

Chaos' Heir 441

Chapter 441 Awkward

Surprise spread through the synthetic mana and fused with the faint tension that had fallen into the hall. The entire meeting area froze, and even Headmistress Holwen halted her steps.

Khan didn't know where to look, but Jack's eyes were great candidates. Still, his attention was on the entirety of the hall, and answers became clear in seconds as he listened to the symphony while adding what he had heard before.

It didn't take a genius to understand who Princess Edna was. Her title, the Headmistress' prompt reaction, and the silence that had fallen on the hall said enough. Khan couldn't even hear the usual whispers. The representatives and members of wealthy families didn't dare to utter a word. Princess Edna had to belong to a noble family.

Still, Khan's understanding went past that obvious conclusion. Jack's evaluation had made many eyes fall on him. Even the Headmistress and the Colonel had stopped focusing on Princess Edna, which didn't make sense considering her status. Something was up. Jack had to be famous, and Khan found no surprise in that.

"Preposterous," The man on Princess Edna's left scoffed. "You gave ten years to fourth-level warriors. He'd be lucky to get there in five years."

Jack ignored the comment and lost interest in Khan. His gaze went to an empty spot in the room and remained there for no apparent reason. Khan even checked the area, but his search didn't reveal anything.

"Ron, you are smarter than Jack in almost everything," Princess Edna exclaimed while glancing at the man to her left, "But he is better than you in evaluating soldiers."

Khan couldn't help but inspect the second fourth-level warrior at that point. Ron was as tall as Jack and only slightly less muscular. Still, he wore his suit with far more grace, and his presence almost replicated the general atmosphere of the hall.

Ron's features were also gentler. He had long grey hair tied into a ponytail that fell on his left shoulder, and small glasses covered his black eyes. His skin was smooth and brown, and his face was slightly sharp near the chin and cheeks.

"Princess!" Ron gasped as he adjusted his glasses. "You shouldn't reveal these details in public. Your enemies might find a way to exploit them."

"That's why you two are here," Princess Edna pointed out.

"Being careful is a duty for you," Ron declared. "You represent-."

"So, you are Captain Khan," Princess Edna stated, completely ignoring Ron. "Jack praised you, so you must be as good as the network says."

Khan still felt like a stranger in that situation, but the question made him snap out of his inspection. The Princess was talking to him, and he only knew one gesture that wouldn't cause problems.

"It's an honor to meet you, Princess Edna," Khan uttered while performing a military salute.

"I heard you fixed Rick's wimpy attitude," Princess Edna continued as if she didn't see the military salute.

Hearing about Rick forced Khan out of his stern expression. Princess Edna had basically confirmed Khan's initial guess by mentioning that name. After all, Rick came from a noble family.

'Is she from the Rassec family too?' Khan wondered while his honesty took over. "Princess, do you know Rick? How is he?"

"It's Esteemed Princess Edna for yo-," Ron warned, but Princess Edna interrupted him again.

"I only heard rumors," Princess Edna revealed. "We used to be playmates. It's hard to believe he grew a spine."

"Princess!" Ron called. "You shouldn't speak about another-!"

Ron interrupted his line when he realized that he was about to misspeak. Khan didn't miss that, but Princess Edna kept talking as if Ron didn't say anything.

"The reports were true," Princess Edna switched topics. "You are quite a looker."

"Thank you," Khan muttered. "You are quite charming yourself."

Khan realized that he had said something wrong when gasps resounded in the hall. Many eyes also fell on him, and he couldn't miss the surge of jealousy from behind. However, Princess Edna ignored the compliment to look at Ron.

"I want to go shopping," Princess Edna revealed.

"Princess, you should at least-," Ron began to say, but Princess Edna interrupted him again.

"Call the car," Princess Edna requested.

"No, Princess, you can't-," Ron almost begged.

"Jack, can you get me something to drink?" Princess Edna asked while turning toward the man on her right.

"No," Jack stated. "I can't leave your side."

"I will take care of that!" Headmistress Holwen used that chance to join the awkward conversation.

"Leticia, right?" Princess Edna asked while looking at the Headmistress. "If you would be so kind."

"It would be my pleasure," Headmistress Holwen performed a bow as she hurried toward the table, and one of the representatives close to the booze didn't hesitate to help with the task.

Princess Edna didn't bother to follow the Headmistress. She stopped looking at her after her request, and her gaze began wandering through the hall. She wasn't searching for anything specific. That seemed her way of killing time.

Khan found himself in an awkward position. He was the closest to the Princess, but Colonel Norrett's silence told him that it was better to shut up. The general reaction to his compliment had also given him similar signals, but he didn't take Monica into account.

"Miss Virrai," Monica stepped forward while performing one of her elegant bows. "It's so nice to see you again."

"Oh, Monica!" Princess Edna's eyes lit up. "I almost didn't see you. Though, I told you to call me Edna many times."

The name Virrai resounded in Khan's mind and confirmed his initial guess. Princess Edna did come from a noble family, and Monica sounded quite close to her.

"That would be improper," Monica smiled.

"Miss Solodrey's manners are impeccable as always," Ron praised. "Princess, you should learn from her."

"Where did you get that dress?" Princess Edna questioned, ignoring Ron once again. "I need it."

"You can try it on if you wish," Monica giggled, "But I'm afraid you can't have it."

"Why don't we go on a shopping spree together then?" Princess Edna requested as she stepped forward to take Monica's hands. "Ron always complains when I get something sexy, and Jack isn't much into fashion. I need a girlfriend's opinion."

"Decorum is a critical aspect of your status," Ron announced while stepping forward to reach Princess Edna's left side. Jack moved even before him, forcing Khan to retreat.

"You know I never refuse the chance to go shopping," Monica reassured. "I'll be glad to help you, but only if you do the same for me."

"Of course!" Princess Edna beamed with joy. "Still, you are making me jealous. You have always been beautiful, but you are glowing now. Any dress will look better on you."

"Thank you," Monica uttered, "But we both know who is the most beautiful woman in the Global Army. Half of the descendants fall for you with a single glance."

"Don't change the topic," Princess Edna pouted. "You did something. Tell me your secret."

"I might be inclined to reveal something after securing a few cute dresses," Monica teased.

"Let's not waste time then," Princess Edna eagerly stated. "Let's hit the shopping area right away. Ron?"

"I'm afraid I can't now, Miss Virrai," Monica refused before Ron could say anything. She even retracted her hands and took a step back to reach for Khan's left elbow.

Khan had kept track of the casual conversation without really paying attention to the words the two women exchanged. He was mostly glad that Monica had saved him from that strange situation, but her actions brought new tension.

"We are celebrating Captain Khan's promotion tonight," Monica said while bringing another hand to Khan's left elbow. "I want to be here for him."

Khan's eyes tried to widen in surprise and panic, but he retained a calm expression. Yet, the entire hall focused on him again, including Princess Edna and Ron.

"Oh," Princess Edna voiced. "Do you prefer this boring event over going shopping with me?"

"Princess!" Ron scolded.

"I'm sorry, Miss Virrai," Monica remained set on her decision. "It's not about you or the event."

Princess Edna couldn't help but focus on Khan at that point. Her beautiful green eyes went over his stern face before falling on the spot where Monica was holding him. Monica wasn't doing anything too intimate, but her stance was clear.

As for Khan, he lacked the experience to know how to behave. He could only let Monica take the lead. Of course, he appreciated her decision to remain. He almost felt the need to hold her like a true lover, but he held back and hoped she would do the same.

"Jack," Princess Edna eventually called. "Is he really stronger than me?"

"Yes," Jack replied while his gaze remained on an empty spot in the hall. "You wouldn't survive a single exchange."

Khan frowned. He couldn't understand why the Princess would try to compare herself to him. The flow of her mana was extremely smooth, but she was only a second-level warrior.

"Jack, don't insult the Princess!" Ron scolded.

"I guess you are not just stars and good looks," Princess Edna sighed. "Fine, I'll stick around, but I want that date, and you need to tell me your secret."

"Thank you for understanding, Miss Virrai," Monica performed a half-bow while squeezing Khan's elbow.

Khan understood the silent message and also lowered his head while voicing polite words. "I'm honored to have you here, Princess Edna."

"Princess Edna," Headmistress Holwen approached the group now that the Princess had expressed her desire to stay. "Your drink."

"Thank you, Leticia," Princess Edna stated but didn't reach for the drink. Instead, Ron carefully took it from Headmistress Holwen's hands and released an invisible spell to inspect it.

Khan used that distraction to glance at Colonel Norrett, and the latter glared at him while nodding a few times. His silent reply was clear. Khan had to go along with that development.

Ron soon handed the drink to Princess Edna, and she promptly stepped forward to reach Monica. The latter turned, forcing Khan to follow along since she didn't leave his elbow, and Princess Edna's guards could only adapt to the new situation.

Jack took Princess Edna's left side and followed her while his gaze remained lost in the hall. Instead, Ron felt forced to stand on Khan's right due to a lack of free spots, and his glare rarely left him.

'What the fuck is even happening?' Khan cursed as that awkward group approached the table with the various representatives.

Khan was truly lost. Nothing in his life had prepared him for that development. Yet, he managed to exchange a glance with Monica, which revealed her hidden shy side. She was also doing her best, and he found new strength in the desire to be worthy of her efforts.

The representatives around the table had long since gotten near the entrance. They had hoped for a chance to talk with Princess Edna, but the recent development forced them to wait for the awkward group to get to them.

"Princess Edna," Robert Bizelli called since he was the closest to the awkward group. "Your presence here is a most-welcomed surprise. It's an honor to meet you."

Princess Edna glanced at Ron, and he didn't hesitate to explain. "Robert Bizelli of the Bizelli family. He is a renowned surgeon."

"Oh, Bizelli," Princess Edna exclaimed while facing Robert. "I had a meeting with your matriarch two months ago. Your hospitality was impeccable."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it, Princess," Robert thanked. "Your funds won't go to waste."

"The Bizelli family never disappointed the Global Army," Princess Edna stated. "I'm sure this time won't be any different."

Robert performed a polite bow as the awkward group walked past him, but he lifted his head in time to exchange a glance with Khan. The man managed to nod in approval, and an honest smile even broadened on his face.

Mister Dunac came afterward, and all the arrogance shown before vanished before Princess Edna. He even began to sweat as he muttered the best greetings he could think of. "Princess Edna, I'm humbled by your presence."

"Mister Murray Dunac from the Dunac family," Ron explained when Princess Edna looked at him for answers.

"Dunac," Princess Edna repeated. "You are the same age as Captain Khan. Jack, how is he?"

Jack only took a look at Murray before voicing a single word. "Worthless."

"What?!" Murray Dunac gasped. "How can you-?"

Murray didn't get the chance to finish his line since Princess Edna walked past him. The young man was mad, but he didn't dare to say anything and even stepped aside when his presence threatened to hinder Jack's way.

Khan remained silent and let Monica lead him alongside the Princess. Needless to say, most representatives completely ignored him due to the presence of a descendant of a noble family. However, some looks fell on him, and very few of them shared Robert's genuine happiness.

Many representatives appeared interested in the relationship between Khan and Monica. They never asked anything specific, but their faces and eyes revealed the truth.

Instead, a few showed some envy toward Khan, which wasn't exactly surprising. He was almost walking hand in hand with Monica, and Princess Edna had even silently accepted his presence. Most representatives would kill to be in his position.

Luckily for Khan, no one dared to insult or crack jokes aimed at putting him in a bad light. Princess Edna's presence forced everyone to be respectful, but Khan knew that the event would have profound consequences, and he wouldn't be able to study them until everything ended.

Slowly but surely, Princess Edna exchanged a few lines with all the representatives in the hall. Those interactions had rarely given Khan a chance to speak, but that was for the best. Everyone would think highly of him after that night, and he didn't have to utter any word to achieve that.

"We are done, right?" Princess Edna asked once the round of greetings ended.

"Princess, it would still be proper to remain-," Ron responded, but his lines never had the chance to last until their end.

"So, we are done," Princess Edna announced. "Monica, let's hit the shops now."

"Miss Virrai, the dinner has barely begun," Monica pointed out. "Leaving already would be-."

"If it's because of Captain Khan," Princess Edna interrupted, "He should come with us."

"What?" Monica gasped, and Ron echoed her question.

"Princess," Ron continued. "A promotion is an important event deserving of celebrations. It would be disrespectful to everyone in this room to take away the main guest."

"We should let Captain Khan decide," Princess Edna suggested, and the entire hall turned toward Khan.

'The universe must have something against me,' Khan cursed. Princess Edna had put him in a pickle, but the matter had a positive side. No one would blame him if he decided to leave. Spending a night with a noble family's descendant would actually deepen his fame.

"How could I refuse Princess Edna's request?" Khan said as an honest smile made its way onto his face. He didn't enjoy those formal meetings, so his true feelings came out.

"Wait," Monica called before the situation could evolve. "It wouldn't be fair for Captain Khan to leave because of me. I'll come on my own."

Khan and Monica couldn't help but exchange a meaningful glance. The two had inspected the matter from different perspectives and had reached opposite conclusions.

Monica wanted Khan to establish connections with the wealthy representatives. Her previous actions had shown her support, and Princess Edna had even played along. Yet, he didn't get the chance to show his value, which went against the event's purpose.

Instead, Khan mainly considered his potential political shields. Spending a night with Princess Edna would create an aura of mystery that would prolong his untouchable state, giving him more time to amass value and power.

Both paths were viable. There wasn't any clear mistake in either of them. Khan and Monica had simply opted for the approach that matched their personality and knowledge.

However, Khan had to admit that Monica was above him in the political field. He would gladly comply if she thought that remaining in the dinner would benefit him the most.

Monica only needed to look at the changes in Khan's expression to understand that he had accepted her approach. He even nodded to reassure her, so she let go of his elbow to prepare for her departure.

Yet, Colonel Norrett approached the group before that decision could become final, and his laugh marked the beginning of his speech. "Please, don't let us hold any of you back. Captain Khan, go ahead and accompany the Princess. After all, keeping her happy is part of your duties."

"Indeed," Headmistress Holwen promptly played along. "Duties come before pleasure. Besides, I'm sure no one here would complain."

A series of "of course!", "have fun", and "safe travels" resounded among the hall. All the representatives showed their gentlest and happiest faces while wishing the best to the group. They only wanted to avoid getting in the Princess' way, but their actions solved the silent conflict between Khan and Monica.

"It's set," Princess Edna announced. "Ron, is the car ready?"

"I still advise against it," Ron sighed.

"We'll be off then," Princess Edna exclaimed before turning without adding else.

Monica and Khan couldn't act like that. Monica made sure to perform an elegant bow to the crowd while Khan showed his military salute. He even took the chance to glance at Colonel Norrett during the gesture, and the latter's nods couldn't be more explicit. He was telling Khan not to waste that opportunity.

Khan and Monica couldn't linger too long in their goodbyes. They quickly turned to follow the Princess and her two guards. No doors remained closed on their path, and the group soon exited the embassy.

"It's here," Ron stated as a beautiful ship hovered toward the ceiling occupied by the group.

'I thought that model had to come out next year,' Khan gasped at the sight of the spaceship.

The vehicle had a half-circular shape, with its curved surface made of black glass-like material. Three engines whooshed on the opposite flat side, and dark metal covered everything else.

The ship wasn't too long, and its insides also looked relatively narrow. Yet, it was tall, and Khan knew it was meant to be one of the fastest vehicles on the market.

The vehicle showed its dark side while approaching the ceiling, and Princess Edna didn't hesitate to walk toward it. A door soon opened on the ship, and a metal platform came out to create a path.

Princess Edna, Jack, and Ron got on the metal path immediately, while Khan and Monica exchanged a hesitant glance before following along. The group soon reunited inside the ship, and Khan couldn't help but commit its insides to memory.

The ship's insides were relatively small, but Khan didn't feel cramped. Moreover, its height allowed the existence of three different floors connected by staircases dug into the metal walls.

The control desk was on the central floor, but the seats there were empty. The ship was flying through an auto-pilot system. The Princess had basically brought only Jack and Ron with her.

"To the shopping district," Princess Edna shouted, and the mechanical voice of a woman repeated the order to confirm it. A map of the Harbor appeared on the control desk, and the auto-pilot even drew the intended route before setting off.

"Don't forget about that secret," Princess Edna teased as she reached one of the seats on the central floor and took out her phone. "I will learn it, no matter of many clothes we have to buy."

"You are forgetting the bags," Monica giggled, reaching for a spot next to Princess Edna. "I have yet to check the shops here, but I've seen some interesting items along the way."

Monica and Princess Edna began to chat, leaving Khan, Jack, and Ron on their own. Jack seemed lost in his thoughts as always, while Ron remained wary. Khan couldn't hope to get a conversation out of either of them, so he let his curiosity take over.

'We are going fast,' Khan thought as he kept track of the ship's movements on the map on the control desk, 'But I'm not feeling anything. I wonder how it would be at its top speed.'

Khan's attention quickly moved to the other commands. The steering wheel was pretty standard, and the same went for the other keys. Actually, that ship had fewer of them, which made it easier to pilot.

The inspection filled Khan with random thoughts and fantasies, but all of that crumbled when a chilling sensation appeared and spread throughout the ship. He instantly turned, but a hand had already landed on his neck by then.

Ron glared coldly at Khan. His hand had taken the shape of a blade while it remained on his neck. Khan felt the danger it radiated even without relying on his sensitivity. If he moved, his head would fall.

"Why are you interested in the control desk?" Ron asked, making everyone aware of what was happening.

"What is this?" Monica questioned while standing up.

Princess Edna looked at Ron before focusing on Khan. He appeared strangely calm under that threat, but that didn't change his situation. He had no chance to escape Ron.

"Miss Virrai?" Monica called since Princess Edna was letting that stalemate continue.

"Ron is never wrong about these things," Princess Edna exclaimed. "Captain Khan, why are you interested in the control desk?"

"Permission to avoid hearing his lies," Ron requested.

"Denied," Princess Edna replied. "Let him speak."

The sudden development would leave anyone confused, but Khan was different. His thoughts worked faster than ever. He could understand that security had to be top-notch around the descendant of a noble family. Ron was probably a monster, so lying wasn't an option.

"I was wondering whether I could fly this ship," Khan admitted.

"Lies," Ron snorted.

"And?" Princess Edna wondered. "Can you?"

"The control desk is pretty simple," Khan revealed, "Simpler than other ships. I can fly this ship."

Ron's glare intensified, but he didn't say anything. His mana stretched from his hand and tried to enter Khan's neck, but nothing survived more than a few seconds. His scanning spell couldn't overcome the chaos element.

"I didn't know you had a license," Princess Edna stated.

"I don't," Khan explained. "I just gained access to the flying courses. They came with my promotion."

"But you said you could fly this ship already," Princess Edna pointed out.

"I learnt through unofficial methods," Khan revealed. "Someone helped me."

"I want to see it," Princess Edna said while leaving her seat.

"No, Princess-," Ron tried to warn.

"He is telling the truth, isn't he?" Princess Edna asked.

"So it seems," Ron replied. "I can confirm it if you give me a moment."

"You are not putting your mana inside me," Khan declared, entering a battle of glares with Ron.

"Ron, let him take the pilot's seat," Princess Edna ordered. "Change of plans. Let's go in orbit."

"New destination confirmed," The female robotic voice of the ship responded, and a new route appeared on the control desk.

Khan continued glaring at Ron. He understood Ron's wariness, but there was a limit to how much he would accept, and being the target of an unknown spell wasn't it. As for Ron, he eventually retracted his hand, but his pressure remained on Khan.

"Are you sure, Princess Edna?" Khan asked once Ron set him free. "I have minimal experience with actual vehicles."

"There's nothing to crash into in space," Princess Edna casually uttered. "Still, I must warn you. Ron will kill you if he feels that something is off."

Khan nodded and showed a slight smile to Monica before heading to the pilot's seat. Ron followed him to stand at his side once he took his place, and both men waited for the ship to leave the Harbor.

The long glass didn't hide anything from its insides, and Monica and Princess Edna soon approached it to admire the scene. The ship flew through the passages among the districts before reaching one of the hangars and exiting the Harbor.

The blackness of space soon filled the glass, and the ship continued to fly until the entirety of the moon became visible. From that spot, Khan could also see the orange planet that kept the Harbor inside its gravitational field. He knew the place had some valuable resources, but his thoughts mostly radiated wonder.

"Deactivate auto-pilot," Princess Edna ordered once the ship put enough distance from the Harbor.

"Genetic signature required to confirm command," The ship requested, and Princess Edna didn't hesitate to place her hand on one of the screens.

"The steering wheel is yours, Captain Khan," Princess Edna announced once her command went through.

Khan felt excited. Flying always put him in a good mood. He only wished that the situation was different, but he didn't let Ron's threatening attitude generate anxiety.

The steering wheel soon fell in Khan's grasp, and he confidently pressed a few keys on the control desk to take complete control of the ship. He even pushed ahead, and an abrupt acceleration unfolded.

"Sorry!" Khan exclaimed as he hit the brakes to slow down the ship. "I knew this model was fast, but I didn't expect it to be so sensitive."

Khan kept the ship on a steady course toward a dark patch of space and avoided performing any turn. He didn't know how much he could do in that situation, so he even held back from accelerating.

"Captain Khan," Princess Edna yawned. "I hope you can do more than flying in a straight line."

'You aren't the one with two fourth-level warriors at your throat,' Khan cursed while wild feelings scratched the back of his head. He wanted to push that ship to its limits but couldn't be sudden about it.

"Princess, Monica," Khan called. "Please, take your seats and fasten your belts."

Princess Edna's eyes lit up in excitement. She immediately reached for a seat and moved it right behind Khan. Monica did the same, while Ron took his place next to Khan. Only Jack remained on his feet, but he had no interest in the matter. He only cared about being near Princess Edna.

Once everyone had taken their place, Khan pushed the steering wheel forward, causing a violent acceleration that made everyone slam on the back of their seats. Even Jack had to hold himself to a handhold to remain on his feet.

'Let's see how it turns,' Khan thought as he began playing with the ship to test its features.

The ship turned out to be extremely nimble. It even surpassed Snow in terms of agility. It could go upside down and more in mere fractions of a second, and its speed only continued to increase.

When the acceleration reached levels that second-level warriors might find hard to withstand, Ron's threatening aura returned, but Khan acted before he could speak. The ship slowed down to make the trip comfortable for Monica and Princess Edna, and Ron didn't hide his surprise.

"What do you think?" Princess Edna asked during that deceleration.

"It's a beauty," Khan admitted. "I've never driven something like this."

"Did you grow comfortable with its commands?" Princess Edna questioned.

"I think I did," Khan confirmed.

"Show me what you can do then," Princess Edna ordered while stretching a hand past Khan's seat to point at a cloud of asteroids in the distance. "Fly through that."

"Princess!" Ron scolded.

"Ron, learn to live a little," Princess Edna giggled.

"That's a C-class danger zone!" Ron explained. "It takes a proper pilot to cross it."

"This ship has incredible shields," Princess Edna pointed out. "Jack, do you think Captain Khan can fly through that cloud?"

"There is no death on the path ahead," Jack stated.

"See?" Princess Edna laughed. "What about you, Monica? Do you think Captain Khan can fly through it?"

"I don't have any doubt," Monica declared.

"It's decided," Princess Edna announced. "Captain Khan, cross that cloud."

"Aye aye, ma'am," Khan agreed before Ron could say anything. He was actually curious about his flying skills, and those asteroids were bound to be an exciting challenge.

Khan accelerated as he pointed the ship toward the asteroids. Meanwhile, he pressed on the control desk to activate holograms that would help him in the crossing. A 3D map of the cloud materialized next to him, and his mana boiled under the imminent threat.

'Faster!' Khan thought as he accelerated again and dived directly into the cloud.

The cloud was far from chaotic. The asteroids inside it followed a specific direction. Only their speed was different, and Khan could handle that.

Khan's eyes darted between the holograms and the scenery on the glass. He couldn't sense the symphony of space, but his eyes saw it. That cloud had a faint layer of mana, and Khan's sensitivity could use it to its benefit.

'Flow,' Khan thought as his body relaxed and his hands became one with the ship. The steering wheel became an extension of his arms, and he moved it according to his sensitivity.

The cloud was no different than a battlefield. Khan limited himself to following the stabler and fainter patches of mana. That approach allowed him to slip among the many asteroids without ever hitting any of them, and the ship's nimbleness only helped in the process.

The trip ended up being way too short. Khan barely realized when he arrived on the other side of the cloud, and it took Princess Edna's excited cry to wake him up.

"You are good!" Princess Edna laughed. "This is far better than those boring meetings."

Ron felt the need to scold Princess Edna again, but the sight of her honest smile made him remain silent. It was rare for the Princess to enjoy herself, so he let that statement go.

"Ron, how does my schedule look?" Princess Edna asked as she closed her eyes to enjoy the ship's deceleration.

"Packed as always, Princess," Ron revealed.

"Cancel everything," Princess Edna ordered. "I've decided. I'm going to stay in the Harbor for a while."

Chapter 442 Trouble

"Princess," Ron sighed, "Can I say something first?"

"No," Princess Edna exclaimed as she opened her eyes. "I'm having fun. I won't give up on it so soon."

"It wasn't about that," Ron cleared his throat. "Your stay in the Harbor requires a purpose. I can come up with a list of jobs suitable for your status."

"Monica, what are you doing in the Harbor?" Princess Edna asked.

"Attending classes, Miss Virrai," Monica revealed.

"What about Captain Khan?" Princess Edna wondered.

"I just got access to the advanced classes," Khan explained.

"I'll attend the classes too," Princess Edna declared.

"Princess, the Harbor offers far better occupations," Ron pointed out. "Besides, you are overqualified, even for the advanced classes."

"I don't want another boring task," Princess Edna complained. "I want to be like everyone else and have fun."

"I'm sorry, Princess," Ron uttered. "No place can offer that."

"Come on, Ron," Princess Edna pouted. "My parents will send me away soon enough. Give me some leeway to go shopping with Monica and Captain Khan."

"Captain Khan?" Ron repeated while glaring at Khan.

"He doesn't get too tense around me," Princess Edna explained. "Even you don't scare him. He might be the first person I met who doesn't have an agenda."

Ron's glare inevitably intensified, but Khan could only shrug his shoulders under that inspection. He had barely spoken with the Princess. Ron couldn't really blame him.

"I'll contact your parents to warn them about your decision," Ron eventually sighed but still kept his wary gaze on Khan. It was clear that he didn't like him.

"Ship, activate auto-pilot," Princess Edna happily ordered. "Let's go back to the Harbor."

"New destination confirmed," The ship replied, and Khan lost control of the steering wheel. The vehicle turned on its own and chose a path around the cloud of asteroids to reach the Harbor.

"Miss Virrai," Monica couldn't help but call in the awkward silence that fell after the Princess' decision. "Are you certain? We can go shopping without ruining your schedule."

"Oh, Monica," Princess Edna giggled as she unfastened her belt to take Monica's hand. "I'm putting myself in your hands, okay? You must show me around and bring me to all the fun events."

Monica found herself in a difficult position. Ron had spoken the truth. Princess Edna's status wasn't something Lucian and the other wealthy descendants could ignore, but refusing her wasn't an option either.

"I'll do my best, Miss Virrai," Monica could only smile as the entirety of her education crossed her mind to develop plans.

"I'll get you to drop that Miss Virrai," Princess Edna chuckled. "I know you also have duties, but I still want us to be proper friends. I feel that we are compatible."

"Our taste in clothes is definitely similar, Miss Virrai," Monica giggled.

"See?" Princess Edna announced while moving her seat closer to Monica and taking out her phone. "Let me show you something I bought recently. You'll make me go through your wardrobe in exchange."

Monica preferred that type of interaction, and the pictures on Princess Edna's phone soon captured her attention. She began having fun as the two chatted about clothes and other items, leaving Khan in an awkward situation once again.

Jack was still lost in his thoughts, while Ron didn't drop his glare for even a second. The two were so unapproachable that Khan considered joining Monica and Princess Edna. Yet, their conversation sounded like an alien language in his ears, so he remained silent and followed the ship's route.

Khan had been in control of the ship for less than an hour. Still, the auto-pilot didn't go as fast, so it took longer for the Harbor to reappear on the glass. It wasn't exactly late, but midnight was approaching, so it was safe to assume that the dinner had ended.

"Let's go directly to Leticia!" Princess Edna announced once the ship entered one of the hangars.

"Princess, it's too late for these matters," Ron scolded. "I'll plan a meeting first time in the morning, but we should prepare an accommodation now."

"The night has flown quickly," Princess Edna exclaimed. "Yes, staying here definitely is the right decision."

"You have also taken advantage of Miss Solodrey's patience for too long," Ron continued. "It would be proper to give her a ride back home."

"In which district do you two stay?" Princess Edna asked.

"Seventh, but-," Khan began to say.

"Drop us on the second," Monica continued. "We have a common friend waiting for us in his flat."

"I can't wait to meet him tomorrow," Princess Edna stated. "Second district."

"Second district," The ship repeated in its robotic voice.

'I need to warn George,' Khan thought as a faint smirk appeared on his face. 'I can't wait to see his face when he hears about all of this.'

The smirk was short-lived since Ron's glare intensified and forced Khan out of his thoughts. The guard wouldn't let any suspicious gesture go by, and Khan could only show a helpless expression at that constant inspection.

The ship didn't take long to reach the center of the Harbor, and it began to descend once it entered the second district. Monica even added directions during the flight, so the vehicle stopped right in front of George's building.

"I'll see you two in class," Princess Edna saluted while Khan and Monica walked through the metal passage to reach the sidewalk.

"It was an honor, Princess Edna," Khan performed a military salute as soon as he jumped off the metal passage, and Monica also performed a bow. However, Princess Edna lost interest in the scene right away, and the ship set off before the two could finish their goodbyes.

Khan and Monica watched the ship disappear before exchanging a careful glance. The sidewalk was empty. They were alone, but their minds were too messy to talk about what had happened in the open.

The two didn't need to say anything to decide their next move. They turned to head for George's building, and their silence continued even when they entered the elevator.

The arrival in George's flat didn't change the situation. Khan and Monica heaved a tired sigh almost simultaneously, but their silence remained. Reaching the main hall also confirmed that George had yet to return, but the two didn't find the strength to speak even then.

Khan had too much to think about. He had to talk with Colonel Norrett and check the next articles about him to understand how the dinner had gone. Still, that was only one part of his problems. He now had to worry about Princess Edna and her overprotective guards too.

Monica wasn't any better. Princess Edna had put a troublesome duty on her. She had to find a way to entertain her in a world where everyone tensed up in her presence. She also had to be a friend without forgetting her family's well-being, and her education might not be enough for that.

Those were only personal problems. The situation grew grimmer when the couple considered their secret relationship. Khan and Monica had just gained a friend they couldn't hope to predict or stop. Their free time and privacy sounded on the verge of vanishing.

Khan wanted to ask Monica's opinion, but he acknowledged that she also had things to sort out. The same went for Monica. She didn't want to waste that precious time immersed in her thoughts. Khan even needed her help, but she was pretty powerless.

"The problems never end," Khan eventually broke the silence.

"As if we had it easy before," Monica cursed.

The couple heaved a sigh, but Monica spoke before the silence could fall again. "She is not stupid, Khan. She might not care about many things, but she sees everything."

"I guessed as much," Khan admitted. "Her guards are also a problem. I've never met soldiers like them."

"They are elites among elites," Monica explained. "Jack made a name for himself on many battlefields before being recruited by the Virrai family. As for Ron, I think he was brought up for that job, but I'm not certain."

"I must be cursed or something," Khan mocked himself. "The universe doesn't even hide it anymore."

Khan and Monica would typically avoid getting into George's flat when he wasn't there, but they both knew the strange night would cover for them. They didn't even need to speak to reach that decision, and the area's privacy slowly warmed them up for the inevitable conversation.

"Did you really get flying courses for the promotion?" Monica questioned.

"Yes," Khan revealed as he approached a couch to lean on its back. "It must be Raymond's doing. Though I don't know why he would help me so much."

"Raymond?" Monica wondered.

"Colonel Norrett told me someone pushed for my promotion," Khan explained. "I can't think of anyone else with enough influence."

"Oh," Monica voiced. She only knew a little about that topic, but Khan had given her a summary, so she reached the same conclusions.

"He must want to protect you from other parties," Monica declared. "The flying license simply is additional value."

"Must be," Khan sighed before lifting his gaze and changing the topic. "What about you? Can you survive the Princess' whims?"

"She isn't too bad," Monica revealed. "Our families made us meet, but we found many common grounds right away. We would be closer if she didn't come from a noble family."

"Maybe her presence will be a good thing," Khan hoped.

"You already lost a chance to talk with the representatives because of her," Monica complained. "Tonight was your night, and she ruined it."

"I'm sure those same representatives will contact me privately," Khan reassured. "Colonel Norrett must have had his reasons for pushing me away."

"I still don't agree with him," Monica stated. "The celebration was supposed to be your political milestone, not another gossip to add to your profile."

"I've gotten used to those anyway," Khan shrugged his shoulders. "I got the flying courses and the advanced classes. It's enough for now."

Monica wanted to be happy for Khan, but she still didn't like how things had gone. Moreover, a thought bugged her, forcing her past jealousy to show its presence again.

"Are you sure you aren't happy for another reason?" Monica pouted.

"What is it?" Khan asked. He sensed Monica's rising jealousy and annoyance, but he couldn't connect the dots in the privacy of the flat.

"Princess Edna is considered the most beautiful woman in the Global Army," Monica revealed, "And she is wealthier than me. She is a better candidate for a secret girlfriend."

"Monica," Khan chuckled.

"No, no, I would understand," Monica scoffed. "It's not like you are a stranger to two-timing. I guess you couldn't help yourself after a month with a single woman."

"I didn't do anything," Khan uttered, but Monica still looked away.

"Wait," Khan recalled. "You are talking about that compliment, right?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," Monica snorted.

"What is it?" Khan teased as he approached Monica's back to take her into his arms. "Does the Princess threaten you?"

"She has more influence," Monica whispered, "And her beauty-."

"Since when was I with you because of money and beauty?" Khan interrupted as he placed his head on Monica's shoulder. "Well, there is that matter about your butt."

Khan was ready for a slap or a shout, but nothing similar arrived. Monica just peeked past her shoulder to look into his eyes, and her worry became evident.

"Princess Edna is indeed beautiful," Khan sighed while tightening the hug, "But I didn't look at her in that way even once. I don't work like that."

"Should I remind you about Jenna?" Monica sneered.

"That was before we reached this point," Khan explained. "I wouldn't be able to give her much attention with you around now."

"Really?" Monica asked.

"Really," Khan confirmed. He was speaking the truth, and Monica could see it in his eyes. After all, she was feeling the same emotions.

"You are such a scoundrel," Monica whispered as she laid her head on Khan's. The two still had countless problems to sort out, so the silence returned, but they found comfort in being in each other's arms.

"You shouldn't have said anything to that reporter," Monica eventually broke the silence. "Those people will say anything just to get a reaction from you."

"I couldn't lie about Liiza," Khan explained.

"I know, but," Monica voiced.

"I couldn't," Khan interrupted. "I would have betrayed my feelings."

"I see," Monica muttered as she began to play with her hair.

Khan's sensitivity revealed the changes inside Monica, but he would have understood them even without listening to the mana. Talking about an ex-girlfriend wasn't ideal, especially when he added feelings to the topic.

"Monica," Khan felt the need to explain himself, "My feelings are dangerous. You have seen how I acted with Lucian."

"You stopped," Monica pointed out.

Khan broke the embrace and pushed Monica toward the nearest wall. His hands went on the metal surface to block her way out. He wasn't trying to scare her. He only wanted to make sure that she realized the gravity of the situation.

"The first time someone found out about Liiza and me," Khan said as memories filled his thoughts, "My first instinct was to kill the witness, and she was a good friend."

Khan wasn't particularly proud of that event, but lying wouldn't get him anywhere. He had really thought about killing Azni, and his emotional spectrum had only broadened since then.

"Did you?" Monica asked without showing any fear. Khan's actions had been sudden, but they didn't scare or worry her. She trusted him too much for that.

"No, but that's not the point," Khan responded. "I'm not a good man. I have dark sides, and I don't plan on getting rid of them."

"Why are you telling me this?" Monica questioned. "I know about all of that already."

'Why did I tell her that?' Khan found himself thinking even if he knew the answer. It all went back to the conversation with George. Part of him was scared.

The fear wasn't rational. It didn't even come from a single source. Khan was worried he would forget about Liiza if he allowed himself to love again. Also, he feared what could happen if he really fell for Monica.

"Do you think I'd chicken out?" Monica asked as her hand reached for Khan's collar to pull him closer. "I told you already, idiot. I'm yours. I'm ready to bring as much shame to myself as possible if I become a problem for you."

"What if I become the problem?" Khan wondered. "What if I become too much to handle?"

"Did you forget how I am?" Monica sneered. "I was ready to hit that slut reporter as soon as she tried to seduce you."

Khan smirked. Seeing Monica experiencing the same intense emotions was genuinely reassuring. His broader emotional spectrum didn't seem to be a problem with her wild mood.

"Besides," Monica continued as her grip on Khan's collar grew tighter. She even began to shake in hesitation, but she continued her line anyway. "It's too late. I'm falling for you. Even I don't know what I'll start to do."

Those words left Khan speechless. He wasn't surprised about the statement. He had actually predicted that something like that was happening since he was experiencing the same emotions.

However, the fact that Monica had decided to reveal her feelings so brazenly put shame on Khan. He was supposed to be the one with the broader emotional spectrum. He was supposed to be the one trained to love like Niqols. Instead, Monica had beaten him in that field.

'I guess the last step is the hardest,' Khan mocked himself as the last barrier inside him crumbled. His love for Liiza would always remain a constant in his life, but his heart finally gained room for someone else.

"You are in a world of trouble," Khan whispered, and his expression told Monica what was happening inside his mind. Needless to say, the two got very little sleep that night.

Chapter 443 Early

"Alright!" George shouted as soon as he left the elevator to step into his flat. "Where are you two?"

George's voice could only reach the main hall, which was empty. Yet, the flat had sent a notification for his arrival, and Khan soon left one of the bedrooms to greet him.

"You damned scoundrel," George cursed when a shirtless and smiling Khan entered the main hall. "I leave you alone for one night, one single night, and you manage to get all dirty with a princess."

"What dirty?" Khan groaned as he rubbed his eyes and approached one couch to lie on it. "I have been a perfect gentleman."

"You don't even know what that word means," George snorted while sitting on the opposite couch. "Come on. Give me all the details."

"I seem to understand that new articles are out," Khan sighed as he searched for his phone. Still, his pockets turned out to be empty.

"Many new articles," George revealed. "Even my father called me. Imagine getting drilled so early in the morning because you can't stay put for a single night."

"I'm innocent this time," Khan swore. "The Princess did everything by herself."

"Somehow, I don't believe you," George stated.

"What about you instead?" Khan changed the topic. "Should I call a cleaning service before stepping back into my flat?"

"I merely fell asleep," George promised. "You might find bottles lying around, but nothing incriminating. I can't say the same for you."

George glanced at a corner of the hall, forcing Khan to straighten his back to check the spot. Monica's dress was lying on the floor, together with one of her shoes.

"That's where it was," Khan exclaimed. "How did it even end up there?"

"You tell me," George responded before considering something. "Wait, is the Princess also here?"

"Don't even joke about it," Khan sighed. "One of her guards already wants to kill me as it is."

"I read something about them," George explained. "They are special forces or something."

"I can believe that," Khan commented. "I've never seen anything like that."

"Strong?" George wondered.

"Yes," Khan confirmed. "Definitely different from common soldiers."

"That's not a job for common people," George declared. "Even my family would be happy if I secured a spot there."

"I'd go crazy in a day," Khan muttered while crossing his arms behind his head and making himself comfortable on the couch's back.

"So, how is she?" George questioned. "I heard Princess Edna is so beautiful she can make marriages crumble by blinking her eyes."

"Is she?" Khan wondered. "She is by no means ugly, but I don't see the need to be so dramatic about it."

"Man, I've seen her pictures," George responded. "How can you even say that?"

Khan looked at the ceiling while his thoughts wandered. Princess Edna was obviously beautiful, and that feature went beyond her physical appearance. Her mana created a charming aura that highlighted and enhanced her figure. She was stunning, but Khan couldn't fall prey to her natural charm.

"I must have grown used to beautiful women," Khan joked.

"I really want to punch you," George cursed.

"Count me in," Monica shouted as she stepped into the hall, "But not in the face. I kind of like it."

Khan lowered his gaze to follow Monica. She had already worn her military uniform, and her bright smile fused with her sleepy expression to create a cute scene. She was also carrying the upper part of Khan's clothes, and his phone was on top of them.

"This thing doesn't stop ringing," Monica complained as she reached Khan's couch and threw the upper part of his uniform on its back. She also handed him his phone, and the countless missed calls and messages became visible on the screen as soon as he touched it.

"Oh," Monica voiced when she noticed her dress in the corner of the hall. "That's where it was."

Khan checked the messages while lifting his left arm. Monica sat right under it and snuggled closer when he began caressing her hair.

George's eyebrows arched in surprise. He had seen the couple during intimate interactions, but the scene carried something more than that. It was almost natural, and a happy smile made its way onto his face as he kept watching it.

"Martha is so cute," Monica commented while checking Khan's screen.

"You know we have history, right?" Khan asked as he wrote a message to summarize what had happened.

"But she is a friend," Monica muttered, "And she calmed me down when I wanted to kill you."

"Luke is offering more money," Khan revealed when he moved to another message.

"Did you even check how much he paid you for Milia 222?" Monica wondered.

"I keep forgetting it," Khan said while moving his mouth on Monica's hair, "And I'm always busy with something."

"Bruce always follows," Monica giggled once Bruce's name appeared on the device.

"How close are their families even?" Khan questioned.

"Pretty close," Monica groaned as she wrapped an arm around Khan's bare torso and closed her eyes. "Their alliance goes back to their grandparents' generation."

"Even the others from Reebfell contacted me," Khan sighed.

"Why are there so many women?" Monica pouted when she checked the messages.

"I wonder why," George coughed.

Monica glared at George before focusing on Khan's thumb since he added a short description for each name he pressed. "Ex-girlfriend, professor, professor, friend and professor."

It was heartwarming to see how many people sent messages. Captain Goldman and Lieutenant Abaze had merely conveyed polite salutes after hearing about the Princess, but Amber and Cora had taken the chance to check up on him.

"Even more women," Monica gasped when Khan went past those messages.

"You'll get used to it," George coughed.

Khan had also received messages from his students, Delia, and many other people he met during his missions. That pile of notifications represented how much Khan had traveled and achieved in those years. It was truly a lot when put together like that.

"My new schedule also arrived," Khan announced. "I have general mana theories in the morning."

"It's really general," Monica explained. "I wonder where I should sit now that we are in the same class."

"You are sitting next to me," Khan stated without moving his eyes from the screen.

"Okay," Monica whispered, and the cheerfulness in her voice was so evident that George shook his head.

"Now, the bad part," Khan sighed as he moved to his profile.

"They can't be too bad," Monica reassured, but her voice disappeared when the overwhelming number of articles appeared in her vision.

Khan only skimmed through the many articles. He read titles and pressed on a few but always went to the next when misinformation appeared. Needless to say, the majority involved his premature departure with Princess Edna, but the Heavenly News made sure to have a special piece about his interview.

"How did she get her hands on these recordings?" Khan wondered when he saw the video attached to the Heavenly News' article.

The video saw Khan jumping on the heads of the crowd outside the training hall, and the article used it to prove his violent attitude. Katia was trying to depict him as a dangerous individual.

"It's hard to believe the Global Army puts so much faith in such a young and unstable soldier," Khan read out loud. "His record hints at a history of distrust toward humankind. His attachment to alien species is so deep that he resorts to violence whenever they are insulted."

"You sure made an impression on her," George mocked.

"She is not wrong," Khan laughed when Katia's signature appeared at the end of the article. "This might be the most accurate article about me."

"Who cares?" Monica snorted. "She is a slut. I'll tell her a thing or two next time."

"Do you think there will be a next time?" Khan asked.

"Maybe not with her," Monica revealed. "I think you truly scared her. Still, more reporters are bound to reach out."

"Does the same apply to you?" Khan wondered. "After all, we did end up with the Princess because of you."

"I'll let this joke slide because I'm in a good mood," Monica pouted while tightening the hug on Khan. "Anyway, my family usually takes care of those. You'll see more of them because you are approachable."

"Is this the time when you explain what happened yesterday?" George reminded.

"Should we have breakfast in the meantime?" Khan suggested.

"Yes," Monica let go of Khan and straightened her position while remaining under the warmth of his arm. "I'm starving."

Khan and Monica exchanged a meaningful smirk after their statements, and George shook his head again. He even voiced a happy comment due to how heartwarming the scene was. "You are lucky I didn't come with Anita today."

"I'm not sure I would have cared today," Khan muttered, and Monica softly slapped his chest before lifting her head to show her eager smile.

Khan didn't hesitate to kiss Monica, and she threw her legs onto his lap to sit more comfortably. The two ended up in an even more intimate position, and Monica also closed her eyes to rest on his shoulder.

"I'm still waiting," George coughed, and the couple exploded into a laugh before finally telling their story.

The food arrived quickly, and the story continued even after the trio finished eating. Whenever George asked a question, new information always appeared, but Khan and Monica had nothing to hide. They updated their friend about everything, and shock inevitably followed.

"Let me get this straight," George gasped. "You have a date with the Princess today?"

"Supposedly," Khan confirmed.

"She might forget," Monica hoped. "Something might also come up and keep her busy. I have yet to hear from her."

"I expect the Colonel to contact me too," Khan added. "It's odd that he has yet to ask about last night."

"He is a busy man," Monica justified. "Still, he seemed to like you. He was nice to me too."

"He does seem nice," Khan sighed, "But he'll probably leave soon. He came just for my promotion anyway."

"You'll make new allies in no time," Monica reassured while pointing at Khan's phone. "They saw you getting inside the Princess' ship. That's enough to make you a celebrity."

"Imagine if they knew I piloted it," Khan wondered.

"The entire embassy would try to get on your good side in that case," Monica revealed. "Maybe start with a handful of people first, and make sure that they have dicks. Otherwise, I will."

"Exactly!" George shouted. "We don't want more suitors for the Princess."

"George, her guards will really kill you," Khan warned.

"Let him go for it," Monica said. "George, take all the women in the Harbor since you are at it. Khan doesn't need them."

"You have come to the right man," George proudly claimed.

"When did you two team up?" Khan joked.

"Don't think about it," Monica pulled Khan from the arm wrapped around her head. "Let George handle the sluts and focus only on me."

"I can have female friends!" Khan shouted.

"Define friend," George coughed.

"You'd be too busy with your incredible girlfriend anyway," Monica rubbed her face on Khan's shoulder.

"What a needy girl," Khan cursed, but his smile revealed far different emotions. He even let go of his phone to caress Monica's cheek.

"You sure got all lovely-dovey after last night," George teased, fully expecting a shout from Monica.

However, Monica diverted her gaze to show a shy look at Khan. Mentioning "love" reminded her of what she had said the previous night, and she was still getting used to that revelation.

Instead, Khan only saw beauty in Monica's genuine reaction. The honesty of her feelings made his emotions overflow, and his eyes instinctively checked the hour on his phone. He wished to have more time to spend with her, but the lessons were too close for that.

"We have to prepare," Khan whispered as his caresses became more affectionate.

Monica groaned, but she still grabbed Khan's neck to pull herself toward him. The two exchanged a short kiss and a long look, but they eventually separated. Monica even left the couch to pick up the dress on the floor.

Khan followed Monica with his eyes before looking at George once she left the main hall. George was wearing a smirk that described his thoughts, but his face mostly expressed happiness, and Khan felt the need to nod at that sight.

Only a few seconds had to pass for both couches to become empty. George and Khan stood up, and the latter retrieved the upper part of his clothes to dress up.

George didn't have classes right away, but his phone was giving him hell, so he retreated inside a bedroom to handle the various calls. Instead, Monica and Khan left the building, and a car was already waiting for them when they reached the sidewalk.

Luckily for Khan and Monica, the second district was too private to allow the presence of curious crowds. Hearing about the Princess had also added the expected halo of mystery around Khan, so no one dared to bother him. The couple could get in the car without meeting anyone, and a short trip eventually brought them to the embassy.

The atmosphere changed as soon as Khan and Monica jumped off the car. The soldiers who welcomed them tried their best to remain detached and professional, but their tension was evident. The same went for the insides of the embassy. Many guards and workers left their offices to catch a glimpse of the couple once they heard about their arrival.

Of course, none of those professional figures hindered the couple's path. The embassy's lower floors lacked people with the guts or relevance to attempt building a relationship with someone connected to Princess Edna. Still, that changed once the elevator brought Khan and Monica into the training camp area.

The different schedules and classes allowed the training camp area to remain devoid of crowds. The various halls still contained enough people to fill the corridors, but that rarely happened due to the presence of the lessons.

Yet, some groups roamed those areas, and many were even aware of the schedule for the advanced classes. Khan and Monica found many people simply standing in the corridors, seemingly waiting for their arrival, and he got far more attention than her.

"This isn't as bad as I expected," Khan commented as he walked among the stares and murmurs.

Students, professors, and workers stopped whenever Khan and Monica appeared in their vision, but he sounded the main topic of the many gossips. That wasn't surprising after everything that had happened, but Khan found some reassurance in the fact that no one was approaching him.

"We are still inside the embassy," Monica whispered. "Only idiots would create a mess here."

"I must have looked pretty cool while threatening Professor Odse," Khan voiced.

"I wish I could have seen it," Monica joked.

"I wouldn't mind causing another mess to keep my woman happy," Khan teased.

"Shut up, idiot," Monica cursed, but a laugh escaped her mouth anyway.

The walk toward the appointed hall was uneventful until a familiar figure appeared in the corridor. The excited look on her face even told the couple what was about to come.

"Monica, you sly girl," Anita exclaimed when she reached the couple. "Your mother taught you well."

"I simply got caught in a strange development," Monica played it humble. "The Princess was kind enough to offer us a ride in her ship, and the rumors did the rest."

"Quite a lucky development then," Anita announced before turning toward Khan and performing an elegant bow. "Captain, congratulations on your promotion."

"Thank you, Anita," Khan nodded. "Are we in the same class?"

"Indeed," Anita confirmed. "Though I think I just lost my seat."

Monica was ready to throw a joke, but Khan spoke before her. "Do you mind if I steal Monica for a few lessons?"

"Bold," Anita giggled. "I like that in a man."

"Just for a few lessons," Khan repeated. "I need her help to keep up with some subjects."

"You don't even need to ask," Anita reassured. "Besides, my girl seems to have already made her decision."

Monica was usually perfect during social interactions, but Khan's straightforward request had made her divert her gaze. She felt shy and warm at the same time since her emotions had yet to cool down.

"I couldn't refuse him," Monica eventually managed to come up with an answer. "I'm sure you understand."

"Of course," Anita stated as a teasing smirk appeared on her face, "But don't think for a second that I believe you two. I know you are up to something. It grows clearer every day."

"The Princess is also part of the reason," Khan declared while lowering her voice. "I will tell you, but it has to remain among us."

"Update me already," Anita gasped while jumping next to Monica. "I want to know everything."

"I have to go shopping with the Princess," Monica revealed, "And I somehow involved Khan."

"You are so weak against him," Anita teased. "How cute."

"She was only trying to help," Khan explained. "The dinner simply took a strange turn."

"It sounds for the best," Anita commented. "Very few can meet a proper noble, let alone go shopping with her."

"We don't know if the Princess will have time," Monica warned. "Avoid spreading rumors."

"I would love to," Anita chuckled, "But I guess a princess is too much. Well, I can't wait to see your faces on the news."

A few more jokes flew while the trio walked toward the appointed hall, but nothing serious happened. Anita was an expert at superficial talks, and Monica soon regained her A-game. Khan could sense that her emotions were still too warm, but he didn't complain since Anita never probed into the couple's businesses.

The arrival in front of the appointed hall revealed more familiar figures. Even Khan recognized many of the students waiting for the lesson to start. Lucian was there, and the same went for the wealthy descendants he met over multiple parties.

"Captain Khan!" Lucian exclaimed as soon as the trio joined his group. "Congratulations on your promotion and enviable experience."

A series of "congratulations!" followed. The entire group expressed their best wishes to Khan, and he couldn't help but notice how many of them had grown politer. The women even tried their best to attract his attention through cute smiles or playing with their hair.

Needless to say, Monica didn't like that situation, but she was no stranger to it. She also received a lot of attention, mainly in the form of questions about the previous night. The Princess was no small matter, and those wealthy descendants would stop at nothing to get a piece of it.

"Captain Khan," One of the men in the group said, "My parents expressed their desire to have you at dinner. It won't be anything formal, but they will probably try to hire you."

"Hey, we said no job offers," Lucian laughed. "Captain Khan is here to study and get even better than he is."

"Come on, Lucian," One of the women called. "Captain Khan will become untouchable after graduating from the Harbor. Mere job offers wouldn't work for him anymore. We'd have to go straight for marriage proposals."

The woman didn't forget to blink at Khan once her line ended, and Anita immediately teased her. "Zoe, you shameless girl. Let Khan get used to his new status first."

"But it will be harder to get him at that point," Zoe complained. "Anyway, Captain Khan, I know a nice place in the shopping district, and they always keep a table for me. Just give me a call if you don't know what to do one of these nights."

Zoe's shameless behavior made the entire group laugh, and even Anita didn't hold back from playing along. Everyone was mostly joking. Even Zoe wasn't completely serious. Still, that interaction revealed something vital to Khan. He could see how the wealthy descendants had completely accepted him.

Of course, that understanding came at a price. Khan could keep a fake smile, but Monica had long since reached the critical point. Her state was no surprise, and it had also become a common sight after the various parties. A few descendants were even waiting for her to snap, but Khan decided to take the initiative that day.

"I'm grateful for the kind words and offers," Khan thanked, "But I'm planning to be a simple student for now. Also, I'm behind in many subjects, so I took the liberty of booking Monica for most nights. She will help me study."

"Hey, I can help with those too," Zoe didn't hesitate to intervene. "Monica, don't keep Captain Khan all for yourself. Share him a bit with us."

"I guess I've grown quite possessive," Monica managed to join the pretenses since Khan's statement had melted her irritation. "Besides, my family granted Khan access to the Harbor, so I have every right to keep him for myself."

"Miss Solodrey," One of the men called, "Any family would support Captain Khan at this point. His achievements are undeniable, and we can all see that third star on his shoulder."

"Well," Monica voiced while showing an eager face to Khan. "It's true. He can decide to accept another offer. He has the status to do it now."

'Needy girl,' Khan cursed in his mind. He knew exactly what Monica was doing. She wanted him to give another earnest statement.

"First of all," Khan laughed, "Let's drop this captain thing. There is no need to be so formal around me."

"But it's sexy," Zoe complained, triggering another general laugh. Even Monica found the need to nod at that statement.

"I don't need a title to be sexy," Khan winked at the group, and the general laugh continued. Still, when Monica saw some of the women agreeing or biting their lower lips, her elbow rose on its own to hit Khan's side.

The gesture surprised the group, and even Monica widened her eyes. She covered her mouth when she realized what she had done. Lucian and the others had no idea she and Khan were so close. They didn't know about her moody personality either, but her reaction partially exposed her.

"As you can see," Khan laughed it off, "Monica is also the only one willing to do what she must to keep me in check. You know, I'm not a good investment if I get kicked out."

Khan's statement turned the tables, and Monica understood that she had to play along when many gazes fell on her. She showed an ashamed expression and even straightened her sleeve while shaking her head in disappointment.

The group began to believe that Monica had been forced to act in such a rude way, and they couldn't blame her. Khan had started a fight on his first day inside the embassy, and a princess was involved now. Drastic measures were necessary.

However, someone still saw through that deceit. Monica's surprised reaction had been too authentic to be replicated easily. Still, when those few tried to find more flaws in Monica's expressions and pretenses, they found Khan's glare waiting for them.

"Okay, let's stop joking around," Lucian eventually announced. "There is my party on the weekend for that. Now, we should get in."

Lucian's words didn't prevent the arrival of a couple of jokes, but the group entered the hall after them. The area turned out to be as big as where Professor Odse had held his lesson, but fewer students attended that class, so Khan and Monica quickly settled in a relatively isolated spot.

Khan and Monica were by no means alone. They had chosen a front-row seat near the wall, but Lucian and Anita stood only a few desks away. Others had also sat behind them, which limited what they could do without getting spotted.

"Thank you for covering me out there," Monica didn't hesitate to whisper as soon as the two sat down.

"It's my job to look after my woman," Khan teased. "Though I didn't expect you to lose your cool. I should joke more often if you keep reacting like this."

"You can't get enough of teasing me, can you?" Monica pouted.

"You should stop looking so cute if you want me to stop," Khan stated.

"That won't happen," Monica claimed. "I happen to be very cute."

Khan smirked as his attention fell on the interactive desk. A few menus were active, but most labels remained dark since the lesson had yet to start.

"Besides," Monica continued, "I can't get ugly now. I still have to give you a gift for your promotion."

"Should I look forward to it?" Khan wondered.

"Of course, idiot!" Monica cursed while doing her best to keep her voice down. "The wait must drive you mad, mad for me."

"Maybe I already am," Khan whispered, and the two exchanged a meaningful glance.

Random laughs echoed in the vast hall and made the couple aware of their public situation. Still, Khan placed a hand under the desk, and Monica understood the silent message. She imitated him, and they intertwined their fingers to express their relationship in that private spot.

"This is nice," Monica voiced in her timid tone.

"It can get better," Khan teased as he reached for Monica's leg. He was still holding her hand, but she didn't put much resistance, so he could lift it until her foot ended on his knee.

"Scoundrel," Monica complained but still adjusted her position to make that new stance more comfortable. Her leg remained on Khan's knee, and he caressed it from time to time.

The spot obviously had limitations, but the couple could hide that much, and warm smiles soon appeared on those interactive desks. Monica and Khan couldn't be together in the open, but they had found another way to express their feelings during their daily life.

That intimate moment didn't last long since a slim man stormed inside the hall and captured everyone's attention. The latter had short dark hair and a slightly long beard of the same color. His eyes were also black, and his seat confirmed his identity.

"Hello, everyone," The man announced as he remained on his feet behind the Professor's desk. "I'm Professor Boatbell, and I hold the course of general mana theories."

A few polite salutes fell from the audience, but the Professor waved his hand to disregard them before continuing his speech. "I want to make a few things clear before we start, so listen to me because I will say them only once.

"For starters, I know I will repeat topics you have already studied. It doesn't matter if you heard them in the basic classes or at home. I will still mention them to make sure your foundation is solid."

Professor Boatbell activated the menus on his desk at that point, and a short inspection of the images made him turn in Khan's direction.

"Captain Khan, am I right?" Professor Boatbell announced. "Congratulations on your promotion. It's a pity to start on the wrong foot, but a warning sounds mandatory."

"Sir?" Khan asked.

"I'd like my class to remain orderly," Professor Boatbell stated. "The moment you start a fight or disrupt my lesson, you are out."

"I understand, sir," Khan nodded. He sensed no hatred in the Professor's mana, and that thought reassured him.

"Good," Professor Boatbell exclaimed. "On my end, I'll do my best to remain fair to everyone. My duty is to prepare you for the strangeness of the universe. I won't teach you anything specific, but what you learn here might help you not feel too lost."

Professor Boatbell fell silent and ran his eyes over his students to make sure that everyone understood what he had just said. Monica and Khan were still in their odd position, but their gazes were glued on the Professor, so they didn't raise any suspicion.

"Very well," Professor Boatbell eventually declared. "Let's start with something very simple: Humankind. I guess you know what that is."

A few laughs resounded, and the Professor smiled, but he soon resumed explaining. "Humankind is exceptionally new to mana. If we take away the centuries spent reverse engineering and experimenting, we are left with little more than two hundred years of actual independent development."

Professor Boatbell stopped speaking for a second before voicing a question. "Who can tell me the reason for that?"

Many hands went up. Even Monica raised her arm, but Khan remained still. He wasn't sure about the question, and Professor Boatbell nodded at one of the students before he could review it properly.

"Because we are behind in evolutionary terms," The student responded.

"Partially correct," Professor Boatbell uttered. "We are indeed behind. It would be better to say that we are one full step too early. How did we get here then?"

Khan lifted his arm before the other students could even understand that the Professor had voiced another question, and the latter promptly nodded at him.

"The Nak," Khan replied.

"The First Impact gave us access to mana before our species was ready to wield it," Professor Boatbell declared. "We are different from species who have already lived with mana for thousands of years. Many of them have even adapted to that incredible energy. They are born with it."

"So," Professor Boatbell continued. "Why are we so strong? So influential? So advanced?"

Lucian and Monica were the first to raise their hands, and Monica got permission to reply. "We copy from other species, sir."

"Humankind doesn't have iconic arts," Professor Boatbell stated. "We simplified what we copied from others. It was very hit and miss at first, but things improved once we gained access to alien knowledge."

Professor Boatbell had begun walking up and down, but he stopped to slam his hands on the interactive desk. His face grew stern and conveyed as much seriousness as possible.

"It will take humankind thousands of years to obtain something remotely close to an art developed only for humans," Professor Boatbell announced. "We must also wait for our species to evolve to a more suitable form. Still, in the meantime, we must continue accumulating knowledge and translating it into our language."

The hall's silence seemed to please Professor Boatbell since a faint smile appeared on his face, but his voice remained stern. "This is your universal job, your greatest duty. No matter what kind of position you'll obtain, you must continue working for the greater good of humanity, and I'll give you the foundation you need to do it.

"In this class, I'll teach you our general knowledge of mana and how we simplify it so that one day you might turn it into something that only humans can use."

Chapter 444 Mutations

Professor Boatbell's friendly behavior and passion for the subject helped retain interest throughout the lesson. His many questions also kept the class engaged and allowed most students to show their knowledge.

The initial topics were rather dull. Professor Boatbell's explanations started from the First Impact and barely covered half a century by the time the class was over. He had to establish a good foundation before moving to specific matters, and Khan felt he did an excellent job at it.

The Professor didn't talk about the invasion. His subject focused on how humanity adapted to mana, so the war wasn't important. Instead, he went over the first attempts at employing and wielding that energy to give insights into what had worked and failed.

The main goal of the subject had been clear since the Professor's initial speech, and his following explanations further highlighted it. Understanding where humankind had failed would grant the students the right mindset when meeting alien arts. They would find it easier to translate them into human terms and add them to the Global Army's knowledge.

Khan had to admit that his teaching methods paled compared to Professor Boatbell's smooth and witty speeches. The man was incredibly good at his job, which suited the privileged environment of the advanced classes.

The Professor's pleasant eloquence wasn't the only feature Khan noticed. The explanations were highly detailed, especially when describing the risks and benefits of each approach. Khan was getting the education he had missed in the past years, and the catching-up process looked far from easy.

It turned out that the ten companies didn't immediately get their hands on mana. The invasion had destroyed most communications, so the surviving groups of humans had to take the first steps into that superior field on their own.

Needless to say, the records of that period were scarce and grim. The countless mutations triggered by the Nak's mana had initially pushed the survivors to test that energy on themselves. However, that approach led to disastrous consequences due to the lack of suitable technology and knowledge.

The first true breakthrough happened when someone mixed mana with technology. Weapons that could harness that energy appeared and gave humankind a chance to reclaim Earth.

The second breakthrough arrived once the noble families stepped in. They restored some form of communication and established cooperation among the survivors. They also added their resources, which quickened the development of weapons and machinery based on mana.

The development took two separate paths at that point. The first and most reliable involved technology, and the debris left behind by the invasion helped a lot there.

As for the second, the families used the various mutated creatures that had survived the invasion as guinea pigs to learn how mana worked. Many humans had also fallen prey to the Nak's infections, and experimenting on them eventually set the basics for the mana cores.

The class ended on those topics, leaving the still-divided humans doing their best to rethink their way of life. Professor Boatbell had to go at that point, but not before sending everyone a longer and more detailed version of his lesson.

Khan scrolled the text on the interactive desk while his phone downloaded it. He had read longer books, but those numerous pages involved a single lesson, and that was only one subject. His training schedule grew tighter just by imagining what was waiting for him.

"That was truly general," Khan commented once the students remained alone in the hall.

"I told you," Monica stated as she detached her phone from the interactive desk. "Most of it is common knowledge anyway."

"Is it?" Khan wondered, showing his helpless face.

"It was part of my education," Monica giggled while pulling with the leg still lying on Khan's knee.

"It would be a pity not to put it into use," Khan joked. "What do you say about studying together tonight?"

"A single night won't put you on par with every class," Monica teased. "You'd need months of private lessons."

"Luckily, I know a place where we can be alone as long as we want," Khan played along while leaning on the interactive table to hide his hand caressing Monica's leg.

"How resourceful of you, Captain Khan," Monica exclaimed as she also placed an elbow on the interactive table and supported her head with her hand. "I hope you don't have anything strange in mind."

"Miss Solodrey, I have the purest intentions," Khan promised.

"Somehow, I find that hard to believe," Monica snickered. "It must be the way you held my leg throughout the lesson."

"Your leg?" Khan feigned innocence before glancing at his lap and gasping. "How did that even end up there?"

"Didn't you notice it?" Monica wondered. "Is my leg so meaningless that you actually missed it?"

"Study with me tonight, and I'll show you how much I appreciate it," Khan suggested.

"I thought your intentions were pure," Monica whispered.

"Purely bad," Khan smirked.

"Such a scoundrel," Monica scoffed. "Though, it would be unbecoming of me to leave a classmate in a dire situation. Captain Khan, you got your date."

"Dates," Khan corrected. "I remember you saying that I needed months to catch up."

Monica covered her mouth, but her fingers remained open enough to show her widening smile. Khan wanted to lose himself in that charming expression, but an annoying feeling reached his senses and forced him to put down Monica's leg.

Monica frowned, but her eyes soon widened in understanding. She even straightened her position when Lucian and other students walked toward her desk to approach the exit.

"How was your first lesson in the advanced classes?" Lucian asked when he noticed Khan standing up.

"Tougher than I expected," Khan admitted, "But I should manage as long as I lose some sleep over it."

"I hope you don't mind if we skip some parties in the next period," Monica announced while also standing up. "It is my responsibility to help Khan with these classes."

"Of course," Lucian nodded. "I'll also slow down with those soon. Hopefully, I'll replace them with study groups."

"I'm down if there are drinks," Zoe exclaimed, and the students around her laughed. Even Khan and Monica joined that cheerful reaction as they approached the group.

"The study groups never lack those," Anita giggled, and more jokes followed as the students left the hall.

Those small talks rekindled the sense of acceptance that Khan had felt before. He had become part of that elitist group, and no one dared to question his presence. Everything remained superficial, but that could already limit the pretenses on his side.

Nevertheless, exiting the hall showed Khan that the wealthy side of the embassy wouldn't forget his new fame so soon. As soon as he entered the corridor, he found Professor Boatbell waiting on the other side, and the man didn't hesitate to call him. "Captain Khan, a word?"

The many gazes that fell on Khan received a general nod. Khan only added a look at Monica before leaving the group to approach the Professor, and Lucian promptly led everyone further away to give the two some privacy.

"Sir?" Khan voiced when he reached the Professor.

"How was your first advanced lesson?" Professor Boatbell asked in his friendly tone. "I hope I didn't go too fast."

"I'll get up to speed soon enough," Khan reassured. "I'm already planning study groups to double down on my efforts."

"That's good to hear," Professor Boatbell announced. "Also, I hope you didn't mind my initial warning. I know what happened with Professor Odse. Mine was only a formality."

"It would have been stranger if you didn't mention anything, sir," Khan admitted. "I'm simply glad my background isn't a problem in your class."

"Of course, of course," Professor Boatbell laughed. "You are all equal in my eyes, at least when I'm doing my job."

"Sir?" Khan wondered since he felt that the last part of the Professor's line hid a deeper meaning.

"I know it might sound awkward after what I've said," Professor Boatbell stated. "I'm also in an odd spot, but duties are duties. My family pressed me to invite you to dinner, and they won't stop asking until you accept. Can you do me this favor?"

"Dinner?" Khan repeated.

"I won't be there as your professor," Professor Boatbell explained. "I'd just act an acquaintance meant to introduce you to some representatives of the Boatbell family."

Khan didn't know what to say. On one side, the invitation further proved his importance. However, going to the dinner would force him to accept any future offer, and he had already gotten some.

"Don't look so troubled," Professor Boatbell chuckled. "I know you must be busy, especially in this period. Just keep my offer in mind. It would mean a lot to me if you agreed."

"I'll keep you updated if you don't mind," Khan answered honestly. "I have many things to sort out, and I've barely begun addressing the first ones. I even need to study."

"Don't even mention it," Professor Boatbell reassured. "Studying must be your priority. However, I hope you'll take my advice. You'll rarely find another environment so full of meaningful connections. Don't miss this opportunity."

Professor Boatbell was a second-level warrior, so Khan could sense the emotions carried by his mana. His advice had nothing to do with the dinner pushed by his family. It was a pure act of kindness.

"I won't, sir," Khan promised. "I'll get my schedule in order and make time."

"Good," Professor Boatbell praised. "Now, go eat something. The day is still long."

Khan revealed a smile and returned to the group. Lucian, Monica, and the others were waiting down the corridor, and they understood what had happened without needing any explanation.

"The Boatbell family isn't among the wealthiest," Monica explained as soon as Khan reached her, "But it has produced a few talents in the last years."

"The Professor is one of them," Lucian added. "He might not look like it, but he gained quite the reputation for his studies of the years after the First Impact."

"I seem to recall reading some of his pieces," Anita joined the conversation. "They were very detailed."

More compliments resounded among the group. Everyone seemed to know Professor Boatbell and his achievements. Khan was the only exception, but no one blamed him for his ignorance.

"Monica," Lucian eventually called, "Did your family provide him with a PR manager?"

"I have the greatest respect for Khan," Monica announced, "But even I couldn't predict his sudden promotion."

"Then," Lucian continued while glancing at Khan, "I could handle that for you. I have good connections in the field."

The offer sounded selfless, but Khan had seen Lucian's true face, and he didn't want any debt with him. He was even about to refuse, but Monica intervened before he could say anything. "He has me for that. I obviously won't leave him on his own."

"Are you sure you aren't overworking yourself?" Lucian wondered. "A PR manager would also suit his new rank."

"Khan is worth a few sleepless nights," Monica giggled in her usual elegant manner.

"And you call me shameless," Zoe scoffed while looking at Anita.

"I can't argue with that," Anita laughed before taking Monica's elbow into her arms. "Are you hiding something from us, Miss Solodrey?"

"What if I am?" Monica teased, and a series of jokes followed.

The group continued that teasing chit-chat while moving through the corridor. Khan and Monica soon stopped being the main topic, but someone always found something else to talk about, so the walk never became silent.

Lucian and the others shared Khan's schedule, but various obligations forced the group to split. Monica, Khan, and Anita remained alone when they left the embassy, and they didn't hesitate to head for George's flat to order some food.

The lunch was uneventful and short. Anita couldn't stay for too long due to personal matters, and George was away. However, Khan and Monica didn't have enough time to enjoy themselves properly, so they opted for a cuddling session in which she took a nap on his lap.

Khan felt happy in caressing that mess of curls, but his mind often wandered. Gaining more insights into the world of the wealthy descendants changed some of his ideas about them, especially now that he had partially joined that elitist group.

One advanced lesson had filled Khan with homework, and completing it would only fulfill the bare minimum of what wealthy descendants handled every day. The situation also grew harsher when he added the various political duties and the tasks forwarded by the families.

Khan had always trained harder than the wealthy descendants. However, he now began to consider the lack of time as a possible reason. People like Lucian and Monica were bound to have had countless dinners. It was actually surprising that they had reached their current level with so many obligations to fulfill.

Stepping into that world had filled Khan with the same obligations, if not worse. His political journey had basically just begun, so he had to condense years of meetings into mere months to catch up with the wealthy descendants.

The situation worsened when Khan thought about his flying course and possible occupations in the Harbor. He had so much to do that even skipping sleep for entire weeks wouldn't give him enough time to train.

Of course, the issue had no solution. Khan had to sacrifice something to make time for his new obligations, and his training was suitable for the task. Taking a break from increasing his attunement with mana would probably benefit him. Still, he hoped to find moments to solidify his skill with third-level spells and test the techniques learnt on Milia 222.

An alarm woke up Monica, and the couple only spent a few minutes enjoying the privacy of George's flat before departing for the embassy again. Khan's new schedule had put "alien environments" in the afternoon, and he couldn't wait to see how the advanced classes handled that topic.

The scenes from the morning repeated themselves when Khan and Monica reached the training camp area. Students, teachers, and more kept track of their movements, but the reunion with the rest of the descendants put an end to most stares.

The seats also ended up being almost the same. "Alien environments" happened in a different hall. Still, their layouts rarely changed, so Khan and Monica could find another relatively isolated spot in which they could express part of their relationship. Her leg soon fell on his knee again, and he caressed it lovingly as he waited for the professor to arrive.

Nevertheless, minutes passed, and the professor still failed to arrive. It got so late that the chatter grew louder since no one understood what was happening.

"Is this common?" Khan wondered when the chatters managed to capture his interest.

"Not in the Harbor," Monica revealed. "Maybe we get to go home early today."

The arrival of a familiar figure shattered Monica's hopes. Khan recognized Professor Nickton, but the man didn't glance at the students even once as he approached the main desk.

"Professor Parver is ill again," Professor Nickton announced while activating the many functions of his interactive desk. "I'll handle today's class."

The students didn't mind that change, but Professor Nickton's appearance managed to create some frowns. The man was even messier than the last time Khan had seen him. His military uniform had many dark spots, and even his beard was dirty. He seemed to have just come out from his lab.

"Okay," Professor Nickton exclaimed while his eyes remained on the interactive desk. "Alien environments aren't my area of expertise. They are actually a broad subject. Instead, I specialize in mutations and relative mana applications, so we'll go with that."

Changing the subject of a lesson didn't sound ideal, but no one dared to complain. Khan also liked the topic, so his interest rose.

"Mutations are a perfectly natural part of the evolutionary process," Professor Nickton explained. "Radiations of various types and intensities can alter our cells, often turning them into something our bodies reject. Mana is no different. It's actually many levels stronger than what our technology normally generates."

Khan understood that statement perfectly. He had seen mutations happen before him, and his azure hair also embodied that topic.

"Animals that evolved with mana are no different," Professor Nickton continued. "They are creatures that managed to achieve a stable form after the mutations. Some even developed unique and incredible abilities, but that doesn't prevent them from mutating again."

Professor Nickton cleared his throat before resuming his explanation. "Sometimes, you might end up in front of a unique mutation capable of producing breathtaking feats, and it is your job to secure those specimens for further study. As for me, I have to teach you how to recognize them."

"The study of alien environments is one of the paths connected to this specialization. Being able to recognize patterns in foreign fauna and flora is key to finding unique aspects that are worth preserving."

'He really hates when soldiers kill valuable specimens,' Khan joked in his mind.

"We have a living example of patterns right here," Professor Nickton eventually stated as he finally stopped focusing on the interactive desk. "Lieu-, wait. Captain Khan? Am I reading this right?"

"Yes, sir," Khan voiced, revealing the most honest smile he could muster. "My promotion happened yesterday."

"I didn't leave the lab at all yesterday," Professor Nickton groaned. "Well, congratulations."

"Thank you," Khan uttered.

"Back to the lesson," Professor Nickton continued. "Captain Khan is a living example of what happens to those infected by Nak's mana. His azure features come from that alien species, and that color is so iconic that anyone in the universe can recognize it."

Khan didn't enjoy being used as an example, especially due to his connection to the Nak. Yet, Professor Nickton's words were true. Khan did fit perfectly into the subject.

"Now, mutations always alter something," Professor Nickton explained. "Be it the mind or the body or both. It is intrinsic to a mutation to turn something into a completely new material."

"Usually, when the mutations affect the body, they stretch to the very species of the lifeform and become dominant features. Captain Khan will probably pass his azure colors and element to his children, just like it happened to other similar cases throughout history."

Monica had to reach for Khan's hand since he had tightened his grip on her leg. He didn't hurt her, but she wanted to show her support. Khan had thought about that topic, and hearing Professor Nickton bringing it up didn't feel nice.

"Of course, only some of the changes might go to the next generation," Professor Nickton specified, "But that's another topic. It's important to know that these mutations can't be replicated easily, or even at all in some cases, so you must be able to recognize some valuable ones that the Global Army always needs."

Professor Nickton used the interactive desk to send a list of recorded mutations paired with detailed explanations and uses. The various names quickly captured everyone's interest, but the opening of the entrance broke that concentration.

Khan found another pair of familiar presences touching his senses and promptly pushed Monica's leg down. His gesture matched Princess Edna's careless entrance with Jack. The two headed directly for the professor's desk, uncaring of the many students who stood up to perform military salutes.

"Princess Edna," Professor Nickton called as the two approached his desk, "Are you interested in mutations?"

"The Headmistress should send you a message soon," Princess Edna explained. "I'm joining this class."

"Oh, sure," Professor Nickton nodded. "Do you wish me to start the lesson from the beginning?"

"No need," Princess Edna reassured before quickly turning to walk toward Khan's interactive desk. As for Jack, he obviously followed her closely.

"We can go shopping right after this mission ends," Princess Edna announced, uncaring that everyone in the class could hear her voice.

"Miss Virrai, I almost thought you had forgotten about our date," Monica joked. She and Khan had stood up to salute the Princess, and they remained on their feet during that conversation.

"I never forget shopping dates," Princess Edna giggled before focusing on Khan. "I hope your tastes are as good as your flying skills, Captain Khan. I won't let you drive my ship again otherwise."

Khan had to look at the Princess while talking to her, but his senses were hard at work. Everyone had heard Princess Edna's clear words, and gossip immediately spread, bringing as much attention as possible to Khan. The fact that he had piloted her ship was no longer a secret.

Chapter 445 Children

Khan could only watch powerlessly as the catastrophe unfolded. His eyes remained on Princess Edna, but the rest of his senses kept track of the hall, and the development threatened to give him a headache.

The night spent with the Princess had been on everyone's mind, but its details had remained vague. The descendants couldn't even ask straightforward questions since a noble figure was involved. They could only guess what had happened, but the latest revelation surpassed their wildest expectations.

Piloting the Princess' ship was a big deal, but the shocking details connected to it went beyond that. First, Khan's flying skills were in the open now. Also, he had somehow managed to get Princess Edna to acknowledge him.

Some initial guesses had seen Monica as the main reason behind the previous night's unexpected development. However, that changed now. Princess Edna seemed to treat Monica and Khan equally and even wanted both to join her shopping session.

Khan was lost. Everything had been a mess since the previous night, but the Princess had managed to make things worse. He couldn't fix that with lies and fake smiles. He could only play along and make the best out of it.

"I'm sorry to say that my taste is quite poor," Khan honestly admitted. "I still can't understand the need for so many clothes."

"I had to force him to buy something before coming here," Monica added. "He would only have military uniforms otherwise."

"A blank slate!" Princess Edna exclaimed. "How amusing."

"Though he does have a good eye for women's clothes," Monica revealed. "I rely on him when I can."

"Don't tell me that he is your secret," Princess Edna's eyes lit up before glancing at Jack. "I wish he could be useful there too."

"Oh, no," Monica giggled, and her laugh ended up being partially honest. "I told you. My secret will come only after some shopping."

Princess Edna seemed to accept the answer since she dropped the topic and walked around the interactive desk. Jack followed her, and the two soon found themselves next to Khan and Monica.

"Princess, do you want to sit next to-?" Khan tried to say, but Princess Edna sat before he could finish his question. She ended up next to him, and Jack occupied a spot at her side, creating the most awkward interactive table in existence.

The gazes and gossip didn't stop even after Khan sat down. Actually, they grew louder. Khan was between Monica and Princess Edna, so the descendants went wild with their guesses.

Only three people ignored that development in its entirety. Jack stared at an empty spot, Princess Edna played with the menus without caring about her surroundings, and Professor Nickton resumed the lesson as if nothing strange was happening.

"If you would look at the list I sent you," Professor Nickton stated, but Khan partially ignored him to look at Monica. She was wearing the same lost expression, and the two found some comfort in their equal state. Monica even pinched Khan's side to show her support before adjusting her position.

Needless to say, the lesson became hard to follow. Professor Nickton didn't have Professor Boatbell's incredible eloquence, but his subject was more interesting for Khan. Still, he had to resort to the entirety of his new senses to catch everything while remaining aware of his surroundings.

Of course, the rumors lost volume, but they existed, and Khan couldn't ignore them. The same went for the various shades added to the symphony of mana. The students almost stated their stances while thinking that Khan couldn't sense them.

Luckily for Khan, the Princess didn't do much. She simply killed time with the menus, making the overall situation bearable. Khan didn't dare to do anything with Monica but kept track of everything else without missing the valuable teachings.

Professor Nickton continued explaining the importance of mutations, using the list given to the students as a guideline. The variables could be endless, but some animals gave birth to similar organs and tissues, and the Global Army could turn those into potions or other valuable items.

The topic went deeper when Professor Nickton focused on the unique mutations. What Khan had seen in his lab was only one of the many and least amazing examples. The list contained Tainted animals that had learnt to generate special alloys and more, and a single specimen could be worth a fortune.

The Professor obviously didn't care about those specimens' financial value, but he mentioned it to highlight their importance. The key was finding patterns among the almost unpredictable mutations, and only true experts with decades of studies could claim to be reasonably accurate.

A dreaded moment eventually arrived. The lesson ended, and Khan remained in his seat, almost waiting for another catastrophe to unfold. He sensed the descendants' stance, so he knew they were ready to encircle his interactive desk.

However, Princess Edna stood up as soon as Professor Nickton left the hall and walked around the desk with Jack to occupy a spot in front of Khan and Monica. Her eyes completely ignored the eager students as they fell on the couple, and a question accompanied her gesture. "The ship is ready. Let's go."

Khan and Monica didn't need to check their respective intentions. They stood up and followed Princess Edna without uttering any words. They only managed to throw a polite salute at the class before leaving it.

The Princess' uncaring attitude saved the couple from a lengthy interrogation, and Khan almost began to have hope for the imminent endeavor. Still, that feeling vanished when he spotted Ron waiting in the corridor.

"Princess, I hope the lesson was enjoyable," Ron announced while leaving the wall and adjusting his glasses.

"It was boring as expected," Princess Edna sighed.

"That's inevitable in your position," Ron commented, "Which is why I suggested a different assignment. Attending subjects you have already mastered is a waste of-."

"I studied the shopping area last night," Princess Edna exclaimed, uncaring that Ron had yet to finish his line. "I know which shop I want to see first."

"Shoes?" Monica guessed.

"You know me so well," Princess Edna giggled before peeking past Monica to look at Khan. "Captain, I hope your good eye doesn't work only on Monica."

"I will do my best to meet your expectations," Khan chuckled. He had every intention of being honest, but that didn't save him from Ron's glare.

Monica and Princess Edna fell into a private conversation about clothes and shopping, so Khan remained alone with Ron's constant glare. The general attention from the people in the corridor didn't help distract him from that annoying stare either, so he let his mind wander to avoid falling prey to his mind's worst sides.

Professor Nickton's lesson touched on themes that Khan had considered in the past. The threat of passing down his mutations had afflicted his thoughts at times. That issue had stayed away from his head since Liiza, but the Harbor had rekindled it.

'Children,' Khan mocked himself as the walk led the group into a secret elevator. 'Am I really considering having them?'

Professor Nickton was an expert, but Khan knew about alternative paths. The mutations weren't absolute, especially when they came from mana. There had to be ways to prevent their hereditary properties.

Khan was nowhere near understanding or gaining any control over his mutations, and his situation was also peculiar. Yet, in theory, he could find solutions. Building a family wouldn't be impossible forever, but he needed more than simple genetic clearance.

The elevator brought the group into an isolated area outside the embassy. The team didn't reach the first floor. They were still near the middle of the giant structure, and the half-circular ship was already waiting past the ceiling's edge.

Khan remained immersed in his thoughts even after entering the ship. His gaze fell on Monica at times, but he always retracted it right away. He had gone through hell and back with Liiza before considering having children with her. It was too early to compare that situation with Monica.

Still, Khan wasn't the only one full of wild thoughts. Ron was in the same situation, but his attention mainly involved Khan's peculiar behavior. He didn't feel any danger coming from him, but the presence of the Princess forced him to be meticulous.

When Ron laid his hand on Khan's neck, he had to snap out of his pensive state. The scene from the previous night repeated itself, and Khan almost rolled his eyes in annoyance but held back for obvious reasons.

"You are up to something," Ron coldly stated.

Monica immediately jumped on her feet, but a single look at Princess Edna told her that she wouldn't help. Instead, the Princess pointed her curious expression at Khan while waiting for an explanation.

"Sir, I believe I'm allowed to think about private matters," Khan tried to get out of that situation while retaining a veil of honesty.

"You are in the presence of the Princess," Ron remained cold. "Any matter that I deem concerning loses its right to privacy."

"Give up, Captain Khan," Princess Edna giggled. "I'm also interested in your thoughts now. Is it the ship again?"

Anger built up inside Monica, but her expression conveyed only concern. She found that treatment unfair, but the sadness she experienced submerged her unreasonable mood swings and replaced them with a supportive look.

"It's not the ship," Khan sighed again as his internal conflict became evident on his face. "It's about Professor Nickton's lesson. I was thinking about the risk of passing down my mutations to my children."

Ron's hand remained firm, but Khan felt the tremor that ran through his mana. Obviously, Ron didn't expect the matter to be so private, and some regret even leaked out of his figure.

Instead, Monica's eyes widened in shock, and her blush became almost noticeable on her dark skin. Everything also intensified when Khan looked at her. She had gotten the wrong idea, and the headache became real when Khan thought about the discussions that would follow.

"Aren't your mutations good?" Princess Edna wondered. "Besides, the second generations rarely carry negative features."

"Are you knowledgeable about Nak's mutations, Princess Edna?" Khan questioned.

"Knowledgeable enough," Princess Edna confirmed before reaching for Monica's hand. "Get down. We had finally found something worth buying."

Monica could barely speak in that situation. Her almost confession from the previous night and the topic mentioned by Khan turned her mind into a mess. Luckily for her, the Princess was quite talkative when shopping was involved, so she could sit in silence and let her do the rest.

Khan resumed his battle of glares with Ron at that point, but the latter immediately backed down. He even retreated his hand while inspecting Khan's azure features. A "sorry" seemed about to escape his mouth, but he ended up remaining silent.

An awkward atmosphere enveloped the rest of the flight. Ron continued to check up on Khan, causing many battles of glares that rekindled the regret experienced before. Meanwhile, Monica shot timid looks at Khan while dealing with the Princess' eager mood. Only Jack remained outside those interactions, but his uncaring behavior soon became the norm.

The landing dispersed the awkwardness and replaced it with pure chaos. The ship stopped on the sidewalk outside a shop, and a crowd had already gathered there. Yet, many soldiers were in the area to keep a wide path open.

Princess Edna almost dragged Monica away, and the others followed closely behind. The group entered the shop only to discover that the place lacked customers. Only the attendants and the owner were there.

"Princess!" The middle-aged woman in charge of the shop announced as soon as the group crossed the entrance. "We have already taken out our best pieces and lined them up before the changing rooms."

"Let's not waste time," Princess Edna exclaimed, ignoring the luxurious welcome to head directly for the changing rooms.

A surprising scene unfolded in Khan's vision once the group reached its destination. The shop had rearranged its layout to create a series of long lines made of clothes and accessories. Each led to changing rooms, building expensive corridors meant to show as many goods as possible.

The shop's layout proved once again how important a noble family's descendant was. Khan had received privileged treatment in Neo Station, but that went far beyond what he expected. The world seemed to revolve around Princess Edna, and she barely noticed the efforts shown by those workers.

Ron's glare interrupted Khan's thoughts and threatened to start another silent battle, but Princess Edna created a diversion that the latter couldn't ignore.

"You must try this," Princess Edna gasped while reaching for a beautiful dark-red dress and handing it to Monica.

"Miss Virrai, why don't you try it first?" Monica suggested even if she took the dress.

"I want you to loosen up first," Princess Edna giggled while pushing Monica toward the changing room.

The two women entered the isolated area together, and Khan didn't hide his interest in the imminent outcome. He was a stranger to style and barely cared about it, but he knew how much Monica liked it, and her happy face was priceless. Besides, Khan wanted to see her in that dress.

Minutes went by, and the attendants standing behind the lines of clothes grew tense during the wait. Their job seemed to depend on the Princess' reaction, which probably wasn't far from the truth.

Eventually, the door of the changing room slid open, and Princess Edna pushed Monica forward to put her under the spotlight. The one-shoulder dress fit her perfectly and enhanced her natural elegance. The few exposed areas also attracted Khan's gaze and kept him glued on the scene.

Monica showed a shy smile under Khan's evident appreciation. She lowered her gaze but covered that reaction with an elegant bow. Still, her performance couldn't be as good as usual after everything that had happened since the previous night.

Ron's sharp eyes didn't fail to miss that forced behavior. Monica seemed to be in trouble, and Khan clearly was the source of those issues, so Ron didn't hesitate to unleash his hand again.

"What now?" Khan groaned once Ron's sharp hand ended on his neck. He quickly realized that his reaction had been rude, but his face appeared unable to wear a sorry expression.

"Miss Solodrey, please, be honest," Ron announced. "Is Captain Khan blackmailing you in any way? You can trust us."

Monica remained speechless, and the same went for Khan. However, Princess Edna exploded into a composed laugh before either could speak.

"Ron, you can be so blind at times," Princess Edna giggled. "Can't you see it? They are secret lovers."

Chapter 446 Candidate

Silence fell among the group. Monica froze in terror, and Khan ended up in a similar situation. However, his stillness didn't come from the same feelings. The shock barely lasted one second before turning into something darker.

The same clicking growl that Khan had heard from the cloud spell became a background noise in his mind. Meanwhile, wild thoughts ran among it and gave birth to nefarious ideas.

Princess Edna's revelation had stunned Ron. That was the second time he threatened Khan for the wrong reasons. It was within his tasks to be so thorough, but regret inevitably piled on and distracted him for a few seconds.

Khan didn't miss that distraction. His sensitivity fused with his wild thoughts and battle experience to give birth to a plan that could exploit that window. Ron was a fourth-level warrior with unknown prowess and abilities, but a Wave spell could surprise even the most troublesome opponents.

Those thoughts went beyond taking care of Ron. Khan could only focus on preserving his relationship now, and killing inevitably became a possibility. He had grown so used to that practice that his feelings made him consider it right away.

Of course, Khan wasn't thinking straight. His nefarious ideas were the result of unreasonable feelings. He was actually considering going against two fourth-level warriors and risking hurting a noble descendant to protect his relationship. That was one of his darkest faces, and someone among the group immediately noticed it.

Nothing had left Khan's mind. His thoughts had merely been an instinctive reaction that had yet to transform into actions. Less than two seconds had passed since the shocking revelation, but a pair of empty grey eyes fell on him anyway.

Khan snapped out of his wild state to focus on Jack. The soldier was looking straight at him. That emotionless stare almost spoke to Khan and told him that any attempt to escape would end in his death.

The realization allowed Khan to calm down. The clicking noise vanished, but his emotions remained violent. Still, he could approach them with a chill mind, and a helpless sigh eventually escaped his mouth.

'What would you even want me to do?' Khan mocked himself. 'Killing everyone in this shop? Should I also destroy the Harbor since I'm at it?'

Khan's mana was the target of his questions. He knew how unreasonable it could be, but he didn't dare to blame it for his wild reaction. After all, he had experienced something similar when Azni found out about his relationship with Liiza. The transformation might explain the new intensity, but those dark thoughts were part of him.

'[Be it planting countless flowers],' Khan played Jenna's teachings in his mind, '[Or creating bloody rivers]. I guess I've gotten too used to the latter.'

"Jack?" Princess Edna called when she noticed Jack's reaction.

Jack's empty glare lingered on Khan for another second, but he soon diverted it to regain his lost look. Khan had stopped being a threat to the Princess, so Jack didn't need to watch him anymore.

"He must really like you," Princess Edna commented. "I've never seen anyone considering going against Jack."

The threatening sensation coming from Ron intensified at those words. He still had his hand on Khan's throat and was ready to unleash it at the first sudden move.

Khan was strangely calm. He was ready to explode but also completely cold. Fighting couldn't get him out of that situation, but he felt no fear. That crisis was an inevitable result. Someone had to find out about his relationship sooner or later. Khan would have preferred things to unfold differently, but he had no regrets, especially now that he had chosen to pursue his happiness.

"Miss Vir-," Monica eventually recovered, and her begging tone conveyed her stance. "Edna, please. Khan had nothing to do with this. I put him in this situation."

"Did you force yourself on him?" Princess Edna giggled. "Monica, I didn't think you were so bold."

"I-," Monica's first instinct was to explain herself, but the situation had other priorities. "I'll do anything you ask. Just spare Khan from any trouble."

Monica even reached for Princess Edna's hands to convey her honesty, but the latter ended up frowning. She seemed confused about that development.

"Monica, stop," Khan called. "It's out. It's too late to do anything about it."

Khan didn't need to inspect his surroundings to know that Princess Edna's revelation had reached the attendants. The surprise leaking into the symphony confirmed that detail. Even if the Princess decided to ignore the recent events, the rumor was bound to spread.

"Let me fix this!" Monica snapped before focusing on the Princess again. "Edna, I put Khan up to this. I take full responsibility for his actions."

Khan hated seeing Monica like that. His mana began to boil as his cold glare fell on Ron. The latter replied with a similar stare, but his hand remained still. He didn't attack even after that obvious enmity.

"Princess," Ron spoke while inspecting Khan's every move. "Captain Khan has shown clear hostility toward you. Permission to behead him."

The fact that Khan didn't move at all was his only saving grace. Ron would have attacked without waiting for the Princess' permission otherwise.

"Denied," Princess Edna stated as her eyes lit up and melted her frown. "Oh! Secret lovers! Of course!"

Princess Edna's statement confused the entire group, but she didn't hesitate to explain herself. "You are afraid that I might reveal your secret."

"You kind of already did," Khan pointed out while glancing at the attendants past the lines of clothes.

"Ron, take care of them," Princess Edna immediately ordered.

"Princess?" Ron wondered. "Captain Khan wanted to hurt you!"

"He wanted to protect Monica," Princess Edna corrected. "She found someone willing to go against me if the situation requires it. I can only be happy for her."

"But-!" Ron tried to say.

"Hurry," Princess Edna pressed. "I want to keep shopping."

Ron couldn't refuse. He glared at Khan again but eventually retracted his hand to approach the various attendants. He also summoned the shop's boss before starting a speech that Khan couldn't hear from his position.

"I don't understand," Monica admitted in confusion.

"What don't you understand?" Princess Edna asked.

"Why did you reveal our secret if you had no intention of blackmailing us?" Monica explained.

"Oh, that," Princess Edna exclaimed. "I didn't realize you wanted to keep it a secret."

"But you called us secret lovers," Monica reminded.

"How to explain?" Princess Edna muttered before avoiding the problem altogether. "Ron, come to explain."

"Yes!" Ron shouted before exchanging a few words with the boss and returning to the group. "The Princess' education and character put her in a unique position. She is very perceptive, but her understanding of social interactions fails to meet proper standards at times."

'Is she an idiot?' Khan wondered before putting that idea aside. His experience with alien species granted him a broader perspective. It didn't take him long to accept that the Princess simply saw social interactions differently.

Ron took out a device from his pocket and summoned the boss with a gesture. The middle-aged woman was all smiles as she approached the soldier and performed a polite bow to the Princess. She even left her genetic signature on the screen before pretending to remain calm.

The Princess also left her genetic signature on the device before ignoring the matter altogether. She limited herself to smiling at Monica while Ron began his speech.

"This shop and all its attendants now belong to Princess Edna Virrai," Ron announced. "I've already forwarded your new regulations, including the instructions to get the family brand. Some soldiers will pick you up once the Princess is done shopping."

"You honor us," The middle-aged woman declared. "Enjoy your stay. I'll prepare the crew for the trip."

The middle-aged woman performed another bow and left the lines of clothes, but Khan and Monica's questioning expressions forced Ron to give another explanation.

"Princess Edna bought this shop and all its secrets," Ron voiced without hiding his scorn toward Khan, "Including yours. A mana restraint will prevent the entire crew from speaking about what they heard today."

"What about the cameras?" Khan asked, forcing his amazement to remain in the back of his mind.

"The cameras went dark as soon as the Princess entered the shop," Ron revealed. "Don't be surprised. It's a standard practice when noble descendants are involved."

The influence and power that Princess Edna could express were stunning. Even Monica opened her mouth in shock. She wasn't really surprised, but that development left her in awe, especially since she couldn't understand why the Princess had gone so far to cover her secret.

As for Khan, he felt awe, surprise, and shock, but his mind recovered quickly and focused on different topics. He didn't know how much he could trust Princess Edna. Yet, the revelation had left him powerless, so he planned on understanding his current situation.

"Princess Edna, do you mind answering a few questions?" Khan called.

"I do mind," Princess Edna pouted. "It's my turn to try one of these dresses."

"I'll tell you Monica's secret if you wait a little longer," Khan tried his chances, and Princess Edna's curious face told him that he had hit the mark.

"Captain Khan," Princess Edna exclaimed. "You have my attention."

Khan ignored Monica's embarrassment and voiced his first question. "Let me get this straight. You had no intention of exposing us, right?"

"I only wanted to clear Ron's doubts," Princess Edna confirmed.

"So, you have no interest in using this information for your benefit," Khan continued.

"You would have to follow my orders anyway," Princess Edna casually declared. "I told you. I just want to have fun."

Khan found it hard to believe that such a lofty figure could have innocent desires. However, Princess Edna's uncaring character felt in line with that behavior, and her mana further confirmed that detail.

"Princess, permission to drop the act," Khan requested.

"Are you sure?" Princess Edna wondered while pulling her hands to leave Monica and turn completely. "I thought you'd be interested in the political game."

"What do you mean?" Khan asked.

"Don't you want to get close to me to use my political value?" Princess Edna questioned. "Dropping your act will lower your chances."

Khan didn't expect that honest speech. Princess Edna had sounded serious, and Ron's stern stance added value to her words. She had stopped being a young woman focused on shopping. Now, she was a noble descendant.

"Do I have that choice?" Khan couldn't help but ask.

"It's fine by me," Princess Edna announced.

"Princess, a Captain should-," Ron warned, but the Princess didn't let him finish.

"So, is this over?" Princess Edna wondered. "Do I get the secret now?"

Princess Edna's eager face put Khan before two paths. He could continue his usual polite act, hoping that his emotions would hold on, or he could drop everything and go with the flow, uncaring of what he might lose in the process.

Khan knew where his mind wanted to go. Yet, he couldn't disregard that chance. He had the opportunity to build a political relationship with a noble descendant. People would kill for something like that. He couldn't throw it away just to avoid pretending in her presence.

The issue truly weighed on Khan. He spent entire seconds pondering about it. However, a decision arrived when he glanced at Monica. She was still terrified, even if the situation had evolved past the previous problem. Her mind had suffered too many blows in the span of a single day.

"Fuck this," Khan sighed while stepping forward. Ron prepared himself to intervene, but Princess Edna raised her hand before he could do anything. She had understood where Khan was going and had no intention of stopping him.

"Will you calm down?" Khan scolded while taking Monica's face into his hands. "You heard the Princess. We are safe."

"Khan," Monica complained. "They are watching us."

Khan smiled to reassure Monica. The recent events had been an emotional rollercoaster, but the safety of Khan's hands allowed her to relax. A few tears appeared in her eyes, but nothing serious followed.

"Don't cry," Khan whispered while wiping Monica's eyes with his sleeve. "We both know how difficult you are if one of your mood swings arrives."

"Shut up," Monica sniffed. "Don't change the topic. You are not choosing this over establishing a connection with the Virrai family."

"Do you think I'd miss the chance to be with you in public?" Khan teased. "You underestimate me."

"Khan, it's a noble family," Monica pointed out. "You won't get another chance like this."

"Actually, this is my second already," Khan laughed as he pulled Monica into his arms. "Besides, I don't care. I will have enough dinners as it is."

Ron coughed, and Khan took that chance to address his behavior. "Can you stop trying to behead me? I'm a war hero. Show me some respect."

"Khan!" Monica snapped while lifting her head and gabbing Khan's collar. "You can't talk to a noble guard like this."

"We said no act," Khan scoffed, showing no shame for what he had just said. "Also, I'm the youngest Captain in history. Even Jack acknowledged me, right? Give me a few years, and I'll have all the noble families begging me to join them."

"We are in the presence of a Princess-!" Monica tried to scold, but Khan sealed her lips with a kiss before she could finish her line.

Monica's mood quelled during the kiss. It even dispersed the remaining tension that still lingered in her mind. She completely calmed down, and some shyness inevitably arrived.

"Monica," Khan called once the kiss ended. "Did I tell you how much I like you in this dress?"

"No," Monica pouted, "But keep complimenting me. You have a lot to make up for."

"What did I do now?" Khan frowned.

"It's because of you that the Princess found out about us," Monica snorted. "What was that stuff about the children? Especially after yesterday!"

"What happened yesterday?" Princess Edna joined the conversation.

"Princess," Ron called. "Maybe it's better if-."

"This scoundrel needed a reminder of how far I am willing to go," Monica declared. "I even said that I was starting to fa-."

Monica couldn't finish her line since Khan placed a finger on her mouth. The gesture made her angrier, but Khan's following words vanquished that feeling. "Those words are only for me to hear."

Khan and Monica fell into a meaningful stare, but Princess Edna interrupted it. "Can I hear the secret now?"

Monica looked at Princess Edna, and her eyes widened when she recalled what she wanted. Her face immediately went on Khan's chest. She couldn't deal with that embarrassing topic.

"It's a type of happiness that only a partner can give," Khan explained while caressing Monica's hair. "I don't know if you have someone like her in your life."

"You are talking about sex, right?" Princess Edna asked without showing any shame, and her words made Monica tense up.

"Sort of," Khan chuckled while lowering his head to lay it on Monica's hair. "Again, it's happiness. It doesn't matter how you get it."

"Is that so," Princess Edna muttered and crossed her arms. "I guess I can't get it. Whatever."

"Princess, I'm sure you'll find someone," Khan reassured, but Monica pushed herself away to show her glare.

Khan felt confused, and the Princess didn't bother to pay attention to that topic anymore. It took Ron to clear those doubts. "The Princess knows her value as a political currency. Her education made sure of that."

The explanation remained vague, and Khan didn't initially understand how serious the matter was. After all, Monica had gone through something similar but had ended up following her feelings.

However, things changed when Khan considered the Princess' unique position. She was as old as Monica but had already mastered the embassy's classes. Her education had to belong to a superior realm, especially regarding relationships.

"Oh," Khan voiced. A wave of sadness washed him over when he looked at the Princess. His upbringing had been awful, and the chaos element messed with his thoughts, but he was himself. Instead, the Princess seemed to have lost something during her education.

"This dress looks cute!" Princess Edna exclaimed while seizing a dress from one of the lines.

"Monica, what do you think?"

Monica recalled the initial purpose behind the visit to the shop, and Khan nodded at her before she could ask anything. The two exchanged a kiss, and Monica left him to reach the Princess.

Khan let his thoughts wander while inspecting the two women. They were both showing honest smiles over shallow topics. Still, that happiness felt special when Khan considered their lives.

Monica's upbringing had been a psychological hell, and Princess Edna probably had far worse. The expectations placed on them could suffocate anyone, but they were still able to smile.

"It makes you want to protect these moments," Ron announced while approaching Khan. "Don't you think?"

Khan glanced at Ron only to notice that he was also looking at the two women. A faint smile had broadened on his face too. Ron appeared happy, even if he did his best to hide that.

"They aren't the only ones with a difficult life," Khan commented, and his hesitation toward Ron was more than clear.

"My apologies," Ron sighed. "I've acted within my rights, but my judgment might have been biased. Please understand that you are the perfect candidate for many jobs coming from enemy parties."

"Enemy parties?" Khan questioned. "Who can target a noble?"

Understanding dawned before Ron could say anything. Khan felt incredibly stupid. Obviously, only a noble could target a noble. As for the motives, they weren't important.

"What makes me a perfect candidate?" Khan wondered.

"Talent, drive, lack of background," Ron explained. "You have no loyalty to speak of. That makes you dangerous."

"You sound knowledgeable about the matter," Khan hinted.

"I was like that," Ron revealed. "That's why someone hired me to kill the Princess. She showed mercy."

Khan felt the urge to gulp, but his expression remained still. That revelation had to be something big, but Ron had spoken it anyway. The gesture probably was Ron's way of making up for his previous behavior.

"What about Jack?" Khan asked.

"He is different," Ron explained. "He went too deep into the battlefield and can't come back. The Virrai family simply trained him to be a guard."

Khan didn't know what to say. He felt to have stepped into a bigger world. The realm of the noble families seemed even stranger and more dangerous than some of the alien planets visited in his missions, but that made it interesting.

"I'll tell you if someone hires me to kill the Princess," Khan eventually joked, and a laugh escaped his mouth when Ron glared at him. The two seemed about to argue, but Princess Edna called Khan before they could start. The night was long, and Khan had to help with many clothes.

Chapter 447 Revelation

The Princess' greed was boundless, and her bottomless finances allowed her to give free rein to her desires. Monica didn't hold back either, and Khan inevitably fell prey to that endless shopping spree.

The few sets of clothes Monica had bought for Khan in Neo Station paled before that night's purchases. He didn't get nearly as many things as the two women, but his wardrobe still reached unprecedented levels.

Of course, the shopping spree didn't lack random arguments or embarrassing comments. Khan had dropped the act, so teasing Ron became the norm, and Princess Edna's unrestrained statements often made Monica blush.

However, none of those issues led to real problems. The group handled everything casually due to the new silent agreement they had reached, so the night went smoothly. Princess Edna even held back from revealing Khan and Monica's secret for the rest of the date.

The shopping dome was big, but Khan felt that the group had crossed most of it before the ship finally headed toward the second district. Usually, that practice would drain him mentally, but he felt strangely lively as George's building appeared on the transparent surface.

The sidewalk was a mess. No one knew the Princess' plans, but everyone saw Khan and Monica leaving with her. The fact that the couple spent time in George's flat was common knowledge, so a crowd of people had tried their chances and had waited there.

Soldiers kept the situation orderly, so the ship could land on the sidewalk without meeting any problems. Shouts resounded as soon as Khan and Monica showed their faces, and the whole area grew completely chaotic when Princess Edna and her guards followed.

The presence of such a lofty figure forced the crowd to fall silent shortly after, but everyone kept track of her movements. To their surprise, Princess Edna, Jack, and Ron followed Khan and Monica inside the building.

No words flew among the group. Khan directly approached the elevator, and Monica timidly followed behind. The remaining three joined them in no time, and the lift soon brought everyone inside George's flat.

Khan was ready to throw himself on a couch, but the symphony that welcomed him caused some hesitation. A specific warmth filled the air with feelings he knew far too well.

'What strange timing,' Khan laughed internally while turning toward the group to announce something meant to slow them down. "Are you sure you want to drink with us? We don't have the best booze."

"I've already called someone," Ron scoffed.

"Ron, Captain Khan is buying time," Princess Edna giggled. "I'm curious."

Princess Edna strode forward, and Khan gave up on his attempt. Monica tried to find answers on his face, but he only shook his head as he proceeded deeper into the flat with the rest of the group.

When the main hall unfolded in Khan's vision, he found Princess Edna curiously inspecting the two people at its center. George was on his feet, with the upper part of his uniform hanging from his shoulders. He had begun to close it, but the Princess' arrival had made that effort pointless.

The second person was Anita, who didn't stop moving even after noticing the Princess. Her uniform only had a few buttons open, but she quickly closed them and adjusted herself to perform a military salute.

George promptly imitated Anita, but his exposed torso made the scene funny, and Khan didn't refrain from smirking. His smile even widened when he noticed George trying to glare at him while keeping his attention on the Princess.

"George Ildoo and Anita Wildon," Ron explained while the Princess remained silent.

"Princess Edna," Anita exclaimed. "It's an honor to meet you."

"It's an honor, Princess Edna," George added.

"Is he your friend?" Princess Edna questioned while glancing in Khan and Monica's direction.

"They are both our friends," Khan responded. "Still, yes, George is the owner of this flat."

Anita couldn't help but panic. George's appearance was unbecoming of a Princess, and she couldn't speak highly of herself either. The Princess' uncaring expression only worsened that feeling. Anita wasn't ready for that meeting, so she opted for a tactical retreat.

"Please, excuse me," Anita declared in the politest tone she could muster in her panic. "A personal matter is waiting for me, and I'm already late. Princess Edna, I'll gladly make up for my disrespectful behavior with a dinner in one of my family's estates."

"You'll have to set an appointment," Princess Edna casually replied before resuming her inspection of George. She didn't even look at Anita hurrying out of the flat.

Monica wanted to say something but eventually held back. Too much had happened since the previous night, and adding Anita to the current situation would only create more problems. As for Khan, he nodded at Anita before showing his meaningful smirk to George again.

Once the elevator closed with Anita inside, Khan heaved a tired sigh and headed for one of the couches. He even unbuttoned his collar and picked up one of the bottles lying around while making himself comfortable on the pillows.

George couldn't understand what was happening but recognized Khan's unrestrained behavior. A frown appeared on his face when he realized something was up, but the Princess beat him to it.

"Jack, how is he?" Princess Edna asked.

Jack glanced at George, and the latter experienced something similar to what Khan had gone through during his promotion. His face went cold as his mind prepared for battle, but the presence of the Princess and Khan's relaxed stance forced him to remain still.

"He knows death," Jack spoke familiar words. "He might surpass me in seven years."

"Truly a gem among descendants," Ron praised.

"Hey, you insulted me last time," Khan complained.

"Mister Ildoo is a respectable member of the Ildoo family," Ron explained. "I can only be happy that the Global Army has produced such a promising soldier."

"Respectable," Khan joked.

"Jack gave seven years to me too," Princess Edna commented. "How curious."

Princess Edna quickly lost interest in George and headed for a couch in front of Khan. George didn't dare to break his military salute, but his confusion intensified once Jack and Ron sat next to the noble descendant.

That sudden development surpassed George's wildest expectations. A noble descendant and two fourth-level warriors were in his flat, sitting mere meters from him, and Khan didn't seem to care about them. Nothing made sense anymore, but Khan pulled George next to him before his mind could explode.

"What did I miss?" George eventually asked since Khan's casual mood reassured him.

"She is peculiar," Khan described while nodding toward the Princess and moving to the others on her couch, "He is uptight, and he is like us."

"The Princess' permission doesn't give you any right to speak about her like this," Ron complained.

"It's called permission for a reason," Khan muttered while eyeing Monica. She was still unclear on how to behave, but that look gave her the confidence to sit next to him.

The situation reached a stalemate. Ron, Princess Edna, and Jack sat on one couch while Monica, Khan, and George occupied another. The two groups faced each other, and neither appeared interested in speaking.

Monica and Princess Edna ended up being the ones to break that stalemate. The Princess reached for another bottle lying around and handed it to Ron before taking it back once he checked that everything was okay.

As for Monica, she remained tense until her pleading eyes fell on Khan. He immediately embraced her at that point, and she cuddled under his arm while he took sips from the bottle.

Needless to say, George's confusion skyrocketed. The Princess wasn't behaving like a noble descendant, and Monica was being intimate with Khan in the open. Something had definitely happened that night, and George couldn't understand what.

"Alright, scoundrel," George eventually grunted while pointing his forefinger at Khan. "What did you do?"

"I'm completely innocent this time," Khan promised.

"As innocent as a death convict," Monica whispered.

"You know I didn't do anything," Khan complained.

"I can count nine different infractions that could get you kicked out of the Global Army," Ron pointed out. "Ten if we add your latest lack of respect toward the Princess."

"He secretly likes me," Khan joked.

"Explain," George almost threatened.

Khan scratched the side of his head with the bottle before coming up with a simple summary. "The Princess was insightful enough to find out about us. We agreed on dropping any pretense after that, at least while there aren't outsiders."

"How did she even guess that?" George asked.

"Well, Monica was all-!" Khan began to say, but Monica promptly slapped a hand over his mouth to shut him up. The two fell prey to a cute scuffle that ended with Monica wearing a pissed expression and sitting between Khan's legs.

"She is cute when you tease her," Princess Edna's eyes lit up. "Captain, do it again."

"Edna, please," Monica pouted. "Khan already has enough fun as it is."

"Didn't you know that before forcing yourself on him?" Princess Edna wondered.

"I didn't!" Monica snapped. "That's a complete misunderstanding!"

"I was only an innocent boy back then," Khan sighed. "I couldn't even try to fight back."

"You?!" Monica cursed as she turned to resume the scuffle, but Princess Edna's loud laugh interrupted it before it went too far.

"Wow," George gasped after finally gaining insights into the situation. "You really are women's greatest weakness."

"You can't talk," Khan responded. "Do you think we'll forget about Anita so easily? I guess she forgave you in the end."

"We were simply studying," George snorted, "And it was hot."

"Behave with her," Monica warned while her arms were still locked in Khan's grasp. "You'll hear from me otherwise."

George opened his mouth to reply but closed it right after to glance at the other couch. He had yet to accept that situation, and his following whisper expressed his doubts. "Can we really talk so openly?"

"The Princess doesn't mind," Khan confirmed. "I think she will actually enjoy herself more like this."

"Do not speak for the Princess," Ron scolded.

"Ron, let the Captain speak," Princess Edna ordered. "It's fun not being treated as a princess."

Ron sighed, but the Princess' excited face made him drop any attempt to control the situation. Among the trio, only Monica wielded enough influence to create problems for Princess Edna, but her secret relationship made her the weakest link. Ron didn't need to worry about the possible consequences of those casual interactions.

George could barely believe his eyes, but he couldn't deny what was happening. Still, he didn't immediately switch to his honest mood. He was a wealthy descendant, so he had to take proper precautions.

"Princess Edna," George announced while standing up and performing a military salute, "I want to point out that my behavior during my private life doesn't speak for my job ethic or family. I hope you won't think less of me as a soldier and member of the Ildoo family due to actions performed during my free time."

Khan revealed a happy smile. He knew George had matured in the past years, but that was the first true demonstration of his growth. He didn't change, but that side of him had improved in ways that even Ron had to acknowledge.

"I have no secret agenda, Mister Ildoo," Princess Edna stated. "Act as you see fit."

"Thank you," George nodded before returning to his seat.

"You should learn from George," Khan didn't miss the chance to tease Monica.

"Alright, enough!" Monica snorted while standing up and pulling Khan with her. "Edna, I need to have a talk with this idiot. Please, excuse us."

Princess Edna merely nodded at the couple before losing herself in the inspection of the flat. She held the bottle with both hands and studied every corner of the hall, uncaring that Monica was pulling Khan into separate areas.

"Stop that!" Monica shouted as soon as the bedroom's door closed behind the couple. "I feel that I'm going crazy already as it is, and you are only making things worse!"

Khan initially smiled. He liked seeing Monica's mood swings, but she radiated genuine anger now. Still, most of that feeling came from lingering anxiety.

"Is this about the children thing?" Khan wondered.

"No!" Monica cried. "Yes! I don't know! What were you even thinking back then? You would have really died!"

Monica's voice broke near the end of her statement. Her anxiety took over and transformed her anger into a hysterical cry. Tears also started to arrive, dispersing any desire Khan still had to tease her.

"Shit," Monica cursed while immersing her hands in her curls and fondling them violently. "I'm going crazy."

Monica's reaction was quite extreme. The recent events weighed on her mental stability, but everything had ended well. In theory, she had no reason to be so upset.

Yet, Khan knew that things weren't as simple as they looked. Seeing an example of how harsh the wealthy upbringing could be added value to Monica's decision to be with Khan. She had chosen to face many risks, and her response to Princess Edna's revelation had highlighted how much he mattered to her.

Khan hated seeing Monica cry, but some happiness still arrived. His senses could confirm many things, but seeing Monica trying to shield him from eventual punishments had been undeniable proof. Some hesitation remained inside her, but her stance was clear. She was completely on Khan's side, and he wanted to take responsibility for that.

"I didn't realize how hard it was for you," Khan admitted while reaching for Monica's hair, but she retreated and turned to get deeper into the room.

"It's not you," Monica sniffed as she approached the bed to sit in its corner. "I'm the one losing control."

Khan walked toward Monica, but she kept her head lowered. Her curls hid her face even when Khan sat on the floor, and she had no intentions of showing herself.

"What are you doing?" Khan whispered while taking Monica's knee and moving it left and right. "Blame me already."

"What?" Monica questioned while peeking through her messy hair.

"I'm the reason you are losing control," Khan replied. "I'm guilty because you say so. Isn't this what we do?"

"This isn't a joking matter!" Monica snapped, lifting her head to reveal her teary face. "The fucking Princess found out about us! What's next? Anita? Lucian? Should we put out banners saying that we are together?"

"Sure," Khan agreed. "Let's do it."

"You are not being serious," Monica scoffed. "Do you have any idea of what would happen?"

"No," Khan admitted. He had accepted that the world of the wealthy descendants still had many secrets, so he didn't dare to claim otherwise. However, his intentions had nothing to do with that, and he made sure to convey them. "But you are struggling, right? Let's stop hiding then."

Monica lifted her head completely and stopped messing with her hair to reach for Khan's left cheek. She caressed him, and he softly bit her thumb when it entered his mouth's range.

"Idiot," Monica giggled. "You just want to tease me in public."

"Tease," Khan muttered while letting go of Monica's thumb to snuggle in her palm, "Hold, kiss."

"Such a scoundrel," Monica whispered as some shyness appeared on her face. "I'm not ready to have children, so get that idea out of your mind."

"It wasn't about that," Khan chuckled. "I was worried about the mutations. I don't want to pass them down."

"Your new hair looks fine," Monica reassured. "Besides, the Global Army has experience dealing with mutations. They won't be a problem."

Khan smiled but lowered his gaze. Some hesitation appeared in his mind but quickly went away. Somehow, he had already made a decision on the matter.

"I have nightmares," Khan revealed while keeping his gaze lowered. "I see the Second Impact whenever I fall asleep. It's mana-related, so there is no real solution."

"What?" Monica gasped. "What are you saying?"

"My mutations cursed me," Khan continued. "I don't know what the nightmares mean, but I keep having them. They probably have something to do with the true reason behind the First Impact, and the Global Army might have the answers."

"That's why you want to become an ambassador," Monica realized.

"It's a suitable career," Khan nodded. "It will allow me to learn more about mana while climbing the political ladder."

Monica didn't know what to say. That revelation was too big for her to accept right away. Suddenly, most of Khan's current personality and behavior made sense. He was basically trapped, and getting stronger was the only available path.

"I had no idea," Monica whispered.

"Only a handful of people know about this," Khan added. "I'm pretty sure Raymond and some higher-ups of the Global Army have some answers, but I can't just ask them."

"No wonder you hate sleeping so much," Monica commented. "It makes sense. You don't want your children to have nightmares."

"Yes," Khan sighed as he finally lifted his gaze. "It wasn't about you or anything. Professor Nickton's lesson simply awakened old worries."

Monica was lost. She needed time to process the revelation, and more questions piled up as she kept thinking about it. Yet, the situation didn't work in her favor, and she had different priorities now.

"You have this immense burden," Monica stated as she left the bed to sit on the floor with Khan, "And I'm here complaining about getting teased. Sorry. I'm so, so sorry."

"Hey, you didn't know," Khan smirked while pulling Monica onto his lap. "You also have it hard. Being with me is no easy task, especially with your family and everything."

"Nonsense," Monica scoffed. "Tease me all you want. Joke and have fun with me whenever you feel like it. Use me as you see fit as long as it keeps you away from the nightmares."

"Use you?" Khan repeated. "You sure utter bold words from time to time."

"I won't go back on them," Monica pouted. "I meant what I said."

"I wonder," Khan teased while pulling Monica even closer and sealing his grip on her waist. "How should I use you? I might have a few ideas."

"What helpless scoundrel," Monica complained before lowering her voice. "Just do all of them. I'm yours, remember?"

Khan's heart almost burst with affection. He kissed Monica, and she let out a cute moan while falling prey to that intimate gesture. They both knew what was about to happen, but the buzz of their phones forced them to take a break.

'George?' Khan wondered when unlocking his phone's screen to read the message. 'If you leave me alone, I'll stop giving you condoms.'

Khan and Monica exchanged a glance before exploding into a laugh. They kissed again but soon stood up to leave the bedroom.

The situation in the main hall didn't change during the couple's short departure. Princess Edna was still lost in her inspection of the area, and her two guards didn't leave her side.

"Oh, Captain," Princess Edna exclaimed when Khan and Monica approached George's couch. "So, is this it? Do you just drink to kill time?"

"We also joke or tell stories," Khan explained as Monica cuddled under his arm. "George and I have gone through a lot together, so we have many interesting tales."

"I want to hear them," Princess Edna stated.

"Of course," Khan nodded. "Still, most of them aren't happy. I'm afraid they might ruin the mood."

"Captain, don't bore me," Princess Edna ordered. "There is nothing I hate more than boredom."

"As you wish," Khan sighed while glancing at George. The two men found a silent understanding that pushed Khan to begin his story. "I guess we should start from when we first met. Are you aware of the Istrone's rebellion?"

Chapter 448 Tests

Princess Edna stayed true to her words. She officially joined the advanced classes and never missed the chance to sit next to Monica and Khan. She also followed them to George's flat every afternoon, leaving no openings for the rest of the students and teachers.

Khan didn't know whether that development was positive for his career. Still, going against the Princess was impossible, so he tried to make the best out of his new situation.

The lessons were fine. The Princess was extremely well-behaved during those, and she barely paid attention anyway, so Khan could follow everything properly.

The mana-related classes belonged to the beginning of the week, but that didn't make the following any easier, especially for Khan. Theory-heavy lessons filled the next days, with many going over every regulation the Global Army had. Khan only had to memorize them, but their sheer amount complicated everything.

Princess Edna didn't help there. She abhorred studying, so Khan couldn't go over his lessons while she was in George's flat. He had to handle that whenever she left or in his spare time, which inevitably led to sleepless nights.

Luckily for Khan, Monica never stopped supporting him. She didn't only know most of the subjects already. Her family had also taught her useful studying methods that she didn't hesitate to share with Khan.

The subjects were another important factor in Khan's diligence. The general topics could be boring, but most of them flowed into specific fields, including those involving ambassadors.

The Global Army had developed countless rules over the years, and the ambassadors had to stick to many. Those regulations also changed depending on different situations, and Khan had to memorize all of them. That was the actual foundation for his career, and he was learning it from one of the best places in the universe.

The sleepless nights, almost complete lack of free time, and constant pressure caused by the Princess could make anyone go mad. However, Khan was no stranger to packed schedules, and he could also find positive sides to his situation.

Princess Edna was unpredictable, but Khan could keep her entertained. He had many interesting stories, especially when he added George to the equation, so fulfilling her curiosity was never a problem.

Monica's feelings for Khan began to bloom properly after learning about the nightmares. They continued to keep their relationship a secret, but she slowly grew used to being with him in front of the Princess. His need to catch up in many subjects also made her strangely obedient, which he never failed to point out.

George risked getting the short end of the stick in that situation. After all, the Princess was basically invading his flat, preventing him from having proper fun. However, he turned everything in his favor. He couldn't see Anita often, but being the host of the Princess' nights made him a celebrity.

In short, things were far from bad, and Khan's schedule almost stabilized once the first week of lessons ended. He had yet to talk with Colonel Norrett, but everything was going fine. However, he still had something to sort out, and the first of the two free days gave him the time to handle it.

'Good luck,' Khan smiled when he read Monica's message on his phone, but the stopping of the cab forced him to put the device away.

When Khan left the car, he found himself in one of the Harbor's hangars. The universe seen from the transparent dome managed to steal his attention for a few seconds, but he lowered his gaze as soon as he sensed soldiers nearby.

"Hello?" Khan called as he crossed a few ships parked before him to reach the group of soldiers. They were only three first-level warriors, but it quickly became evident that Khan's fame had arrived there.

The soldiers grew stiff as soon as they noticed Khan's azure hair. One didn't bother to turn, but his companions pulled him to claim his attention. Needless to say, the three soon performed military salutes and didn't move a muscle as they waited for Khan's request.

"At ease," Khan exclaimed while pulling out the letter for his flying courses. "I have to redeem this. Can you help me out?"

One of the soldiers stepped forward to read the unlocked letter, but he shook his head when he understood its contents. "You must see the Lieutenant in charge of this hangar, sir."

"Can you bring me there?" Khan politely asked, and a series of nods unfolded in his vision.

The three soldiers escorted Khan to a separate area of the hangar. It took a few corridors, but the group eventually arrived in front of an office, and one of the first-level warriors knocked on its door.

The door unlocked, and the soldiers stepped aside to open a path for Khan. The latter walked inside, and a young-looking man busy tinkering with his interactive desk became visible.

"Yes?" The man casually asked, but his demeanor changed as soon as he noticed the azure hair. He immediately stood up to perform a military salute, and far politer words followed. "How can I help you, Captain Khan?"

"Lieutenant?" Khan questioned.

"Shurpard, sir," The man replied.

"Lieutenant Shurpard, I have to redeem this letter," Khan explained while handing the unlocked device. "Am I in the right place?"

Lieutenant Shurpard didn't hide his surprise when he read the letter, and Khan used that time to accept the changes in his status. He had mostly been around wealthy descendants and professors since his promotion, but those soldiers' reactions told him how important he had become.

"C-congratulations, sir!" Lieutenant Shurpard soon exclaimed. "Free flying courses are a great honor, but I can't think of anyone more deserving than you."

"So," Khan continued, ignoring the praise, "Am I in the right place?"

"Of course!" Lieutenant Shurpard responded. "I can be your instructor if you are okay with that. Otherwise, I can summon a superior, but that might force you to wait."

"Then, can I start now?" Khan wondered.

"As long as you are fine with me, sir," Lieutenant Shurpard clarified.

Khan wasn't picky, and some eagerness had also gotten to him. Besides, the Lieutenant was a second-level warrior. He couldn't be a bad instructor.

"Sure," Khan nodded. "No problem at all."

"I'm honored, sir," Lieutenant Shurpard laughed and hurried to the other side of the desk before addressing the soldiers standing outside the office. "Make someone come down to take my spot."

The soldiers acknowledged the order, and Lieutenant Shurpard showed a big smile to Khan before leading him out of the office. Initially, Khan believed he would return to the hangar, but the Lieutenant brought him deeper into the dome to reach a big, cubical room.

"This way, Captain," Lieutenant Shurpard called as he approached the room's entrance and unlocked it with his genetic signature.

A vast, white space unfolded in Khan's eyes once the two men entered the room. The area resembled a training hall due to its emptiness, but a single seat existed at its center. The place even felt familiar to Khan, which caused some disappointment.

"Is this a flight simulator?" Khan questioned as the Lieutenant approached the seat to activate its holograms.

"Indeed, Captain," Lieutenant Shurpard confirmed. "These courses always have the first lessons inside a simulator. I'm sure you understand."

Khan quickly lost interest in the matter, and the appearance of the holograms didn't help. Those azure images depicted one of the many control desks he had studied with Luke's simulator. He simply couldn't learn anything from them.

"Sir, if you would join me," Lieutenant Shurpard announced. "This is the general look of a control desk. Most modern ships have adopted this design, except for-."

"Purely terrestrial vehicles," Khan interrupted. "Some hybrid ships still cling to old designs too, but they are getting rare."

Lieutenant Shurpard remained surprised, but Khan decided to press on. Clearly, he was the most important person in the room, so he used that to his advantage.

"That's the handbrake," Khan stated while pointing at one of the keys. "The levitation lock is next to it, and you can find the communication panel above. I can go on."

Khan barely looked at the control desk during his explanation, but his fingers always pointed at the correct keys. He seemed to have committed them to memory.

Lieutenant Shurpard didn't know how to react. The flying courses had a schedule to follow, but Khan knew his stuff. Also, the rumors about him corroborated his expertise.

"Captain," Lieutenant Shurpard eventually coughed, "Is it true that you flew Princess Edna's ship?"

'The rumors have already gotten here,' Khan sighed internally before showing a meaningful smile to the Lieutenant. He didn't say anything, but his expression was enough.

"I think we might skip a few passages in your case," Lieutenant Shurpard announced through his broad smile. "Why don't you follow me back to the hangar?"

"Gladly," Khan stated, and another walk began.

The Lieutenant remained silent, but his mana said a lot. The same went for the few soldiers Khan met on his way. It felt strange to be held in such reverence by people much older than him, but that was his new status. Even the wealthy descendants would probably treat him like that once Princess Edna got out of the way.

Still, that situation confirmed Khan's initial idea. He didn't care about that superficial politeness. He didn't want those kinds of relationships. They were necessary for his career, but he would rather have fewer meaningful connections over a sea of acquaintances.

Of course, Lieutenant Shurpard was already off that list. He was too tense around Khan, and the situation didn't improve even when they entered the privacy of a ship. The soldier wore a fake smile whenever their eyes met. He would never be able to look past ranks and fame.

"Captain, this is a standard training ship," Lieutenant Shurpard explained while leading the way toward the control desk. "As you can see, I'll also have a steering wheel. Mine can override your directives, but I'm sure I won't need to use it."

Khan inspected his surroundings. The ship was relatively old and chunky. It wouldn't be his ideal choice, but he recognized the control desks, and that was enough. After all, he only had to get his license there.

"Why don't we see how you handle the set-off?" Lieutenant Shurpard asked. "Mind you. The Harbor has special procedures for departures and arrivals. We'll have to go on auto-pilot to leave the dome."

Khan remained silent as he approached the pilot's seat on the left and made himself comfortable. He even began activating the functions necessary for the flight, but the first scolding didn't take long to arrive.

"Captain," Lieutenant Shurpard called while sitting next to Khan. He sounded conflicted, but he still voiced his rebuke. "You should fasten your seatbelt before proceeding with the set-off."

"Right," Khan sighed as he reached for the seatbelt. "Sorry, I like feeling the ship's movements."

"That's dangerous, sir," Lieutenant Shurpard pointed out.

"I know," Khan chuckled. "I guess I developed bad habits flying on Nitis."

Nitis' records were some of the most unclear parts of Khan's profile, but the Aduns were no secret, and Lieutenant Shurpard couldn't help but convey his curiosity.

"Sir, if you don't mind me asking," Lieutenant Shurpard announced. "Did you really ride a Tainted animal on Nitis?"

"Mine was mischievous and petty," Khan laughed without hiding his lingering affection for Snow. "He always rolled himself on the ground to get me all dirty."

"Do not worry," Lieutenant Shurpard claimed since he misunderstood Khan's tone. "Ships are extremely reliable. The auto-pilot program is probably smarter than me."

'Snow was reliable,' Khan scoffed in his mind while completing the procedures for the set-off.

The auto-pilot stepped in when the ship left the floor, and a robotic voice came out of the control deck. "Authorization required."

"Lieutenant Shurpard requesting departure from the Harbor," The Lieutenant answered through his control desk.

A few seconds had to pass before the auto-pilot acknowledged the Lieutenant's request and continued the set-off. Khan had no control over the maneuver, and even his fame couldn't fix that. The Harbor's regulations wanted those phases of the flight to be automatic.

The ship left the hangar and flew through a few channels before leaving the dome. The autopilot turned itself off once the vehicle entered open space, and Khan's hands were already on the steering wheel by then.

"Do I need to do anything specific?" Khan wondered as he let the ship move in a straight line.

"Let's start with basic maneuvers," Lieutenant Shurpard declared. "Just do as I say, sir."

Khan followed the instructions whenever they arrived. He accelerated, turned, and performed simple maneuvers whenever the Lieutenant gave the order. The latter was only testing Khan's basic flying skills, and he did perfectly.

"Captain, you definitely know your way around ships," Lieutenant Shurpard praised once Khan went over all the basic maneuvers. "Let's move toward the moon. I want to see how you handle the proximity to a surface."

Khan didn't hesitate to comply. He turned and accelerated to enter a free dive toward the Harbor's moon. The ship's speed made the Lieutenant uncomfortable, and that feeling intensified as the rocky surface grew closer, but Khan made sure to slow down before he could receive another rebuke.

"Same maneuvers?" Khan asked once the ship stopped less than five hundred meters from the surface.

"Y-yes," Lieutenant Shurpard confirmed. "Though, try not to go too fast, sir. It's dangerous, and this ship isn't meant for sharp maneuvers."

"I noticed," Khan commented while proceeding to repeat the previous maneuvers. He accelerated, turned, and even landed on the rocky surface as soon as the Lieutenant ordered him to.

"Well," Lieutenant Shurpard coughed while the ship remained parked on the moon's surface. "Captain, your flying skills are surprisingly good. You could get your license in a few months at this pace."

"Months?" Khan frowned.

"Well," The Lieutenant coughed again. "Checking every step of the schedule is important. Regulations also want at least twenty completed flights before gaining access to the actual test."

"Does this count as one?" Khan wondered.

"No, sir," Lieutenant Shurpard said in a sorry tone. "The test will want you to fly far closer to the surface and perform sharper maneuvers."

Khan didn't have to pretend. He felt disappointed and made sure to show that on his face. He knew that the Global Army had to be thorough, but he really didn't need those training wheels.

"I can boot a flight program to give you an idea of the test if you wish," Lieutenant Shurpard immediately bent the rules to gain Khan's favor. "Protocol doesn't allow me to mark it as your first successful flight, but it might quicken the process."

"Sure, go ahead," Khan uttered, and the Lieutenant played with his control desk until holograms depicting a clear path came out.

The holograms were interactive, so Khan could tinker with them to read all the requirements. The Harbor already had a training path that went over deep craters and similar environmental hindrances, but the speed required to meet its standards felt quite disappointing.

"Do I need to go so slow?" Khan questioned once his inspection ended.

"It's just a training route, sir," Lieutenant Shurpard explained. "The actual test will ask you to go faster, but not above the speed limit."

"Is there a speed limit here?" Khan wondered.

"Only if you are close enough to the moon," Lieutenant Shurpard revealed. "The speed limit also changes depending on the quadrant or area. I'm sorry, but the Harbor is strict with its regulations."

'There probably are special permits for that,' Khan guessed since he had read something similar in his books.

Khan eventually took another look at the training route. It looked easy, but he didn't want to go so slow. Yet, Lieutenant Shurpard could override his commands, which could be dangerous during sharp maneuvers.

"Look, Lieutenant," Khan opted for an honest approach. "I want to push this ship a bit, but I'm uncomfortable when you can take over any time. It might make us crash."

"You don't have to worry, Captain," Lieutenant Shurpard reassured, uncaring that Khan's words might have been offensive. "I have a lot of experience."

"Alright," Khan stated. "What's the speed limit?"

"Captain?" Lieutenant Shurpard called. "Well, this is a training ship. It won't exceed the limit even if you keep pushing the wheel."

"Perfect," Khan muttered as he made the ship perform a sharp acceleration.

Lieutenant Shurpard slammed his back on the seat and reached for the steering wheel. His first instinct told him to interrupt that violent set-off, but some hesitation appeared. He had just reassured Khan, and going against him so soon was far from wise.

Meanwhile, Khan ignored the Lieutenant to focus on the training route. He made the ship go faster and faster as he approached the various maneuvers required by the holograms.

Lieutenant Shurpard had to fight against the desire to stop Khan whenever a mountain or a crater appeared. The ship was definitely going too fast for someone on his first ride, but the initial successful maneuvers brought some reassurance.

Khan soon reached the speed limit, but the ship's poor agility made him slow down at times. He didn't trust the vehicle enough to dive into reckless behavior. Still, he did his best to remain fast, and a sense of freedom eventually invaded his mind.

In the end, Khan cleared the training route and landed on the rocky surface again. He remained slightly disappointed, but the Lieutenant had the very opposite mindset. Khan was no beginner, and the recent flight had proven that.

"I should be able to go faster once I get used to this ship," Khan exclaimed to break the silence.

"Faster?!" Lieutenant Shurpard raised his voice before regaining his polite tone. "Captain, there is no need for that. The test isn't that harsh."

"But I like going fast," Khan admitted through his shameless face.

"Oh," Lieutenant Shurpard gasped. "Well, sir, the ship for the test won't have the speed limit, so you might risk failing if you keep accelerating."

Khan showed his disappointed expression again. He knew there were regulations to follow, but he hoped they wouldn't be so strict.

"There are ways to avoid regulations," Lieutenant Shurpard continued in an attempt to make a good impression on Khan. "Renting or owning fast ships can grant a certain clearance level. The same goes for pilots with specific permissions."

"Rent?" Khan repeated.

"The Harbor has many ships available for rent," Lieutenant Shurpard explained. "They aren't cheap, but you should have great discounts, sir."

"What about buying one?" Khan questioned since the topic had come up. "Do I have discounts on that too?"

"Yes," Lieutenant Shurpard confirmed, "But you'd still need tens of millions of Credits. I don't know if-."

"Tens of millions?" Khan repeated before heaving a sigh. That number of Credits was still a distant dream.

"It's not only that, sir," Lieutenant Shurpard continued. "Fuel is expensive, and the same goes for various permits. Docking in hangars also costs money, and I'm not even considering yearly maintenance and check-ups."

Khan couldn't help but stare at Lieutenant Shurpard. He had read a lot about the topic, but the soldier made it sound far harsher than he had initially believed. Keeping a ship almost sounded more expensive than purchasing it.

"The renting part," Khan went back to the previous topic. "Can I go out alone if I have enough money to rent?"

"You need at least ten flights for that," Lieutenant Shurpard explained, "And the auto-pilot won't give you much freedom."

"So, license first," Khan sighed.

"I'm afraid that's for the best, sir," Lieutenant Shurpard smiled in an attempt to reassure Khan. "The course doesn't stop at the flights either. You'll also have to surpass a theoretical and practical test."

"Isn't this the practical test?" Khan asked, pointing at the steering wheel.

"A pilot must know basic emergency procedures," Lieutenant Shurpard revealed. "Crashes are rare, but they happen, and you must know how to survive them, sir."

"How does someone survive a crash in space?" Khan questioned.

"There are techniques meant to survive space-walking," Lieutenant Shurpard declared. "They can't keep you alive for long, but they might give you enough time to repair eventual damage or call for help."

Chapter 449 Rank

Khan talked a bit longer with the Lieutenant before being forced to bring the ship back to the hangar. The conversation enlightened him about different parts of the course, but everything remained superficial since it was only the first lesson.

The Lieutenant had to return to his post once the lesson ended, leaving Khan alone in the hangar. Usually, he would opt for a long, relaxing walk back home, but his packed schedule forced him to call a cab to save time.

Khan didn't look past the window's seat even once during the ride back to the second district. His eyes remained on his phone for the entire time due to the immense number of pages he had to study. He didn't waste a single second in the past days, but he remained behind and didn't know how many sleepless nights had to happen to fix that.

Things changed inside the elevator of George's building. Khan heaved a helpless sigh as he threw his phone into his pocket. He wanted to rest for a few minutes, but checking the flat came first.

Luckily for Khan, the symphony that filled George's flat depicted a relaxing environment, and the main hall confirmed those sensations. Khan couldn't see George, but Monica was on one of the couches, busy reading holograms coming out of her phone.

"What are you studying?" Khan asked while heading straight for Monica's couch.

"I'm just reviewing alien languages," Monica explained while moving toward the corner of the couch and tapping on her lap. "I want to be ready for next week."

"Such a good student," Khan chuckled as he lay on the couch and used Monica's lap as a pillow.

Monica put away her phone and focused on Khan. She caressed his cheek, and a cute "hey" came out of her mouth.

"Hey you," Khan replied, and a smile bloomed on his face when Monica lowered her head to deliver a kiss.

"How was the lesson?" Monica asked.

"Not bad," Khan whispered while turning to dig his face into Monica's waist. "I showed the Lieutenant there that I could fly. I just have many things to study on the side."

"The pilot's license is a big deal," Monica giggled. "It also expires every ten years."

"I know," Khan groaned, enjoying the affection that Monica's caresses conveyed. "The Lieutenant answered every question I had. I guess being the Princess' friend helps. Where is she anyway?"

"We have plans to go shopping later," Monica revealed. "Only women she said. Apparently, she involved the Headmistress."

"And here I thought I could have you all for myself today," Khan complained while snuggling closer to Monica.

Monica giggled again as she moved Khan aside to free her legs. Khan's head ended on the couch, but Monica soon lay on him to deliver a far more passionate kiss.

"Where is George?" Khan asked once the kiss ended.

"In his room," Monica replied while taking Khan's face between her hands. "Don't look at me like this. I know you haven't slept in four days."

"I'm surprised you noticed among all that snoring," Khan teased.

Monica pouted but quickly ignored the joke to deliver another kiss. Khan instinctively reached for her butt, but she lifted her head before the situation could degenerate.

"Sleep," Monica whispered. "You can have me once you are rested."

"You are so obedient these days," Khan teased again.

"I'm the best girlfriend in the world," Monica proudly claimed. "I must support my man when he has a hard time."

"I should thank your family for educating you so thoroughly," Khan pressed on.

"Enjoy it while it lasts," Monica snickered as she let go of Khan to make herself more comfortable. "I'm noting down every joke. I'll take my revenge as soon as things get easier for you."

"What will you even do?" Khan asked, letting Monica slide on his arm to keep her at his side.

"You'll see," Monica smirked. "You'll have to beg me to stop."

"That doesn't sound too bad," Khan chuckled.

"It won't be pleasant!" Monica snapped but quickly calmed down. She even neared Khan's mouth before voicing a whisper. "Just sleep and dream about me."

"I wish," Khan cursed as he turned to face the ceiling. "I also have a lot to study."

"Subject?" Monica questioned.

"Regulations," Khan sighed. "More fucking regulations."

"Let me think," Monica muttered while approaching Khan's ear to speak tempting words. "Why don't we move to a bedroom while I wait for Princess Edna's message?"

Monica's suggestion could sound bold to a stranger, but Khan knew her real intentions. When he glanced at her, he noticed a trace of concern in her charming and slightly shy expression, which further confirmed what he had felt.

"Are you planning to tire me out?" Khan wondered.

"I'd do anything as long as it helps you," Monica declared. "So, keep relying on me. Keep using me until I'm the only thing in your mind."

Khan couldn't contain himself at those words. Wild vigor filled his body as he straightened his back and carried Monica with him. The two found themselves sitting on each other, with their lips long since entangled in a long kiss.

Nevertheless, Khan's phone rang before he could start to unbutton Monica's uniform. Their passion took a break and checking the device revealed that Colonel Norrett had sent a message.

'Dinner with me tonight,' Khan read on his phone. 'A car will pick you up in three hours.'

"He has finally contacted you," Monica commented.

"He is probably leaving soon," Khan guessed. "I'm surprised he remained in the Harbor until now."

Monica agreed with that statement, but the invitation ruined her plans. Khan would never go to sleep now. She could push for a nap, but Khan's focus on the phone ended up annoying her.

"Hey," Monica called, pulling Khan's ear closer to her mouth, "You aren't looking at me."

Khan smirked and put his phone away before standing up. Of course, he lifted Monica, and she clung to him without needing warnings or words. Somehow, they had already decided how to spend those three hours.

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A ship arrived to get Khan, just like the message had said. He only had to reach the sidewalk to find it and start the flight to where Colonel Norrett wanted to have the dinner.

The passengers' seats weren't empty. One of Colonel Norrett's guards sat silently before Khan, and her expression told him that she had no intention to speak. Still, her eyes showed some respect, which was more than appreciated.

The ship left the second district and headed for the shopping area. Buildings that Khan had visited with the Princess ran through his vision, but his attention eventually fell on a tall structure covered with large windows. One of those dark glasses opened at the vehicle's arrival and turned into a landing area.

Getting off the ship put Khan into a small hall with only one table and two seats. Meals were already resting on its surface, and Colonel Norrett was also occupying a chair. Meanwhile, his other three guards were standing next to a wall.

The woman in Khan's ship reached her companions right after the landing, and Colonel Norrett stood up as soon as he noticed Khan. His arms spread to welcome him, and a laugh left his mouth.

"The man of the hour," Colonel Norrett announced, "Or is it a week already?"

"Almost a week, sir," Khan confirmed. "I thought you would have left by now."

"My original idea saw a far shorter trip," Colonel Norrett cursed as he pointed at the seat on the opposite side of the table. "Still, the Princess brought many duties with her, and it's my job to see that they are fulfilled."

"Duties, sir?" Khan wondered while approaching the second seat.

"Security issues," Colonel Norrett explained while sitting down, "Performance reports, internal rearrangements, and so on."

Khan joined Colonel Norrett at the table, and the latter promptly filled his cup with what smelled like strong booze before moving to his own glass. The two even drank and let a calm silence follow.

"I'm sure you have questions," Colonel Norrett broke the silence as he proceeded to seize various meals and place them on his plate.

"They are vague," Khan admitted as he also seized some food, "And numerous."

"Didn't Miss Solodrey clear many of them for you?" Colonel Norrett wondered. "I might be distant from the students, but rumors have a long reach."

"Sir, I'm merely a valuable figure that the Solodrey family wants to keep close," Khan said without bothering to stop eating.

"Try to breathe every once in a while," Colonel Norrett commented.

"I'm hungry," Khan replied while continuing his feasting.

Colonel Norrett smirked and brought a hand on his chin. He inspected Khan, and a comment eventually left his mouth. "Not that young when it comes to women."

Khan pretended not to hear the joke, but the desire to change the topic arrived, and he had the right question for that.

"Sir," Khan gulped down the remaining food in his mouth, "How should I handle my political situation?"

"That's for you to decide," Colonel Norrett stated. "What you do with your rank and connections will set the foundation for the kind of soldier you'll become."

"I want to be an ambassador," Khan opted for an honest reply. "That probably needs as many connections as possible."

"Then go to every dinner and social event," Colonel Norrett declared.

"I don't have enough time for that," Khan pointed out.

"Make it," Colonel Norrett responded. "Unless it's too hard for you."

Khan didn't miss the Colonel's challenging tone, and that detail made the answer clear. There were no easy paths. Khan would have to sacrifice something to fit everything inside his schedule.

However, Khan didn't stop at that understanding. The Colonel's straightforward answer set a specific mood that made Khan's shameless side come out.

"Sir, what plans do you have for me?" Khan directly asked.

"I'm a Colonel," Colonel Norrett scoffed. "I don't have plans for Captains."

"Too young," Khan repeated words the Colonel had used in the past. "You must have something in mind. Does it have to do with your occupation?"

"I have many occupations," Colonel Norrett clarified, "And you are too young to hear them."

"But I might end up on a path that doesn't suit them if left on my own," Khan teased, hoping that the new approach would trigger a more helpful answer.

"Little shit," Colonel Norrett snickered. "Well, you missed your big celebration, but having the Princess as a political ally compensates more than enough."

'Political ally,' Khan scoffed in his mind. He had probably become closer than many others to the Princess, but that didn't make her an actual ally. Her personality was too erratic for that.

"The Princess must be your starting point," Colonel Norrett continued, "But you must never give her away. You'll lose value in the eyes of many representatives if you do."

Khan couldn't help but nod. He didn't have the ability to give away the Princess, but it remained a piece of good advice. As long as the representatives thought they could get to her through him, he would have the advantage.

"Learning to differentiate among families will also come in handy," Colonel Norrett added. "The smaller families will show you more respect, but you won't get much from them. Instead, the wealthiest will try to exploit you in exchange for greater benefits."

"What about exceptions?" Khan questioned. Monica, Luke, and Bruce were good examples, but Khan also considered Robert Bizelli and other figures that had made a good impression.

"They exist," Colonel Norrett. "However, you'll always thread a thin line while walking on the political journey. You must find a balance among wealth, benefits, respect, and personal goals."

Khan emptied his plate and focused on his drink while losing himself in his thoughts. Colonel Norrett wanted him to expand his knowledge of the various representatives to choose who to prioritize. Yet, he was in the Harbor now. His current needs might not match his future ones.

"Of course," Colonel Norrett exclaimed, "Seizing personal achievements remains your best option. You must hurry to establish yourself in the political environment only if your fame was a fluke."

Khan lifted his gaze to exchange a meaningful look with Colonel Norrett. His statement was clear. Personal achievements were the key to a better political life. As long as Khan continued being amazing, he wouldn't need to worry too much about his various connections. They would come to him.

"On that topic," Khan announced, "I might have something."

"What is it now?" Colonel Norrett asked. "Did you hold something back from your experiences on Milia 222?"

"It's about my second third star," Khan explained. "I should be ready to get it."

Colonel Norrett dropped the cheerful mood to wear a stern face. Khan had gotten his first third star less than a week ago. Achieving mastery over spells at the same level in such a short time sounded impossible, but Khan's element could make it feasible.

"Are you sure?" Colonel Norrett questioned. "I don't go easy on liars."

"I'm sure for one spell," Khan confirmed. "It should be enough."

"Maybe in your case," Colonel Norrett replied, "If someone with enough relevance corroborates it."

Khan showed his shameless smile, and Colonel Norrett shook his head. Still, he appeared amused. The more Khan opened up to him, the funnier those interactions became.

"Let's hit a training hall once this dinner ends," Colonel Norrett declared. "I have to leave anyway. A short stop won't hurt."

The Colonel glanced at the table to check for more food, but he only found empty plates. Even the booze wasn't where he had left it. Khan had the bottle next to him, ready to refill his cup.

"When did you even eat all of this?" Colonel Norrett gasped.

"I never stopped eating," Khan claimed.

"This talent should go on your profile," Colonel Norrett commented. "Oh well."

Colonel Norrett stood up, and Khan imitated him. The two didn't exchange words before heading for the vehicle in the landing area, but the Colonel still left orders for his guards. "Prepare my ship. Pick me up once I'm done."

The guards performed military salutes, and Khan nodded at them before following the Colonel inside the ship. The pilot was still inside, so the vehicle set off immediately to head for a district with training halls.

The trip didn't last long. The Colonel wasn't picky, so the pilot headed for the closest training hall. Khan and Colonel Norrett soon landed in front of a familiar large building and entered it without saying a word.

Colonel Norrett scoffed when Khan reached an empty hall and revealed his shameless face again. He even crossed his arms behind his back. He had been the first to find an available area, but he had no intentions of paying for it.

"You should have enough money to pay for your own halls," Colonel Norrett joked while using his phone to unlock the training area.

'I should really check how much I have now,' Khan cursed, recalling how he had yet to see how much he had earned from Milia 222.

Preparing the hall for the test took less than a minute. Soon, a circular, reinforced target appeared in the distance, and the Colonel even took a step back to give Khan all the space he needed.

Truth be told, Khan had barely trained during those days. His schedule had been a mess of lessons and studies, which didn't give him any time to visit halls. Yet, he had already confirmed that the chaos spear met the requirements for his new star, and he trusted his control enough to be confident in his other spells.

Khan didn't wait for anyone. He joined his hands and poured as much mana as possible between them. He had cast the chaos spear so many times that mustering the necessary emotions felt natural, and the separation of his palms revealed his success.

An unstable purple-red spear took form between Khan's hands. The weapon's surface shook to no end but leaked no energy. It had found new stability after the last time Khan had tested it, and launching it proved its power.

The bright pillar that followed the spear's crash on the target filled the training hall with wild winds. Khan and Colonel Norrett's hair fluttered under those gales, but their expressions remained stern. The Colonel even applied his cloaking technique to his mana to avoid revealing his reactions.

The mana contained in the spear eventually vanished, and peace returned inside the training hall. The target was still in one piece, but its deep cracks and darkened chunks said enough about the power of Khan's spell. The number "3" in its corner was almost unnecessary in that situation.

The Colonel's stern expression didn't break even after the target confirmed the spear's power. Instead, his emotionless eyes fell on Khan, and a request followed. "Show me another spell."

Khan lifted his right hand, and purple-red mana quickly covered it before stretching forward. A bright sword grew from his fingers, carrying the same unstable properties as the chaos spear. The spell had gotten longer, and its power had multiplied.

"No need," Colonel Norrett stated as soon as Khan turned to approach the target. "I'll update the network once I get to my ship. Your new uniforms should arrive in the next few days."

"Thank you, sir," Khan said, dispersing the mana accumulated around his hand.

"Truly a terrifying growth rate," Colonel Norrett muttered. "I don't know how good that is."

"I know about the risks of excessive training," Khan reassured.

"It's not that," Colonel Norrett explained. "Power leads to envy."

The warning was vague but clear enough for Khan to understand it. Murray Dunac had already shown something similar, and there had to be more descendants like him.

"Accompany me outside," Colonel Norrett quickly changed the topic, and Khan complied.

The two men left the training hall, and Khan expected the silence to reign until the inevitable goodbyes. However, Colonel Norrett broke it before they could reach the building's exit.

"You might be a student in the embassy," Colonel Norrett announced, "But don't forget that you are also a captain."

"Is this about representatives and soldiers?" Khan wondered.

"Don't put your rank away because you have unrelated tasks," Colonel Norrett explained while opening the exit. "Make use of it."

"Colon-," Khan called, but a circular platform landed on the sidewalk before he could finish his line. Colonel Norrett didn't even bother to address the matter. He simply jumped on the item while waving his hand.

"You are Captain Khan," Colonel Norrett shouted without turning, "Not student Khan."

The platform set off as soon as that line ended. The machine brought Colonel Norrett above the buildings, where a ship was waiting for him. Khan recognized the big military vehicle seen before his promotion, and its disappearance from the district marked the departure of one of his best allies.

'My rank,' Khan thought as his gaze remained on the area where the ship had disappeared. 'I know it's far from useless, but still.'

Khan couldn't come up with ideas right away, but something was clear. His finances were part of his power, so it was time to check how much he actually had.

A quick look at the Harbor's map told Khan where he could find a console. He only had to cross a few blocks to reach a relatively hidden area with protected rooms meant to give some privacy, and touching their dark surfaces revealed the machine he was looking for.

Khan activated the console through his genetic signature and browsed the menus until the label "withdraw" appeared. Pressing on it showed his pending incomes, and their amount made his eyes widen in surprise.

'Five hundred thousand Credits?!' Khan managed to keep the shout inside his mind. Somehow, he had accumulated half a million.

Chapter 450 Purchases

The huge sum left Khan speechless. He had departed from Reebfell with sixty thousand Credits, but Milia 222's rewards had multiplied that number in ways he didn't expect.

'I can build a home with cans of spicy chicken now!' Khan ended up shouting in his mind before serious thoughts took over.

The console had all the details Khan could desire. The huge sum wasn't the result of a single payment. Luke was the biggest benefactor, but multiple parties had joined their forces to create that half a million Credits.

The families involved with the secret factory had handed out bonuses. Even Monica and Francis' families didn't shy away from that task. Also, the Global Army provided additional Credits for Khan's heroic feat and promotion, ultimately leading to that huge sum.

Many past conversations ran through Khan's mind. He wasn't a clueless boy from the Slums anymore, but his understanding of Credits remained vague, especially when it came to those huge quantities. He could only try to recall everything he had learnt and experienced on Reebfell to give actual value to the number on the console.

'Monica,' Khan inevitably thought before rejecting the idea. Monica was busy with the Princess and the Headmistress now. He would ask for her advice, but only later on.

George also came to Khan's mind, and the idea of sending him a message grew stronger as the seconds passed. However, Khan's phone ended up buzzing before he could take it, and the text on its screen ruined his plans.

'Give me some hours alone,' George wrote.

'He must have waited for this chance,' Khan laughed before typing a reply. 'The condoms are in my room.'

'I obviously have mine,' George replied.

'Good luck then,' Khan wrote before adding something. 'Say hello to Anita from me.'

George didn't answer, but Khan could easily imagine his expression, which led to a chuckle. Truth be told, George deserved some fun time after having to deal with the consequences of Khan's fame. Khan could only be happy for him.

Nevertheless, George's unavailability kept the issue alive. Khan had just gotten his hands on an insane amount of money which he didn't know how to use. Moreover, he had the Colonel's words to address.

'Don't put your rank away,' Khan repeated. 'You are Captain Khan.'

Captains had many benefits. They got better discounts and a higher salary, but Khan knew the Colonel wasn't talking about that. The latter wanted Khan to use the other advantages to be more than an ordinary student.

'Something that money can't buy,' Khan eventually thought as he proceeded with the withdrawal.

A Captain could start missions and ask the Global Army to pay for eventual teammates. In theory, Khan could join or create jobs in the Harbor. He only had to study its environment and market to understand what could work.

However, Khan's schedule was hellish. The Colonel had told him to make time, but that topic involved political events. Even if the Princess left him alone, he still wouldn't be able to fit actual missions into his daily life.

'What does he even want me to do?' Khan sighed. 'Studying is enough to keep me awake every night.'

Khan couldn't find a correct answer, and blaming his partial ignorance didn't feel right. He knew what a Captain could do. Even some of his recent lessons had gone over the subject. Time was the main problem unless he was truly missing something.

It quickly became clear that the aimless pondering wouldn't lead anywhere. Khan simply decided to mention the issue to trusted friends. Still, in the meantime, he could deal with other matters, especially now that George's flat was off-limits.

Khan left the private room and checked the interactive map on his phone. The shopping district was nearby, and some of its buildings became interesting now that half a million Credits were in his pocket. Of course, he wasn't thinking about clothes.

A cab came to pick Khan up in a few minutes, and he jumped inside without taking his eyes off the phone. He had three main targets, but finding the most suitable shops turned out to be quite challenging due to their sheer quantity.

'Where are the descendants when I need them?' Khan cursed while browsing through the many shops' descriptions, reviews, and general prices.

Ideally, the most expensive shops would have the best merch, but that wasn't always the case. Khan had learnt on Reebfell that brands could make prices skyrocket even if the goods were barely up to par. He really needed the help of someone knowledgeable of the Harbor, but his instinct had to do for now.

The car left Khan before his first target. The building in front of him was tall and slightly large, with a decent number of customers noticeable from the transparent windows on the first floor. It wasn't crowded, but it looked popular.

Countless eyes turned in Khan's direction as soon as his azure hair entered the shop. He ignored the customers to head for the main desks at the center of the first floor, but a waiter intercepted him.

"Captain Khan!" The waiter almost shouted, showing her big smile. "You honor us with your presence. What can the Elite's Refuge do for you?"

"I'd like a catalog of your non-elemental spells," Khan went straight to the point.

"Right away!" The waiter responded while pointing at deeper parts of the first floor. "If you would be so kind as to follow me. We have waiting areas that are a tad more private."

The waiter even glanced at the interested crowd of customers to highlight her statement, and Khan didn't dare to refuse. He followed the woman inside a small room on the other side of the shop and occupied one of the two couches.

"I'll be right back," The waiter declared before leaving the room.

Khan made himself comfortable, but the metal door slid open only a few seconds later to reveal a second waiter carrying a cup of booze that she promptly left on the couch. The woman even performed a half-bow before leaving in a hurry.

'The Colonel probably didn't mean this,' Khan smirked while picking up the cup, 'But who am I to refuse?'

The booze tasted good, and Khan savored it while waiting for the catalog to arrive. The Elite's Refuge was an all-around shop, so he didn't expect to find the best non-elemental spells, but it was a good starting point. Also, the warm welcome told him that the waiters would probably answer his questions honestly.

A white line eventually lit up between the two couches and created a series of holograms that matched Khan's request. A long list of non-elemental spells accompanied by suitable descriptions appeared in his vision, and discounted prices also hovered next to them.

Khan took his time to study the list. The holograms had more than a hundred labels, but he cut them down to thirty by applying a few filters. Still, he had to spend minutes reading and considering everything.

Truth be told, Khan didn't know what he was looking for. He wanted to fill gaps in his knowledge while hoping to find something interesting, but nothing caught his eye.

Khan eventually used the holograms to summon a waiter, and the metal door soon opened to show the woman from before.

"How can I help, sir?" The waiter asked.

Khan could see many prying eyes behind the woman. His presence had become a popular topic among the customers, and the other waiters also paid attention to the scene. He couldn't get honesty in that situation, so he opted for a different approach.

"Can you come here for a second?" Khan questioned while gesturing to the waiter to enter the room.

The woman was quite young. She didn't have dazzling beauty, but no one would call her ugly, and Khan's request made her blush. Her mana even radiated some excitement as she stepped forward to let the door close behind her.

Khan understood what was happening but ignored that reaction to stand up and show a polite smile. His action intensified the woman's excitement, who almost failed to hear the following question.

"Do you know where I can find better stuff?" Khan asked.

"What?" The woman gasped, but Khan continued before a frown could appear on her face.

"I don't know how all of this works," Khan partially feigned innocence while retaining a friendly face. "I want to purchase high-end goods, but I don't know where to start."

The waiter's eyes widened in understanding, and some internal conflict soon followed. She even glanced at the closed door behind her while thoughts ran through her mind. She wanted to make a good impression, but speaking about the shop's competitors wasn't ideal.

"Is it too much?" Khan continued before the woman's work ethic could ruin his plan. "I don't want to put your job at risk, so don't overthink it. I'm just trying my chances."

The waiter found Khan's honesty heartwarming. He was a captain, but his rank had never joined that conversation. He treated the woman as his equal, which rekindled her excitement.

The woman glanced at the door again before whispering. "Do you have a map of the Harbor?"

Khan's smile widened as he took out his phone and opened the map. He even leaned toward the waiter to show the screen, and she carefully imitated him while her blush intensified.

"How high-end do you want it?" The woman wondered.

"Ideally, the best the Harbor can offer," Khan explained.

"Non-elemental spells, right?" The woman continued.

"Correct," Khan confirmed. He had other targets, but they probably were too specific for the waiter since she was only a first-level warrior.

"You shouldn't look for a shop then," The woman revealed. "I can point you toward something that has what you need, but getting in might be a problem."

"You are already doing enough," Khan reassured through his friendly face. "Leave that part to me."

Khan's words added more fuel to the woman's excitement and made her lower her eyes to continue the conversation without feeling too embarrassed. "You must look for an exclusive club. Go here and ask for Pandora."

The woman pointed at a building on the screen even if the map had no descriptions attached to it. Khan marked it before storing his phone and straightening his back. The waiter imitated him, leaving the two awkwardly close.

"Is she expecting a kiss?" Khan mocked himself while inspecting the waiter's eager face. Her eyes often fell on his mouth, which said a lot about her intentions when paired with her emotions.

"I should leave now," Khan said in the politest tone he could muster.

"Of course," The woman gasped while stepping aside.

Khan headed for the door, which opened as soon as he touched it. Still, the waiter made sure to claim his attention one last time.

"Captain," The waiter called while gently running a hand through her long brown hair to uncover her right ear. "I'm Marion. I hope you'll visit us again."

The entire floor noticed that interaction, and Khan could only smile before hurrying outside the shop. The car booked before was still there, and he almost jumped inside it while giving the new destination.

'Monica is going to kill me,' Khan smirked when he thought about the rumors that would spread, but the matter quickly ended in the back of his mind. He had found something promising, and some eagerness inevitably built up.

The club was inside the shopping district, and the car only needed a few minutes to reach the anonymous building. Khan crossed the sidewalk to enter what looked like a residential structure, but the powerful middle-aged man standing behind the main desk hinted at its secret purposes.

"How can I help you, Captain Khan?" The middle-aged man announced while Khan was still crossing the hall. The doorman was a third-level warrior who remained strangely calm in Khan's presence.

"I'm looking for Pandora," Khan exclaimed, finally triggering some surprise in the doorman's expression.

"Last floor," The doorman recovered quickly and activated one of the elevators. "Though, your journey might be short."

Khan nodded before heading toward the elevator. The doorman had already set the commands, so the lift closed and climbed to the last floor on its own.

From the outside, the building was nothing special. It appeared able to contain spacious flats, but that was it. Yet, the scene that welcomed Khan as soon as the elevator opened showed surprising details.

Khan didn't end in a flat. The elevator brought him into a dim, short corridor connected to a small desk dug into the metal wall. A third-level warrior, a middle-aged woman, stood behind it and showed her emotionless smile at Khan's arrival.

"Hello," Khan announced since the woman didn't say anything. "I'm looking for Pandora."

"Of course you are, sir," The woman stated. "Anyone who ends up here is looking for it."

"So?" Khan continued. "Am I in the right place?"

"We'll see," The woman replied. "Excuse me for a moment."

The woman left through a door behind her desk, leaving Khan alone in the corridor. He could only wait in that situation, but that didn't bother him.

A few minutes had to pass before the door reopened and the woman returned to her desk. Her expression appeared kinder now, which acted as a good omen.

"Someone inside will explain how Pandora works," The woman stated while pressing a key under her desk to open a hidden door on Khan's left. "Welcome."

Khan wanted to nod at the woman, but the intriguing symphony coming out of the new passage distracted him. Some dizziness tried to spread in his mind due to the captivating scents and sensations leaking from the door. A dim environment had unfolded in his vision, and he fell prey to his curiosity while diving into it.

The door closed as soon as Khan crossed it, leaving him in an open space as big as George's flat. The place had various luxurious couches, armchairs, and tables arrayed to create different seating areas. Four desks occupied the center of the hall, forming a square location meant for employees, and waiters roamed the place to attend to the various customers.

Khan's arrival attracted some attention, but nothing as loud as his previous experience. The customers and attendants merely glanced at him before going on with their days.

As for Khan, he recognized some of the customers. He didn't know everyone's names, but he had seen those faces in the embassy. A few were his fellow students, while others seemed to be professors or workers encountered after his classes.

The inspection couldn't last long since an attendant quickly approached Khan. The man was a burly second-level warrior carrying the presence of an experienced soldier, but his smile remained kind while talking to Khan.

"Captain Khan," The man exclaimed. "It's an honor to have you at Pandora."

"Thank you," Khan nodded.

"I must inform you that your acceptance is unusual," The man continued. "Pandora is usually out of reach for figures with lacking background, but the boss made an exception in your case."

"I'm grateful," Khan thanked again. "Can I rely on you to learn how Pandora works?"

"Certainly, sir," The waiter stated. "Please, follow me to the central desks."

Khan complied, and the man promptly activated the menus on the desk once the two reached it. A series of labels went by before a waiter delivered a drink to mark the beginning of the explanation.

"Pandora is an exclusive club, sir," The man explained while Khan was immersed in the drink's pleasant taste. "As such, members are required to pay a monthly subscription fee, which has been greatly lowered in your case."

"What are the benefits?" Khan wondered as the drink kept pampering his tongue and throat.

"Access to goods that have yet to hit the market," The man revealed, "Including but not limited to items with an alien origin, compelling auctions, and services of various kinds."

Khan didn't need to ask what kind of services. He knew what wealthy people could do in their free time, and the topic didn't interest him. However, the early access to alien goods captured his attention.

"Do the goods involve non-elemental spells?" Khan wondered.

"Obviously," The man confirmed. "The list is quite long, and some items on it have yet to receive official authorizations. A few might never get them due to how dangerous they are."

The revelation didn't come as a surprise. Khan had already seen non-elemental spells with foreign origins. His "enhanced reading" came from the Guko and had compatibility issues, so it felt only natural that similar problems could appear with other techniques.

"Is that it?" Khan decided to say. Milia 222's dock basically offered similar things, and he had lived there for a while. Pandora's services barely matched that environment for now.

"Sir, with all due respect," The man announced, "Only the best goods end up in Pandora. You might have collected and encountered amazing things during your missions, but Pandora can top all of them."

The man wasn't lying, or at least, he truly believed his words. His confidence even managed to affect Khan. Pandora truly sounded like a box of wonders.

"Additionally," The man continued, "Being a member grants you access to exclusive places. We also have branches in many space stations and cities. Still, the services in those locations might differ."

Khan didn't care about most of the explanation. Adding a new drinking area to his list was intriguing but unnecessary. Yet, the high-end goods remained an appealing topic, especially now that he had the money to purchase them.

"Can I take a look at your inventory?" Khan asked.

"I'm sorry, sir," The man uttered. "Only members have access to it."

"I see," Khan sighed. "How much is the subscription fee?"

"For you, sir," The man exclaimed, "Ten thousand Credits."

Khan wanted to choke on the drink but remained calm on the outside. The price sounded absurd, and it had probably gone through a severe discount due to his relationship with the Princess. Amber had stated that thirty thousand Credits were enough to purchase a small house in Reebfell, but Pandora wanted a third of that every month.

'Is this a scam?' Khan couldn't help but wonder before rejecting that thought. The waiter in the Elite's Refuge and the man in front of him had told the truth. There had to be good stuff in Pandora.

"I need to think about it," Khan admitted. "I wonder, would it be possible to subscribe for only a month?"

"Yes," The man replied. "However, canceling the subscription might lead to higher fees in the future. Pandora likes loyal customers."

"Understood," Khan sighed before pointing at the drink. "Can I remain here and maybe get another in the meantime?"

"You are a guest, sir," The man smiled. "Tonight, Pandora is making an exception."

Khan smiled back and followed the departing man with his eyes for a few seconds before focusing on the desk. The waiter had already prepared the menus for a subscription. Khan only needed to add his genetic signature and pay to become a member.

'Ten thousand for a single month is insane,' Khan cursed while taking sips from his drink. 'The actual goods will probably be as expensive too. There is no way I can afford a lasting subscription.'

The high price was a problem, but Khan could accept it. He wouldn't remain updated on Pandora's various services, but a month was more than enough to get a general idea and decide what to purchase.

'These drinks are also delicious,' Khan joked as he gestured toward one of the barmen behind the desk. The latter only had to see him pointing at his cup to prepare another drink.

The elevator opened while Khan was still immersed in his thoughts, and a familiar presence claimed his attention. He peeked past his shoulder, and surprise appeared on his expression when he noticed Anita stepping in.

Anita shared Khan's surprise but showed a bright smile while approaching him. She even gestured at the same barman while taking a spot next to him.

"I knew Pandora would have recruited you sooner or later," Anita exclaimed. "Who can blame them?"

"I actually came here by myself," Khan revealed. "I wanted better shops, and someone pointed me in this direction."

"That someone was right," Anita stated. "Pandora is the best in many ways."

"I didn't know you were a member," Khan voiced.

"I'm legacy," Anita replied, "Just like Monica and many other students. Though, I mostly come here to relax and have actual drinks."

Anita tried to be as natural as always, but her mana didn't lie. Khan and Anita had only seen each other during the lessons after the awkward moment in George's flat, and they had yet to talk about it.

"Something on your mind?" Khan probed.

Anita pretended not to hear Khan, but a sigh left her mouth when the new drinks arrived. Her gaze wandered over the tasty booze before she finally muttered words. "Capt-. Khan, you know that lost cause better than anyone. Tell me, am I wasting time?"

"If you like it," Khan announced, "It's not wasted time. That's what the Niqols would say."

"But I'm not a Niqols," Anita pointed out, "And neither is he. I know Nitis left a deep mark on him, but I need to know."

Khan glanced at Anita. She was still looking at her drink, but her internal struggle was real. She was also a wealthy descendant faced with an important choice.

"George might sound and act like an idiot," Khan revealed, "But he is the most trustworthy person I know."

"Is he now?" Anita whispered.

"Do you want my advice?" Khan asked. "The more you hold back, the farther he'll get."

"I'm not completely lost like my girl," Anita teased before diverting her gaze and playing with her blonde hair. "Though, he does look good with his uniform open."

"He is a true soldier," Khan smirked, ignoring the comment about Monica. "Any woman would be lucky to be with him."

"And yet it seems that any woman can have him," Anita continued, "Differently from you. Monica sure is lucky."

"George has found his peace," Khan explained. "He only jokes most of the time. Just hit him when it becomes too much."

"The idea has crossed my mind," Anita admitted.

"Don't hold back then," Khan uttered, "And put a leash on him since you are at it."

"That would be a nice sight," Anita giggled. "Still, you are on his side. You don't have my best interest in mind."

"I would have told you to stay away if I thought you couldn't make him happy," Khan claimed in a serious tone.

Anita felt forced to look at Khan. His seriousness was more than evident. He didn't refute her previous statement, but it was clear that he had accepted her.

"Your looks are only part of your charm," Anita stated. "No wonder you could catch my girl."

"That remains a misunderstanding," Khan dismissed the claim. "Besides, shouldn't you be in his flat already?"

"Being late is the least I could do," Anita scoffed. "He still has to prove himself."

"I won't go to his flat tonight," Khan reassured. "You'll have all the time you want."

"I'm not that shameless, Captain," Anita chuckled.

"I know," Khan declared. "You pretend to be superficial, but you actually care deeply. You didn't hesitate to stay with him when he was injured. I'm sure he also noticed that."

Anita had to lower her gaze to hide her surprise. Khan had seen through her political persona in mere weeks, and talking about it in the open embarrassed her.

"It's fine," Khan continued. "I'm glad he found someone like you."

"Thank you," Anita muttered. "I should probably go."

"Have fun," Khan chuckled as his focus returned to his drink.

"That reminds me," Anita exclaimed once she lifted her head. "I forgot to thank you. Calling me a friend in front of the Princess was kind of you."

"Anita, you are my friend," Khan smiled, and Anita smiled back as she began to leave the desk.

"Wait!" Khan suddenly called when he recalled something.

"What is it?" Anita questioned.

"Do you know where I can get the best techniques connected to the pilot's training?" Khan asked, revealing his second target. "I know the Global Army will give me some, but I don't want to settle for freebies."

"Oh," Anita gasped before approaching Khan again. "I'm not a pilot, but I heard good things about one shop."

Khan pulled out his phone to show the interactive map of the Harbor, and Anita browsed through it before marking a shop. The place's name was "Ace High", and glowing reviews spread under it.

"Good luck," Anita exclaimed once Khan retrieved his phone.

"You too," Khan replied.

"Right," Anita giggled while lowering her voice. "I don't believe you two for even a second. I know you are hiding something."

Anita stormed off before Khan could say anything, but a smile remained on his face. He had been honest with her. Khan really thought she would be good for George. He only hoped the two of them could see that too.

That casual encounter had been pleasant and had also given something important to Khan. Anita had confirmed that Pandora was everything it claimed to be and more. Spending ten thousand Credits to look at its goods sounded worth it now.

Khan returned to his drink and filled the subscription to the club. His phone began to buzz after he added his genetic signature to the interactive desk, and a new menu appeared. The name "Pandora" now shone among the magical items' list, and clicking on it revealed dozens of labels that would require time to study.

"Congratulations," The barman closest to Khan stated as soon as the procedure ended. "New members have discounts on high-end drinks. Do you want to try some?"

"I'll have to refuse today," Khan politely denied. "Sadly, time isn't on my side."

Khan emptied the drink and exchanged a smile with the barman before approaching the elevator. His curiosity was deafening, but it was getting late, and he still had two shops to visit.

The car brought Khan to Ace High, where he confirmed Anita's praises. Everyone was as professional as possible there, and it only took Khan a few questions to gain access to more private areas where he could purchase better pilot-related techniques.

After leaving Ace High, Khan headed for his third target. He had to get a new knife since his old one was damaged and unsuitable for his current level, and his previous inspection had highlighted one of the biggest shops in the district.

"Captain Khan!" A male waiter behind the main desk on the first floor almost shouted. "You honor the Steel Manticore with your presence."

Khan was starting to feel the weight of his sleepless nights, and the previous drinks didn't help. Thinking about all the matters he still had to attend also worsened his mood, so he opted to go straight to the point.

"I have a question," Khan stated. "Compared to a city on Earth, how does your shop fare?"

"Pardon?" The waiter asked in surprise.

"I need a third-grade knife resistant to the chaos element," Khan explained. "Price is not an issue, but the quality is mandatory. Is your shop on par with Earth's cities?"

The waiter felt tense under the spotlight, and having Khan in front of him basically put all the eyes in the shop on him. Telling the truth might hurt the Steel Manticore, but lying to one of the most famous figures in the Harbor sounded crazy.

"The Steel Manticore has the best blacksmiths in the Harbor, sir," The waiter declared. "They are envied even on Earth. However, some shops in the big cities surpass them while retaining a lower price."

"Thank you for your honesty," Khan sighed before deciding to reward that gesture. "What's your name?"

"Kyle, sir," The waiter exclaimed in excitement.

"Kyle," Khan muttered. "Have a good night."

Khan left the shop without adding anything else. He didn't do anything, but that acknowledgment was bound to pass down some of his fame. Kyle would probably have a few lucky opportunities in the following days.

"To the seventh district," Khan ordered once he returned inside his car. It was time to go home, but he couldn't relax during the trip. He still had to handle the issue of his knife.

It was late, but not too late. Dinnertime had ended by a few hours, so the shops on Reebfell were probably closed. Yet, he could rely on someone to deliver his request.

Khan sent a message to Amber, and a long conversation followed. The two updated each other and joked before moving to the matter at hand. Amber obviously agreed to contact the Divine Architects for him, and inevitable goodbyes eventually arrived.

A tired sigh escaped Khan's mouth when his building appeared in his vision. He had yet to hear from Monica or George, but that probably was for the best. He still had so much to do, and his exhaustion was quickly building up.

Khan exchanged a polite salute with Perry before heading toward his flat. He immediately threw himself on his bed, and the desire to sleep started to creep in. Yet, looking at the phone reminded him of his duties, so he forced himself to sit and inspect his purchases.

Nevertheless, a call arrived before Khan could open Pandora's menus. The name "Divine Architects" shone on the screen while his phone buzzed, and he quickly answered it.

"Hello?" Khan exclaimed.

"Captain Khan," A familiar voice came out of the phone. "I'm glad you remember our humble shop."

"Master Cansend!" Khan recalled. "I didn't expect you to answer Amber's request so quickly."

"You are too humble," Master Cansend replied. "The Divine Architects will obviously warn me when such a high-profile customer arrives."

"You are as kind as ever," Khan praised.

"So, I'm guessing you are in need of a new weapon," Master Cansend announced.

"That's right," Khan confirmed. "A chaos-resistant third-grade knife."

"Curtis can't handle such a difficult project," Master Cansend warned.

"My finances have greatly improved since we first met," Khan reassured.

"That's great," Master Cansend declared. "However, I'm afraid the project will remain expensive. I can apply a discount to my services, but the chaos-resistant materials have seen a sharp rise in price after Milia 222's disaster."

"Can you give me an estimate?" Khan wondered.

"Is the project any different from Curtis' creation?" Master Cansend wondered.

"No," Khan uttered. "It only needs to be a grade higher."

"I need to check a few things to give you an exact price," Master Cansend declared. "However, it won't be less than eighty thousand Credits, shipment included."

Khan's mind went blank for a second. That was almost one-fifth of his finances. However, he wouldn't hold back when it came to life-saving tools. Having the best weapon on the market could make a big difference during crises.

"Can I give you my answer once you know the actual price?" Khan wondered.

"Anything for you, Captain," Master Cansend agreed. "Still, if possible, can you send a 3D scan of your hands to this contact? I have Curtis' notes, but you are young. You might have grown."

"I'll get to it right away," Khan promised.

"I'll hear from you soon then," Master Cansend said. "Have a good night, Captain Khan."

"Thank you again for the quick call," Khan saluted, and the call ended.

Khan cleared Master Cansend's request right away. The phone could perform those simple scans, so he did a few of them of both his hands before sending them to the Divine Architects' contact. Master Cansend even send a message to confirm their arrival, so Khan put the matter in the back of his mind.

The time to check Pandora's goods finally arrived, but the universe had other plans. Khan's phone started to buzz again, but the calls and messages were unrelated to his shopping spree, and a quick look at them revealed their purpose.

'Already?' Khan cursed before ignoring all the people contacting him to check the network. The label "third-level mage" had appeared next to his profile, confirming that the Colonel had officially acknowledged the test.

The news had filled Khan's phone with curious people, and he was in no mood to mind them. The buzzing also distracted him, so he threw the device toward a pillow before lying down.

'This day is endless,' Khan cursed again, but the universe had one last surprise. A knocking noise resounded from the door, and opening it revealed a furious Monica.

"You didn't waste any fucking time!" Monica shouted while storming inside the flat. "You couldn't wait to get rid of me to be all sweet with that waiter!"

"Wait, Monica," Khan tried to call, but his attempt was pointless.

"Shut up!" Monica shouted again while waving the bag in her hand. "You stay there. I'll get to you in a minute."

After the warning, Monica entered the bathroom and closed the door behind her. In theory, being inside Khan's flat without George was problematic, but he couldn't care now. Also, the lessons were a perfect excuse.

'I knew it,' Khan mocked himself while returning to the comfort of the bed. He wasn't worried since the matter was a complete fabrication, but his phone continued to buzz, which annoyed him to no end.

Khan kept his head lowered when he heard the bathroom door opening, but the strange sensations flowing into the symphony eventually made him peek past the bed. All his exhaustion vanished at that point.

Monica was showing a timid face that broke into a smile under Khan's captivated gaze. She was wearing sensual, half-transparent lingerie that barely hid the skin underneath. The outfit even came with tights that made Khan forget to blink.

"Congratulations on your promotion," Monica whispered. "I hope you like your gift."