall. "You couldn't go a month without hearing about her on the news."

Khan felt a bit odd. He noticed similarities that made him frown. It seemed that he shared his father's tastes in terms of women.

"Everyone thought she would never marry," Raymond continued. "I still remember when your father announced their engagement. The event caused quite the uproar."

'Were my parents professional troublemakers?' Khan couldn't help but wonder.

"Oh, I lost myself in my memories," Raymond added. "It must be hard to talk about this for you."

"It mostly makes me curious," Khan admitted. "I never thought my parents had such influence among important people."

Raymond smirked as he brought his eyes back to Khan. He drank a bit before lowering his glass. His face carried some interest, and Khan could see the dark depths of his mind reflected on it.

"I might have said too much," Raymond announced as his expression regained its previous friendliness. "Those are redacted records. I might also get in trouble if I don't watch my tongue."

Khan didn't believe that Raymond had chosen his words carelessly for even a second. His phrases hid a deeper meaning, which sounded quite evident to Khan. His parents mattered enough to silence even a fourth-level warrior from an extremely wealthy family.

Still, Khan couldn't understand why Raymond was giving him such obvious clues. The revelations could only make him curious, which didn't amount to much.

"I wish I could remember more things," Khan casually said to keep the conversation on the topic.

"Maybe forgetting is for the best," Raymond suggested. "I can't imagine how you must have felt during the Second Impact. I wouldn't be surprised if you still had nightmares about it."

A hammer slammed on Khan's mind and shattered his thoughts. Disbelief tried to fill his face, but he held it back. Raymond had diverted his gaze again, but his words had been strangely precise.

'Does he know about the nightmares?' Khan thought. 'Are they a common occurrence with Tainted humans? Was he only speaking casually?'

Khan couldn't find answers to Raymond's behavior, and the latter was quick to change the topic.

"Anyway, enough with these sad tales. Let's enjoy this meeting."

Raymond tapped the floor, and an interactive menu appeared. He browsed through it with his feet until a large, azure screen materialized right past the couches.

"I might as well explain my curiosity since you are here," Raymond stated as he continued to tinker with the menu to make new images appear on the holographic screen.

Spheres of different colors materialized on the screen, and descriptions soon appeared next to them. They added labels and behaviors to the various types of mana depicted by the holograms and divided them by element.

"This is a bit beyond what they teach you in the training camps," Raymond explained. "Humans also aren't too knowledgeable in this field, but bear with me for a moment."

Khan nodded, even if the descriptions made a lot of sense. He had long since learnt that the mana had a sort of will, which changed depending on its element. The holograms simply put those details into words.

"The mana isn't like other energies," Raymond declared. "It's miraculous in many ways. You could almost say that it's a living being."

The holograms changed to depict new scenes. They all showed the effects that different elements had on certain fabrics and the long-term advantages that some alterations could bring.

"Try to compare this to what you have seen on Nitis," Raymond continued. "The mutations there were mostly unstable, unlike these. Do you know why?"

"The complexity of the body to mutate?" Khan guessed.

"That's definitely a factor," Raymond stated. "Let's go with this now."

Raymond browsed through the menu, and the holograms changed again. The new scenes resembled the previous, except for an important feature. Animals had replaced the fabrics.

Khan couldn't help but think about Nitis when the holograms showed the animals undergoing stable mutations to transform into stronger creatures. He had seen similar scenes, but everything on Raymond's screen looked cleaner and smooth.

"What do you think?" Raymond asked while more scenes played on the screen. "These animals are mutating just fine. Why is that?"

Khan felt quite drawn by the topic. It involved mana, so it interested him. Yet, he couldn't sense what was happening in the holograms, so he had to rely on his knowledge to come up with an explanation.

"You chose the element according to the animal you wanted to mutate," Khan guessed. "The creatures on Nitis didn't have that chance. The different types of mana inside them simply went wild."

"Correct," Raymond exclaimed. "Different elements lead to different behaviors. Of course, this is a simplistic view. I can name ten different studies on the mana's purity, and they wouldn't be enough to explain how difficult it is to trigger a stable mutation."

Raymond wasn't saying anything new, at least for Khan. His knowledge had long gone past humankind's limits. Most of it actually came from alien species.

"Now, tell me," Raymond continued. "How is it that some creatures on Nitis still managed to stabilize their mutations?"

"Innate adaptability?" Khan presumed.

"Partially," Raymond replied while changing the holograms again. "The elements have a different level of dominance, which also changes depending on their mixture."

Khan almost stopped hearing Raymond when new holograms filled the screen. A ranking that described the different levels of dominance appeared, and the chaos element came out on top. The second place didn't even come close to it.

Raymond took Khan's silence as his cue to resume speaking. "The chaos element is extremely invasive. In many cases, it takes over the hosts, but that power hides the key to fixing humanity's greatest flaw."

The holograms disappeared, forcing Khan to focus on Raymond. The latter was wearing the same smirk from before, but his expression radiated some ambition now.

"Which is?" Khan carefully asked.

"We are one of the few relevant species who need external methods to wield mana," Raymond announced. "Our innate lack of mana cores is a weakness, and we don't have time to wait for our bodies to evolve naturally."

"Do you think the chaos element can trigger that evolution?" Khan wondered.

"It's too early to say," Raymond sighed, and his expression regained its previous friendliness. "I would need the pure mana of a Nak for my experiments. Nothing beats their ability to trigger mutations."

"I can't generate that," Khan quickly explained.

"I know," Raymond reassured. "Your presence here is mostly related to the opposite field. I wanted to know how Bret stabilized your mutations, but alas."

"My father is still alive," Khan exclaimed. "Maybe you can ask him."

"Maybe I should," Raymond uttered. "Though I bet he wouldn't share my ideas, especially after what happened to you and your mother."

Khan nodded and refilled his drink. He was locking most of his thoughts in the back of his mind to avoid showing his real emotions, but he didn't completely ignore them, and some questions eventually found their way to his mouth.

"Raymond, if I may," Khan called. "Humans are stronger than most species after the evolution. Our innate flaw probably compensates for that."

"Mana cores usually become useless after the evolution," Raymond casually responded, "And getting there is extremely difficult. That's not really a solution."

"What exactly happens during the evolution?" Khan asked.

"You sure have a silver tongue," Raymond laughed. "You'll go far in the Global Army. The answers will eventually come."

A buzzing noise spread through the room at that point. Raymond drew his phone from his pocket and heaved a helpless sigh. He even shook his head before closing the call and tapping on the screen to send a message.

"So unfortunate," Raymond voiced another sigh as he stood up. "I'm afraid something came up. I must go somewhere."

Khan promptly stood up and reassured Raymond. "That's only normal in your position."

"I didn't want our meeting to be so short," Raymond revealed. "I even made you come all the way here. Take the bottle with you. It's the least I can do for wasting your time."

Khan would typically try to refuse or offer a polite answer, but he didn't bother. He emptied his drink and picked up the bottle before performing a military salute.

Raymond wanted to say something, but his phone rang again. He rolled his eyes and pointed at his phone while wearing a funny face. Khan smirked at the scene, and his smile widened when Raymond rejected the call.

"It will only get worse," Raymond cursed. "You know how to get back to the roof, right? I'll activate the elevator for you."

"It was a pleasure, Raymond," Khan mustered some polite words.

"Same here, Khan," Raymond stated. "Let's do this again."

Raymond's phone rang again as soon as he finished his line. He and Khan exchanged a nod at that point, and the latter turned to walk toward the elevator.

An opening appeared on the cylindrical structure as soon as Khan reached it, and a circular platform was waiting for him inside. Khan stepped on it, and the lift rose until it brought him back to the roof.

The car had never left, and the driver didn't say anything at Khan's early return. The vehicle's door promptly opened, and Khan took a sip from the bottle as soon as the set-off began.

'What is his deal?' Khan cursed in his mind.

Raymond had mostly been as friendly and cheerful as possible, but Khan felt to have seen his true colors a few times. It was even likely that Raymond had chosen to show them on purpose for unknown reasons.

'He knows my family,' Khan pointed out. 'He probably knows it better than me.'

Khan couldn't predict that his family would be one of the meeting's main topics, but he could generally deal with that. Yet, he didn't expect his father and mother to be so important. Raymond might have lied to him, but that wouldn't make sense.

'And what was all that stuff about mutations?' Khan wondered. 'I get that he is interested in the Nak, but he should ask the higher-ups of the Global Army for that.'

A vague picture formed in Khan's mind. He didn't have any proof, but a few dots connected anyway. Raymond's interest in the Nak, the reinforced fabric, Jenna's prediction, and the odd feeling on the fourth asteroid seemed to have something in common.

'It can't be,' Khan thought, 'But it might make sense if the fourth asteroid has a lab.'

Deep thoughts afflicted Khan's mind throughout the flight. He didn't only worry about Raymond's potential implication with the investigation. His memories often resurfaced and made him reevaluate his life in the Slums. His father had always lied to him, but he couldn't find any incriminating instance.

Khan almost failed to notice the landing, but he reacted before the driver could call him. The doors opened and left him on the sidewalk before Luke's building. The meeting had been short but incredibly meaningful.

A messy scene welcomed Khan's return to the building. Luke, Bruce, Francis, Monica, and the four first-level warriors were occupying a few couches and sharing multiple bottles. Their mood was quite happy, which didn't change when Khan entered their vision.

'Martha must be with Jenna,' Khan thought while waving at his companions and bringing the bottle to his mouth. He wasn't in the mood for pleasantries and intended to go straight for a free room.

"You came back earlier than I expected," Luke announced before Khan could cross the couches.

"We got interrupted," Khan quickly explained. "Mister Raymond received a call."

"That's a pity," Luke responded. "Do you want to join us? It's still a bit early."

"I think I'll skip today," Khan smiled. "I'm a bit tired."

"Tired from what?" Francis snorted before Luke could say anything.

Khan had suppressed a lot during the meeting. The talk about the Nak and his father could make him explode, but he had retained his calm and had ignored the whispers of his urges. Still, Francis's words dug a hole that Khan had no intention of patching up.

"Is something the matter?" Khan asked while stopping in his track. The couches were only one meter from him, and Francis was sitting on the closest, but he only showed his back.

"I'm just saying," Francis stated while turning and placing an arm on the couch's back. "You haven't done anything for the entire week. How could you be tired?"

"I've trained," Khan calmly explained.

"Ah! Training," Francis laughed through an evident mocking tone. "We all know who you have in your room. I'll give you a clue. She is green."

"Francis, drop it," Monica scolded.

"Why should I do that?" Francis scoffed. "We all think that. We work every day while he gets to spend his time with his alien whore. How is that fair?"

Francis' slobbering voice revealed his drunken state, but Khan didn't care. That open insult to Jenna made him drop his suppression and experience all the emotions from the meeting. Annoyance, uneasiness, anxiety, and anger emerged and found a perfect target.

"Maybe you'd also get a woman if you spent less time trying to get them drunk," Khan mocked.

"You can't talk to me like this!" Francis shouted while standing up.

"Why?" Khan smirked. "Because your family might get angry?"

Francis' face turned red in anger, but Luke, Bruce, and Monica stood up simultaneously to appease the situation. However, Khan sensed that Francis' mana had started to move, so he prepared for the worst.

"Why don't we all calm down?" Luke exclaimed, but Francis lifted his arm before anyone could do anything.

Mana gathered at the center of Francis' palm to generate a series of orange sparks. The latter clashed with each other and released a lightning bolt that shot at high speed toward Khan.

Khan had evaluated the power of the spell even before it took form. Francis was drunk, but he had still mustered something that came close to the second level. The attack was deadly but not unavoidable. Still, he opted for a psychological blow.

The blood vessels on Khan's right hand clotted while he raised his arm. His gesture perfectly matched the launch of the lightning bolt and made it land on his palm.

The [Blood Shield] could endure the spells from third-level mages now. Francis' attack couldn't even make a dent in the alien technique, but it enveloped Khan's hand in grey smoke that hid its state.

Monica gasped, but Khan acted before she could do anything. He brought his palm to his mouth and blew on it to disperse the smoke. Once the gas vanished, everyone could see that his hand was perfectly fine.

"That's it?" Khan wondered, and Francis couldn't find the strength to reply. His spell wasn't too powerful, but seeing it blocked by a bare hand was too much to take.

Khan scoffed and shook his head before turning to approach the elevator. He couldn't bother with that trivial stuff. He only wanted to drink and think about his meeting.

"Get a grip on yourself!" Monica shouted as soon as she managed to face Francis. The elevator opened by then, and Khan showed no surprise when he saw Monica hurrying to follow him inside.

"You shouldn't be so obvious," Khan chuckled and brought the bottle to his mouth once the elevator's entrance closed.

Monica ignored Khan's words and reached for his right hand. Her expression betrayed her surprise when she didn't see any wound on the palm. A black mark had appeared, but that was it.

"You should also get a grip on yourself," Khan teased while retracting his hand to show its palm and back. "See, I'm fine."

"Sorry for worrying about you," Monica pouted.

"Hey, we are still in hiding," Khan pointed out. "You should hold back in public."

"You can't expect me to stay calm when my man gets attacked," Monica muttered as she reached for Khan's hand again and tried to wipe the black mark.

"Your man?" Khan repeated as he closed his fingers on Monica's hand and pulled her closer. "I thought we weren't dating."

"We aren't!" Monica hurriedly stated before turning toward the opening entrance of the elevator.

"Wait, not here."

Khan took a step to his side and pulled Monica with him. He stood at the elevator's entrance and prevented the closing of its doors.

"No one can come now," Khan uttered. "What were you saying?"

Monica lowered her gaze but brought it back to Khan right away, and cute words left her mouth. "I wouldn't do that stuff with someone who isn't my man."

"So," Khan snickered while suppressing the urge to kiss Monica, "We aren't dating, but I am your man."

"Exactly," Monica nodded.

"That doesn't make any sense," Khan said.

"It does because I say so," Monica responded.

"How can anyone argue with that?" Khan sighed.

"You definitely can't," Monica voiced before her tone turned a bit timid. "Just accept it."

"If I am your man," Khan teased as he wrapped the arm holding the bottle around Monica's waist to pull her on him, "Does that make you my woman?"

"What do you think?" Monica whispered before letting go of Khan's hand to wrap both arms around his neck and kiss him.

"Does my woman want to spend some time in her room?" Khan asked when the kiss ended.

"I don't know if I'm in the mood," Monica played along before mentioning actual problems.

"Someone might even find out."

"Do you prefer me to drink this on a bed with Jenna?" Khan joked while lifting the bottle so that Monica could notice it.

"Press on my floor's key already," Monica snorted.

"No need," Khan smirked. "We are already here."

Monica turned toward the corridor before showing a helpless expression. Still, a bright smile broadened on her face when she noticed Khan's shameless smirk. She ended up giggling and tightening her embrace to leave another kiss on his mouth.

Khan wrapped his arms around Monica's waist. She understood the silent request and jumped on him. Her legs also performed a hug and allowed Khan to carry her across the corridor. Needless to say, their kiss didn't end even after they entered her room.

Chapter 399 Serious

A slightly unfamiliar ceiling unfolded in Khan's vision when he opened his eyes. The sight tried to confuse him, especially since the nightmare had just ended, but his sensitivity reminded him of where he was.

A smirk made its way to Khan's face when he rolled himself to his right. A mess of curly hair hid a beautiful face sleeping on a pillow. Monica had yet to wake up, and snores escaped her mouth from time to time.

'She slept through my nightmares,' Khan thought. 'Cute.'

Khan didn't return to his room last night. He had remained with Monica until they both fell asleep. They didn't do anything too intimate, but their relationship had progressed a bit. His exposed torso and her open shirt proved that.

'It's quite early,' Khan thought when he checked his phone. Luke and Bruce had sent him messages, but he wasn't in the mood to read them. Also, his mind instinctively calculated how long he had before Monica went to work.

The room was utterly silent except for Monica's breathing and occasional snores. Peace reigned, but the rustling of the sheets disturbed it when Khan crawled toward Monica and wrapped an arm around her waist.

A giggle left Monica's mouth, and a cute groan followed when Khan kissed her forehead. Monica turned to her left to use Khan's arm as a pillow, and a smile broadened on her face when her eyes opened.

"Morning," Khan whispered, and Monica snuggled closer to leave a quick kiss on his lips. Khan left her waist to remove the curls from her face, but his gesture made Monica widen her eyes.

"This isn't a dream," Monica gasped while placing both hands on Khan's chest to keep him away. "Why are you in my room?!"

"I asked nicely," Khan teased, "And you let me stay."

"This can't happen," Monica stated as panic filled her expression. "And where are your clothes?!"

"You took them off yesterday," Khan chuckled.

"No, you took them off!" Monica corrected.

"See, you remember," Khan joked.

Monica's panic only intensified when she noticed her open shirt. Khan could see her bra, so she turned and hurriedly threw the sheets on her.

Even during the turn, Monica didn't leave Khan's arm. Her head was still there, and Khan could sense her calming down when he caressed her hair.

"You always take a bit to warm up," Khan snickered as he approached Monica again and hugged her from above the sheets.

"It's your fault," Monica pouted but didn't oppose the kisses that Khan left on her neck and head.

"Is it?" Khan whispered into Monica's ear. "Am I to blame for your dream too?"

"We won't talk about that!" Monica shouted.

"But I want to hear the details," Khan complained.

Monica remained silent for a few seconds before turning toward Khan. She stared deep into his eyes, and a hand eventually reached his face to pull him down.

The two exchanged a long kiss in which Monica didn't hold back from running her fingers on Khan's bare chest. At first, her touch carried some hesitation, but she quickly let her desire take over her actions.

"The dream was nice," Monica whispered when their lips separated, "But this is better."

Another kiss followed, but Monica soon pushed Khan slightly away. The gesture surprised him, but that feeling vanished when Monica slowly removed the sheets to uncover her open shirt.

Some shyness tried to make its way to Monica's face, but her expression carried far more, and its intensity limited Khan's look at her bra to only a glance. He found her emotions far more attractive, and his eyes showed evident desire when they returned to her.

The two didn't speak anymore as they lost themselves in their intimacy. Monica's shirt soon flew away, and she didn't voice the slightest complaint. She was too busy messing with Khan's hair or exploring his back to care, and his touch only deepened her immersion.

The couple took a break only when it was clear they were about to cross another line. Monica had sat on Khan's lap by then, and her kisses grew slower and slower until she finally retracted her head.

Words didn't arrive even at that point. Monica caressed Khan's cheeks and traced the edges of his lips while his hands remained firm on her waist. He was ready to push a bit more, but Monica ended up exploding into a laugh that distracted him from his urges.

"What is it?" Khan asked with a smile.

"My mother would kill me if she knew I slept with a man," Monica revealed. "Well, she would kill you first."

"Remind me never to meet your mother," Khan replied.

"She would like you," Monica reassured, "But she would still kill you."

"The path to a wealthy woman's bed is full of dangers," Khan sighed, "And yet here I stand."

"You are an idiot," Monica giggled, "But you are the only one who wouldn't take advantage of me even when I'm sleeping right next to you."

"I'm not getting that bra off today, am I?" Khan questioned.

"Not a chance," Monica smirked. "I will also kick you out soon."

"So heartless," Khan sighed, but Monica only laughed before laying her head on his shoulder.

"You sure like this position," Khan pointed out. That wasn't the first time that Monica sat on him. They actually often ended up like that.

The lack of an immediate answer made Khan turn toward Monica. He moved away some of the curls to uncover her face. Some of her shyness had returned, but she mustered the courage to reveal her thoughts.

"You look only at me when we are like this," Monica explained.

"Are you tempting me to keep my attention on you?" Khan asked.

"What if I am?" Monica wondered.

"Such bravery for someone who could barely kiss me only a week ago," Khan joked.

"Shall I remind you that I started this?" Monica teased.

Khan snorted and tightened his grip on Monica's waist before pushing her to his right. Monica ended up with her back on the bed and Khan above her, and he didn't hold back from voicing a tease of his own. "Should I be the one to end it?"

Surprisingly enough, Monica didn't panic at all. She had laughed during the abrupt gesture, and Khan could only see a warm smile when he rested upon her.

"Disappointed?" Monica asked.

"When did you get this bold?" Khan questioned.

"I'm not bold," Monica explained, "Not now. I simply know that you won't do anything bad."

"Am I so predictable?" Khan sneered.

"No," Monica replied. "You just make me feel safe."

Khan could press on, but he didn't want anymore, not after that statement. He lowered his head and placed it on Monica's chest. She tensed up for a moment, but she began to caress his hair when she understood that he had no bad intentions.

"I'm reaching my limit," Monica eventually mumbled, but her voice turned into a mixture of a moan and a shout when Khan left a kiss on the exposed skin right above the bra. "Khan!"

"Alright, alright," Khan laughed and lifted himself only to see Monica with her arms crossed above her chest.

"I don't feel safe anymore," Monica pouted, and Khan laughed even more as he lay beside her.

Monica pretended to be angry, but she still let Khan pull her in his arms. She nestled on his shoulder, and her hands went back on his torso while she immersed herself in his cuddles.

"I should kick you out right now," Monica complained, even if her actions sent the opposite message.

"Your alarm has yet to ring," Khan pointed out. "We have time."

"Did you check your phone?" Monica asked.

"Luke and Bruce sent me something," Khan revealed. "I didn't read it."

"It's obviously about Francis," Monica stated.

"I was too busy hearing your snores to care," Khan teased.

"I don't snore!" Monica snorted, but Khan pulled her closer and interrupted her next complaint.

"Khan," Monica pleaded.

"I can't get enough of teasing you," Khan laughed.

"Come on," Monica said in her cute voice while pulling Khan's head to make him face her. "You need to deal with the situation."

"What situation?" Khan scoffed. "The guy can't handle his booze."

"He attacked you with a spell," Monica reminded, "In front of many witnesses. You'll have Luke and me on your side. His family won't be able to do anything."

"Politics," Khan cursed. "I've killed for far less on the battlefield. He is lucky I have some self-control."

"I'm sure he will think twice about attacking you after yesterday," Monica reassured. "Everyone was quite stunned."

Something changed in the synthetic mana and made Khan glance at the source of that event. Monica had regained her intense gaze, and Khan couldn't help but tease her.

"Did you like what you saw?" Khan asked as he brought their faces closer.

"I didn't like seeing Francis attacking you," Monica exclaimed before her voice turned into a whisper. "Though you did look cool."

"Did I?" Khan whispered before the two fell into a kiss that Monica immediately interrupted.

"We did enough of that today," Monica scolded. "Let's figure out how to deal with Francis before my shift starts."

"Who said it was enough?" Khan tried to bring back the previous mood, but Monica defeated his attempt with her worried face.

"Khan, this is serious," Monica pleaded.

"You are so unfair," Khan cursed, and Monica snuggled closer to hide her shy smile. She was in his arms, wearing only her bra and a skirt. Khan couldn't possibly refuse her.

"How to deal with Francis?" Khan wondered. "Maybe I should really kill him. We are on Milia 222. Bad stuff happens."

Khan was mostly joking, at least in that conversation, but Monica had an unexpected reaction. Her face grew slightly cold, and she stared at the ceiling while her thoughts ran wild.

"We would have to make the corpse disappear," Monica added. "You can't leave any trace against a wealthy family."

"We?" Khan repeated as his attention went to Monica. "You can be quite dark."

"I have no sympathy for that scumbag," Monica scoffed, "And he even had the gall to attack you."

"You are cute when you are mad," Khan teased, but his tone soon turned serious. "Still, killing is a big deal. You shouldn't take it lightly."

"I'm the descendant of a wealthy family," Monica stated. "I've been trained to kill."

"It's always different when you are in the real world," Khan sighed. He still recalled his first kill on Istrone. He didn't want Monica to experience that. If possible, he didn't want anyone to experience that.

"No, I did actual training for that," Monica explained. "At first, I started with normal animals, then Tainted creatures. My family never put me in front of a human, but I know it's coming."

Khan could only praise that kind of training. It was similar to what he had taught on Reebfell, except for the human part. He would never force anyone to take a life.

"A criminal?" Khan asked.

"Criminals sentenced to death," Monica revealed. "Most families had stopped doing that. Istrone's rebellion rekindled the market."

"It makes sense," Khan admitted. "Many descendants died on that damned planet."

Monica saw Khan diverting his gaze to lose himself in sad memories, so she brought his face back to her and reassured him. "Many survived thanks to you."

Khan smiled. He appreciated Monica's effort, but the mood was growing intimate again, and she didn't have time for that, so he pinched her waist to distract her.

"What was that for?" Monica whined.

"Don't jump into my problems already," Khan scolded. "I'll tell you if I need help."

"Do you think I'd be in the way?" Monica asked in a sad tone.

"I think I'd have to face your mother if we get discovered," Khan joked.

Monica didn't let the joke distract them from the issue. She knew she couldn't ask too much from Khan since they had only been together for a week. Yet, she didn't want him to cut her out from a part of his life.

"Are you so eager to see the dark side of my life?" Khan continued since Monica was still staring at him.

"It's still your life, isn't it?" Monica replied. "Being with you only during the good sides would make this kind of meaningless, don't you think?"

Monica's resolve stunned Khan. She could be shy, moody, and childish, but her actions showed her maturity. She had told Khan to keep things simple, but she didn't make that decision lightly. She had already accepted that they would face rough patches, most of which would come from him.

"Don't look at me like that," Monica scolded since Khan's intense gaze brought back her shyness.

Khan felt devoid of thoughts. His desires took over and made him leave a quick kiss on Monica's lips. She didn't even try to refuse it, and the two soon rekindled their intimate moment. It even seemed more passionate than before, but the universe didn't let them enjoy it.

A groan escaped Khan's mouth when Monica's alarm rang. He didn't want that moment to end so soon, and she shared his feelings. Still, her hands were tied.

"You need to go," Monica whispered while the alarm continued to ring. "I need to shower and change."

"We can do that together," Khan suggested.

"Not a chance," Monica giggled before leaving a quick kiss on Khan's lips. The time to kick him out had come, but she diverted her gaze and wore her timid expression while a suggestion came out of her mouth. "Though, maybe you can come earlier tomorrow."

"Is this an actual request?" Khan teased.

"Don't tease me even now," Monica complained, "And get off me already."

Monica pushed Khan, and he let her win. He straightened his position and crawled out of bed, but his eyes remained on Monica.

"Stop it," Monica voiced as she picked up a pillow and hugged it to hide her chest. "I'll be late."

Khan heaved a helpless sigh and finally diverted his gaze to search for his stuff. His elegant pullover was on the floor, while the sheath was on the bedside table. Wearing them took only a few seconds, and he didn't hesitate to approach the entrance afterward.

"Wait," Monica called before Khan could leave. She hurriedly left the bed to reach him and voice a request. "Give me one last kiss."

"I got myself a needy woman," Khan stated before fulfilling Monica's request. She was still hugging the pillow, so the kiss didn't become too passionate.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Monica said once the kiss ended. "Come earlier, okay?"

Khan obviously nodded, and Monica tightened her hug on the pillow. The two had understood each other without saying anything specific. They wanted to spend more time together, and that new agreement made both of them desire that tomorrow could come faster.

Khan felt the need to take a deep breath when he left the room. He knew something would have happened if the alarm didn't interrupt them. Even Monica had realized that. Her request probably came from that understanding.

'It's getting serious quickly,' Khan couldn't help but think when he recalled the meaningful expression that Monica had worn after their last kiss.

Monica's affection wasn't necessarily a problem, but Khan knew that he had worn a similar expression, and that could be troublesome. He didn't experience emotions like a human. He felt far more.

'I'm really getting into it,' Khan acknowledged.

Of course, that was a mere realization. It felt strange to be so involved in something like that, but the time for hesitation had long since passed. Khan was way past holding back now.

The departure from the room opened Khan's mind to the rest of his problems. Francis' attack and the time spent with Monica had interrupted his review of the meeting with Raymond, but the walk back to his bed allowed him to resume it.

Two main points immediately became clear. First, Khan's parents were far more important than he had initially believed. Also, the nightmares probably were a known consequence of the Tainted status, at least among certain experts.

Both points were deeper than they appeared. Bret's banishment to the Slums had to hide something meaningful, which probably involved Elizabeth or the procedure used on Khan to stabilize the mutations.

Khan didn't have enough data to side with one of the two hypotheses. Both of them could be true as far as he knew. Still, when he added Raymond's interests to the equation, he felt that the procedure had a greater role in the banishment and removal of his family name.

The knowledge of the nightmares brought up equally deep questions. Khan still had to rely on Raymond's interests and vague words to justify his ideas. Yet, if Raymond had planned his revelations, Khan could easily conclude that he wasn't the only one cursed with the scenes of the unknown solar system.

'Am I in the middle of a fucking conspiracy?' Khan wondered. 'How much is the Global Army hiding?'

Sadly, the only ones who could answer Khan's questions were unreachable. His father was the most accessible expert, but his restrictions made an interrogation impossible. Moreover, Khan still didn't know how he felt about him.

That torrent of wild thoughts kept Khan company even after he returned to his room. Jenna had woken up since she had sensed his arrival, and a predictable question soon left her mouth.

"[I want to hear every detail]," Jenna requested before understanding that something was wrong. "[Khan, what happened]?"

The question snapped Khan back to reality and focusing on Jenna helped him sort out his messy thoughts. He immediately jumped on the bed, and she entered his embrace while she waited for him to begin his tale.

Khan told Jenna everything. She was the best consultant and friend in that situation since she saw mana like him. Her knowledge was actually deeper than Khan's, so she could uncover details he might have missed.

However, Jenna's answer turned out to be quite disappointing. "[The chaos element is the best to trigger mutations, but trying to give them a direction would go against its nature. As for the Nak, I truly don't know]."

Truth be told, Khan had predicted a similar outcome. Everything was too vague even for Jenna, but she was aware of the situation now. Khan could count on her senses to make up for what he missed.

"[Anyway, we should definitely kill Francis and get Monica to help with his corpse]," Jenna changed the topic. "[No one will hear about him again]."

Jenna radiated proper killing intent. Learning about Francis' sudden attack had put a target on him. She didn't even care about the words he had used. She simply couldn't forgive him for trying to hurt Khan.

Khan didn't immediately address that killing intent. Other problems ran through his mind, and Francis wasn't part of them. He still saw a vague picture, and only Jenna could tell him how reasonable it was.

"[Hey]," Khan called. "[What do you think I would feel in the presence of a Nak]?"

"[I think words wouldn't be able to describe your reaction]," Jenna revealed.

"[I'm talking on an instinctive level]," Khan explained. "[I can't stop thinking about the fourth asteroid and that strange sensation. I don't know. Your prediction and Raymond's interest in the Nak seem to create a pattern]."

"Imminent chaos," Jenna repeated the exact words said to Khan during their first encounter. "[It will most likely feel like an attraction, an instinctive sense of belonging]."

"[I have felt drawn to that sensation]," Khan pointed out.

"[Khan]," Jenna continued, "[I wouldn't have missed the presence of a Nak. That's something no one can miss]."

"[What if there was a communication method used only by Nak]?" Khan wondered, "[Something similar to what the Nele use]."

"[It would still cause visible changes in the mana]," Jenna stated. "[Still, it does feel oddly connected. There are some coincidences]."

"[Especially if your prediction is true]," Khan added.

The hypothesis put Jenna in a pensive state. Her predictions relied on patterns, which she created through her sensitivity. There was a chance that her senses had unconsciously perceived something and had added it to her mental image of Milia 222.

Nevertheless, the matter remained unrealistic. Jenna was a rare talent among the Nele, but her superiors remained above her in many aspects. She might be unable to recognize or notice extremely faint sensations, but they wouldn't escape Caja or other leaders.

"[Whatever it is]," Jenna eventually spoke, "[We'll face it together. I'll be at your side before Monica can even arrive]."

"[Your jealousy is getting worse]," Khan commented.

"[I don't care]," Jenna snorted. "[She must learn her place. She must know that she can sleep with you only because I allow it]."

Khan didn't even try to argue with Jenna. He laughed and checked his phone to read the messages that had arrived during the night. Luke and Bruce had mostly expressed concern for his state and their support in an eventual political struggle, but a new text reached the device while he was still busy coming up with replies.

'What?!' Khan shouted in his mind when he read Luke's new message. 'Another theft happened? How is that possible?'

Chapter 400 Deployment

Luke didn't add any detail to his message, but its contents were more than clear. Another prototype of the reinforced fabric had gone missing, so a meeting had become necessary. The team had to gather to plan the next move.

Khan didn't immediately leave his room. His eyes remained on the phone while his thoughts ran wild. He probably was the team member with the best understanding of the situation, but that only made it harder for him to accept what had just happened.

The factory was an isolated environment with limited space. The Cobsend family couldn't add too many guards. Yet, it had probably implemented new security measures after the thefts.

Moreover, Luke's team had spent the last month tracking the various warehouses and vehicles connected to the industrial district. That action couldn't go unnoticed, so the criminals involved with the thefts were bound to know they had eyes on them.

Most criminals would choose to lay low in that situation, and that without adding Raymond's arrival and Khan's attack on the buyers to the equation. The thieves were suffering attacks from both sides, but the factory had still lost another prototype.

'The theft must have been recent,' Khan thought. 'We might be able to catch up with the criminals if we hurry, or so Luke will think.'

Khan could guess what Luke had in mind. The last theft had put a target on the vehicles that had recently entered the industrial district. Luke would probably send the team after them, but Khan's guts told him that the effort would be useless.

The criminals involved in the theft were by no means ordinary. They wouldn't commit mistakes, and the very probable inside help would cover any trace.

Luke's plan would probably make everyone waste time, but Khan couldn't refuse to follow his orders. He had to play his part, so someone else had to handle the other aspects of the investigation.

"[What do you need me to do]?" Jenna asked as soon as Khan turned toward her. She had read the message, and his expression had told her enough.

"[Luke will probably deploy us]," Khan explained. "[You can't stay here on your own, not with Raymond around. I need you among your species where no one can touch you]."

"[Do you really think I'll leave you]?" Jenna asked as she half-turned to lay her left side on Khan's chest. "[I need to watch your back now more than ever]."

"[Jenna]," Khan called.

"[Don't Jenna me]," Jenna complained. "[You want to keep me safe, but so do I]."

"[It's not about keeping you safe]," Khan tried to justify.

"[What is it then]?" Jenna asked as she grabbed Khan's neck to push him down. Khan's back ended up on the mattress, with Jenna pinning him down by pressing on his shoulders.

Jenna wasn't holding back. True strength flowed through her arms to prevent Khan from moving. He would have to fight back properly to break free.

"[I will force you to accept my help if I must]," Jenna continued as her expression gained crazy traits. Even the synthetic mana around her echoed her seemingly frenzied state.

Jenna would appear truly dangerous from the outside, but Khan ended up smiling at that scene. He knew what was happening. Her emotions had simply made her snap.

"[Do you think I'm replacing you with Monica]?" Khan joked.

"[That's not what I said]," Jenna pointed out. "[But, you aren't sending her away, are you? You are even sleeping with her now. That place belongs to me]."

"[Listen to my mind]," Khan said while thinking about his affection toward Jenna. "[Listen to what the mana is telling you]."

Khan's attempt to calm down Jenna had the opposite effect. His affection added fuel to her frenzied state and made her grab his right hand to place it on her chest.

"[Take me]," Jenna almost begged. "[Make me yours and keep me at your side forever. Use me as you plea-]!"

Jenna let out a surprised gasp when Khan squeezed her chest. The remaining arm on his shoulder lost strength, allowing him to sweep it away without hurting her.

Jenna fell on Khan, but he stopped her before she could slam her head on his. She immediately tried to kiss him now that they were so close, but a thumb stopped her lips before they could reach his mouth.

"[Khan]," Jenna whined as she grabbed Khan's head and tried to close the distance that separated their lips.

"[You will do as I say now]," Khan declared, sending as much authority as possible into the synthetic mana.

A tremor ran through Jenna when those words reached her ears. She stopped struggling to kiss Khan and remained still as she waited for his next order.

"[Get up]," Khan voiced, and Jenna followed the order. She straightened her back to stand on her knees, and Khan used that chance to sit on the bed.

"[Come here]," Khan continued while sounding even bossier. He was playing on Jenna's desire to please him to make her calm down, but that was only the beginning of the process.

Jenna fell in Khan's embrace, and he adjusted her position to make her right side lay on his chest. Warm cuddles followed, and Jenna shook whenever his fingers touched her skin. She had grown incredibly sensitive in her frenzied state, and Khan didn't hold back from kissing her head from time to time.

Difficult minutes went by. Jenna still experienced bursts of emotions that made her try to kiss or tease Khan, but he mustered the entirety of his self-control to avoid that outcome. There would be no going back if he accepted her even once, and that didn't apply only to Jenna.

Jenna's breathing eventually grew ragged before slowing down to return to a normal pace. She nestled deeper in Khan's chest as her emotions became quieter. She was finally calming down, and Khan kept cuddling her until she regained her sanity.

"[I didn't expect-]," Jenna muttered.

"[It's fine]," Khan interrupted her. "[We knew something like this would happen]."

"[I'm getting too dangerous for you]," Jenna started to panic. "[I almost-]."

"[Don't even start]," Khan scolded while flicking Jenna's forehead.

Jenna went silent, but her beautiful eyes often peeked at Khan's concerned expression. A smile slowly broadened on her face, and Khan felt the need to curse when he recognized the emotions she radiated.

"[Are you about to jump on me again]?" Khan asked.

"[I was just fantasizing]," Jenna giggled. "[I demand you get this bossy more often]."

Khan shook his head, but he also heaved a sigh of relief. Jenna had gone back to her normal state. They had managed to avoid the crisis.

"[That's my lewd girl]," Khan teased while tightening the hug on Jenna. He had to leave to attend the meeting, but she had the priority. He needed to clear things up with her first.

Khan wasn't trying to sideline Jenna. He simply didn't want her to remain alone in a building owned by the Cobsend family. Yet, he still needed her in the investigation, and he made sure to be as transparent as possible with his following words.

"[I need you to join the search for Rodney]," Khan explained, "[At least while I'm away]."

"[I get it]," Jenna sighed, "[But don't leave me alone for too long]."

"[I wouldn't dare]," Khan reassured. "[Contact me if you find anything or need me to spoil you for a bit]."

"[I won't even try to hold back]," Jenna giggled.

"[You are impossible]," Khan joined her laugh.

A few more minutes passed, but the couple eventually separated and dressed up. Luke sent another message in the meantime, but Khan ignored it as he hurried outside the room with Jenna.

Nothing could escape the two's senses, so they went straight for the main hall and outside the building. The path was clear since the team was busy with the meeting, so Khan could send Jenna away without alerting anyone.

Khan went back into the building after the separation. Now that Jenna was outside the Cobsend family's reach, he could focus on the investigation, so he didn't hesitate to use the elevator to reach the last floor.

The meeting was in the same room with the interactive map of Lower Level 1. Khan only had to knock on its door to enter a tense environment filled with sour faces and anger. The synthetic mana echoed everyone's feelings, and Luke turned out to be the most intense of the group.

"What took you so long?!" Luke shouted when the entrance closed behind Khan.

"I had to deal with a problem," Khan vaguely explained.

"What can be more important than this?" Luke scolded as Khan approached the interactive desk.

"These criminals had the gall to steal a prototype with me here. This is a direct insult to my family."

"Luke," Khan called while mustering the calmest words he could think of, "I came as soon as possible. You know I did."

Khan's evident honesty made Luke realize that his previous words had been too much. He didn't address them to save face, but he took a deep breath to calm down and avoid falling prey to his anger. Sadly, he wasn't the only one annoyed by Khan's late arrival.

The whole team had gathered in the room, and, except for Master Ivor, everyone was standing around the interactive table. Silence reigned, so the snort that followed sounded extremely loud. Francis didn't add anything else, but his gesture expressed his stance.

Khan wasn't in the mood for games. His relationship with Monica had yet to provide proper emotional and physical release, and the previous interaction with Jenna had only pushed him to his limits.

Luke had also deserved a polite and collected answer, but Francis didn't fall in that category, and Khan was already beyond holding back with him. Francis stood on the opposite side of the desk, and his eyes widened when a threatening figure suddenly jumped on it.

"Khan!" Bruce shouted when Khan landed on the interactive table and fixed his cold gaze on Francis.

"Come on," Khan ordered, completely ignoring Bruce. "Speak your mind."

"Khan, this is not the time," Luke stated.

Khan's eyes remained on Francis for the whole time. The latter kept a straight face, but the synthetic mana around him reeked of his fear. He was acting tough to save face, but his resolve shook as that chilling gaze remained on him.

"I've killed things three times your size in Ecoruta's trenches while bullets flew above my head," Khan slowly said as he crouched on the interactive desk. "Don't fuck with me."

"Khan!" Luke called as he stepped before Francis to hinder Khan's path.

"How do you expect me to work with him?" Khan asked, even if his gaze remained on Francis.

"You won't work with him today," Luke quickly explained. "I'm splitting you into different teams. You are with Master Ivor."

"Master Ivor?" Khan repeated as he finally looked at Luke.

Master Ivor was standing near the metal wall, but he left it to approach the interactive desk after Luke's words. He walked until he reached Francis and even placed a hand on his shoulder.

"We will go after the deliveries that happened in the past hours," Master Ivor said while wearing a polite smile. "We must deal with the only one handled by Orlats."

Khan shot another chilling glance at Francis before stepping down from the desk. The situation was slightly different from his initial prediction. He would understand the team's deployment, but Master Ivor's presence would tell everyone that the operation had the blessing of the Cobsend family.

"There will be no turning back after this," Khan pointed out.

"I need to make this attack official and compensate any innocent party," Luke summarized. "I will only turn my family into a public enemy otherwise."

"What if we don't find anything?" Khan wondered.

"I will have to accept that the task is beyond me," Luke declared.

Luke's sad situation became clear after that short explanation. A theft had happened under his direct supervision. He had already failed in his task. The current assault was only a desperate move meant to save his reputation.

"Alright," Khan nodded. "I won't go easy on the Orlats if that's what you want."

"Thank you," Luke sighed in relief.

"Mister Alstair, if I may," Master Ivor continued while pulling Francis' shoulder to make him half-turn. "Lieutenant Khan outranks you. It's only proper for a descendant with your status to show some manners."

Khan didn't expect Master Ivor to scold Francis, and he felt even more surprised to see the latter listening to his words. Francis gulped before performing a military salute and mustering the politest tone he could. "I'm sorry, Lieutenant Khan. I've been disrespectful."

Francis' emotions didn't match his words, but Khan couldn't use them to contradict him. He nodded and let the matter go for now as he brought his focus to Master Ivor.

"I can update Lieutenant Khan on the road," Master Ivor announced while letting Francis go. "We can't waste time."

"Is that okay?" Luke asked Khan.

"No problem," Khan exclaimed.

"Very well," Luke stated as he clapped his hands. "It's time to go. Don't kill anyone, but don't let these factions take you lightly either. Good luck!"

The team split into different groups that hurried toward the exit. Khan could confirm that Monica and Martha were together, and he nodded when both of them shot concerned gazes at him.

Khan moved once Master Ivor reached him, and the two left the room without saying anything. Only Luke and Bruce remained behind, but they didn't add anything either.

Master Ivor and Khan remained silent even after they left the building. A car was waiting for them on the street past the sidewalk, and they entered it without wasting any time.

"Ecoruta," Master Ivor spoke once the car started moving. "I heard that the Stal are huge."

"That's not their strangest feature," Khan chuckled while trying to suppress the memory of the Stal's sexual organs.

"You sure have seen a lot for your young age," Master Ivor sighed. "It must be hard to contain yourself before such blatant disrespect."

"Why did you help me?" Khan wondered since Master Ivor mentioned the issue. "I'm grateful, but I don't understand why."

"Luke asked me to," Master Ivor revealed. "I am quite respected among wealthy families. I can scold Mister Alstair without putting any blame on the Cobsend family."

Khan appreciated Luke's concern, but his relationship with Francis remained extremely poor. It even seemed that nothing could fix it, especially since he had every intention to keep dating Monica.

"Ivor, sir, lend me your experience," Khan eventually requested. "What do you think I should do with Francis?"

"I'm afraid there's nothing you can do," Master Ivor chuckled. "Mister Alstair seems set on hating you."

"That's not funny," Khan cursed, even if a short laugh ended up leaving his mouth.

"Do not despair," Master Ivor reassured. "Earning the enmity of a wealthy descendant is a common occurrence, especially for someone as popular as you."

"Won't that doom my career?" Khan wondered.

"Success creates enemies," Master Ivor stated. "It's perfectly natural."

Khan sighed, but Master Ivor promptly added something. "Lieutenant Khan, this old man thinks you did the right thing. Showing weakness would have only led to bullying. Sometimes, the clueless kids need to learn their place."

"Clueless kids?" Khan snickered. He didn't expect Master Ivor to be disrespectful toward wealthy descendants.

"I trust this conversation won't leave this vehicle," Master Ivor casually uttered.

"You have my word," Khan laughed, and the car's insides went silent.

The vehicle took a while to reach its destination, but Khan and Master Ivor eventually found themselves before a large two-story building. The place had a vast metal gate and no windows. Moreover, its surfaces hindered Khan's senses.

Two Orlats guarded the gate, but both tensed up when they saw Khan and Master Ivor walking in their direction. Those aliens were mere first-level warriors without great sensitivity, but the pressure radiated by their opponents told them that they were outmatched.

"We need to talk with your boss," Master Ivor announced after reaching the gate. "Let us through."

"No human gets inside without previous authorization," One of the Orlats exclaimed, even if his voice grew fainter as Khan added more coldness to the synthetic mana in the area.

"I can create a path," Khan suggested while turning toward Master Ivor.

Master Ivor didn't get the chance to reply since the gate suddenly started to open. Its metal doors slid to create a narrow passage, and a stronger Orlat became visible in that gap.

"We don't want any problem," The newly arrived second-level warrior stated, "But we will ask for some form of compensation."

"That won't be a problem," Master Ivor quickly announced as he made his way through the narrow passage. Khan followed him, and a vast warehouse full of metal boxes and other items unfolded in his view.

The warehouse had a straightforward design. Two staircases in the back of the area connected the first floor to the second, and a few crews of Orlats moved the various items according to their orders. Only five second-level warriors occupied the place. All the others were weaker than them.

"Open these boxes," Master Ivor ordered without showing any trace of his previous friendliness. "We need to check them."

"We can't show you the goods," The second-level warrior who had welcomed the duo complained.

"And you can't stop us from opening them by force," Master Ivor responded.

The Orlat frowned before Master Ivor's serious stance. He didn't want to follow his orders, but he appeared more scared of the consequences of his refusal.

"The Cobsend family will have to pay a steep price to compensate for this insult," The Orlat threatened.

"That won't be a problem," Master Ivor replied. "Now, the boxes."

The Orlat kept his eyes on Master Ivor for a few more seconds before turning toward the other second-level warriors in the warehouse and nodding. The latter gave new orders to the workers, who began to open the various boxes to show their contents.

Khan hid his surprise but studied every reaction. The Orlat stayed true to their fame by knowing that Khan and Master Ivor were working for the Cobsend family, and their decision to cooperate also spoke for their political skills.

A fight would have only damaged the warehouse and the goods. Instead, accepting Master Ivor's conditions would give that faction the chance to blackmail the Cobsend family without losing anything. That was the smart choice, but Khan still found something odd.

In theory, Master Ivor was the biggest threat and the figure with more authority. The Orlats were also bound to know his level. Yet, Khan found himself at the center of most worried glances. Even the first-level warriors paid more attention to him.

Everything became clear when Khan heard some of the faint murmurs exchanged by the Orlats. The words "chaos wielder" explained how far his fame stretched. Those workers were probably aware of his actions in the dock.

"It's better to be feared in some cases," Master Ivor said while Khan was still immersed in his inspection. "Fame can be a good shield."

"I'll take that as a compliment," Khan uttered.

"It was a compliment," Master Ivor chuckled. "Let's go, Lieutenant Khan. We have many boxes to check."

Khan could rely on his senses to check for the reinforced fabric since he had memorized its unique aura. Still, the boxes could have hidden drawers, and only a personal inspection could uncover them.

The warehouse was big enough to contain hundreds of boxes, and the variety of items they held was also surprising. Provisions, magical weapons, and tools of various shapes and functions crossed Khan's vision and awakened his curiosity, but he couldn't find anything connected to the reinforced fabric.

That result matched what Khan had initially predicted. The Orlats weren't on his target list in the first place either, so he felt no disappointment once the inspection ended and left him empty-handed.

"What now?" Khan asked after Master Ivor checked the hour on his phone.

"Now, we hope the other teams find something," Master Ivor sighed.

"And if they don't?" Khan wondered.

"You heard Luke," Master Ivor whispered to make sure that the Orlats in the warehouse didn't hear him. "Our stay on Milia 222 might come to an end in that case."

"Are you done?" One of the second-level warriors shouted since Khan and Master Ivor were merely standing at the center of the warehouse. "Our business must continue."

"The Cobsend family will send a negotiator in a few days," Master Ivor promptly announced.

"Thank you for your cooperation."

Master Ivor turned to leave at that point, and Khan followed him. It was clear that the outcome had left a bitter taste in the old man's mouth. He probably wanted Luke to succeed and gain some respect in the family, but the universe didn't cooperate.

Khan knew enough to keep the investigation alive even after today's failure, and he considered whether to say something in the meantime. Master Ivor could be the perfect middle-man since Khan's message spoke about a traitor in the Cobsend family, but something distracted him as soon as he left the warehouse.

"I've called the car," Master Ivor revealed once the gate closed behind the duo. "It should come here in a matter of minutes."

"You go ahead," Khan replied as he carefully inspected his surroundings. "I have something to do."

"Lieutenant Khan, it might not be wise to act on your own," Master Ivor warned. "The general mood won't be happy if the others come back empty-handed too."

"I'm afraid Luke will have to trust me on this one," Khan declared before making up his mind and facing Master Ivor properly. "Tell him that I'll reveal everything once I get back."

Master Ivor looked deep into Khan's eyes for a few seconds before diverting his gaze. He seemed to lose interest in the matter as he said his goodbyes. "Good luck, Lieutenant Khan."

Khan only needed to read the synthetic mana to know that Master Ivor was simply being protective over Luke. There seemed to be genuine affection between the two, but Khan didn't linger too much in that inspection. He had to leave now.

A familiar presence made Khan cross the street and turn a corner to end up in a relatively isolated area surrounded by buildings. He was still close to the warehouse and could even sense Master Ivor from his position, but his entire attention ended up on a lonely car parked near the sidewalk.

The car didn't have anything special except for the familiar presence coming out of the slightly lowered window in the back. Other vehicles also crossed it and reassured Khan about the area's safety, but he still walked around the district to avoid ending up in another trap.

Once the inspection ended, Khan headed for the car but didn't immediately approach the backseats. He stopped in front of the pilot's window when he reached the vehicle and knocked on it before pointing down with his fingers.

The window went down and revealed the human pilot behind it. The dark glass had blocked Khan's senses, but he could now inspect the first-level warrior on the steering wheel. The middle-aged man seemed scared of him, and he took that as a good sign.

"I'll make this thing explode if you try anything funny," Khan threatened. "Are we clear?"

The pilot slowly nodded, and Khan checked the reaction of the synthetic mana to confirm that his message had gotten through. His interest in the middle-aged man vanished at that point, and he turned to approach the backseats.

A mere pull unlocked the door and revealed a luxurious place. The back of the car featured a rectangular area with many comfortable seats, but Khan ignored everything to focus on the smirking figure that had unfolded in his view.

"Your senses are something else," Rodney announced while inspecting Khan from head to toe. "Maybe I should have really listened to our alien teachers."

"Give me one reason not to kill you right away," Khan threatened as his hand went on his sheath. He was still outside the car, but he was confident in killing Rodney before the pilot could set off.

"Hey, hey," Rodney laughed. "You turned me into a prisoner, and I tried to kill you. The way I see it, we are even."

"I turned you into a prisoner because you tried to kill me," Khan corrected.

"Let's not linger on old details," Rodney casually voiced. "You are alive, and I'm almost free. Nothing else matters."

"One reason," Khan repeated. He wasn't in the mood for games, especially with Rodney.

"No fun as always," Rodney shook his head. "I'll give you two reasons. First, if I don't return, your signed letter goes public. I believe you don't want to deal with that."

"That's easy to fix if you are nowhere to be found," Khan declared.

"How cold," Rodney laughed. "I guess I need to use my second reason. It turns out that we are on the same side. We have to cooperate to get what we both want."

"I'll count to three," Khan warned. "One."

"Calm down," Rodney exclaimed. "Look, I took this job to make quick cash and establish some political relationship. I had no idea Raymond fucking Cobsend was involved. Isn't that what you are worried about?"