

Chaos' Heir 471

Chapter 471 Radola

"Last chance!" The male announcer shouted.

"Five million and one," The female announcer continued, "Five million and two, five million and three!"

"No fucking way," Khan muttered, but the announcers' following words forced him to accept the event.

"Lord Vegner wins!" The male announcer declared. "Pandora congratulates you for adding such a promising piece to your collection."

A round of applause unfolded, but Khan's gaze remained fixed on the stage. His mind struggled to realize how much money he had just earned while he watched his old knife disappear into the floor.

"Khan," Monica called in a scolding tone from the nearby seat.

Khan returned to reality and stood up, peeking past the gallery's edge to find his benefactor. A heavily overweight man was searching for his figure from the seats below, and he performed a military salute to express his gratitude.

"Can he even see me from down there?" Khan wondered.

"Smile and let the applause end," Monica ordered.

Three days had passed since the dinner with George and Anita's families. Khan had performed his second solo flight during the weekend, but the new week brought additional tasks, and the current auction was one of them.

In theory, selling a second-grade knife was no big matter, but Khan's involvement and presence made the applause last longer than usual. He had to remain in his military salute and exchange smiles with the other guests in the gallery for an entire minute before getting a chance to sit again.

"Five fucking million," Khan sighed in disbelief as he almost crashed in his seat.

"It's three for you," Monica corrected. "Pandora will take forty percent, which is lucky in your position."

"Three fucking million," Khan sighed again, making Monica giggle.

"Who is that guy anyway?" Khan questioned once the amazement started to wear off. "Why is he a Lord?"

"It's nothing official," Monica explained. "It's mostly a nickname meant to show respect. Lord Vegner has no family behind him, but his business made him rich enough to earn that title."

"Which business?" Khan asked. "Is it related to his crazy bid?"

Khan's knife had barely approached the three million when Lord Vegner made the winning bid. He raised the price by two million to secure the second-grade weapon.

"Maybe," Monica replied, diverting her gaze when Khan looked for her eyes. "He is a famous benefactor of unknown artists and collector of strange items, so there might be no connection."

"What's his business?" Khan asked again since he knew something was up.

"Brothels," Monica revealed, finally showing her shy eyes to Khan. "He has many establishments, and rumors say a few can fulfill even the nastier requests."

Khan's face instantly grew cold. The topic wouldn't usually trigger Monica's shyness, so the matter had to be personal.

"Is he trying to get to you?" Khan questioned.

"His-," Monica diverted her gaze again, "His brothels only have male prostitutes."

Khan frowned and opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. Meanwhile, Monica peeked at him and covered her mouth to suppress a loud chuckle. Her previous reaction didn't come from shyness. She simply found it hard to explain the topic to Khan without laughing.

"So," Khan voiced as understanding filled his thoughts.

"He might have taken a liking to you," Monica continued without hiding how funny she found the matter. "I don't blame him."

Khan turned to face the stage and adjusted his position. He was no stranger to male prostitutes since the Slums also had them. Still, he didn't expect to gain a benefactor for similar reasons, especially after becoming a Captain.

"Are brothels part of your family education?" Khan eventually joked.

"I need to be aware of shady characters since it's so hard to resist me," Monica played along.

"Someone is getting cocky," Khan teased while glancing at Monica. "Maybe I should stop complimenting you."

"Rejected," Monica snickered. "If I get too cocky, you'll have to deal with it."

"You are such a handful," Khan laughed.

"And you love me anyway," Monica declared, stretching her right arm past the armchair to put it in Khan's range.

Khan had a joke ready, but his mood didn't allow him to say it. He reached for Monica's arm to take her hand since the gallery gave them more privacy, and his eyes remained on her. He had just gotten more Credits than he had ever hoped to earn, and Monica was the sole reason behind that.

"I saw Lord Vegner's business in action," Monica revealed as her attention returned to the stage. "It was Selma's birthday, and she made her family purchase a spectacle. I can say Lord Vegner has good taste."

Monica smiled and tightened her grip on Khan's hand while waiting for a joke. She knew Khan would be jealous, but that would earn her the attention she loved. Yet, Khan's silence eventually forced her to look at him.

"Khan?" Monica called since Khan kept staring at her.

"I will do unspeakable things to protect what we have," Khan warned.

Monica didn't expect such a serious statement during that joyous event, but its meaning was clear. She knew Khan didn't love like a human, and his words proved how deeply he had fallen for her.

"First, show me more of your love," Monica exclaimed. "Love me until I'm unable to go back."

Khan performed a slow nod, and his eyes betrayed his desire. Monica fell prey to a similar feeling and forced herself to turn toward the stage. She couldn't contain herself when Khan looked at her like that.

"Just a few hours," Monica whispered words mostly meant for herself.

Khan and Monica didn't speak anymore. They had already decided what they wanted to do, so everything else moved to the backseat. They followed the auction, clapped their hands when necessary, and drank, but they both counted the minutes that separated them from proper privacy.

Khan's knife wasn't the main attraction. The auction was barely halfway done when that sale ended, so the couple had to wait almost two hours for the event to end.

Sadly, the departure from the auction area reserved more surprises. Khan and Monica had just entered the main staircase when a big figure blocked their path.

"Captain Khan, Miss Solodrey," Lord Vegner announced while performing a clumsy bow. "I hope I'm not interrupting anything."

The couple's stance wasn't exactly appropriate in those circles. Monica clung to Khan's elbow, keeping it tightly on her side. The Harbor had already seen them like that, but they were closer than usual that night, and anyone could see how comfortable they were with each other.

Khan could finally get a better look at the man. Lord Vegner was truly fat, and his belt only highlighted his ample belly. Still, his clothes were tailor-made for his size, which improved his tanned figure, and his short brown hair gave off a pleasant scent.

Moreover, Lord Vegner was only a third-level warrior. Khan could feel the presence of a cloaking technique, but nothing escaped his senses. Strangely enough, the man expressed pure friendliness and interest.

"Lord Vegner, right?" Khan felt the need to take the lead, especially since Lord Vegner had addressed him first. "You aren't interrupting anything, sir. Actually, I'm lucky I got a chance to thank you personally."

"Lord Vegner, it's a pleasure to meet you," Monica stated without letting Khan go.

"You have nothing to be grateful about, Captain," Lord Vegner chuckled as his chubby face created a harmless picture. "Your knife will be worth ten times what I paid it for in a few years. Mine was a simple investment."

"I had the impression you were a collector, sir," Khan admitted.

"I am," Lord Vegner revealed. "My estates are full of strange and exotic objects. If you are interested, I can plan a tour."

"I'm flattered, sir," Khan engaged in one of his polite responses, "But I don't think I have the time. Though, I could settle for dinner."

"I was only sticking to political formalities," Lord Vegner laughed. "You must be overwhelmed with homework, so don't worry about the dinner. You don't have to address me so politely either. I'm just a humble businessman."

Khan and Monica kept their smiles wide, but the silence that followed brought awkwardness. Lord Vegner had yet to state the reason behind that conversation, and openly asking about it would sound impolite, especially to the man who had just given Khan millions.

"Oh, sorry," Lord Vegner laughed again when he realized his mistake. "I'm actually a big fan of you, Captain. I have been since your exploits on Nitis, so meeting you in person makes me tense."

"I'm not sure I'm worthy of such praises," Khan replied as his fake smile tried to falter.

"Captain, I evaluate men for a living," Lord Vegner pressed on. "Trust me when I say that mere praises barely touch your value."

"Lord Vegner speaks the truth," Monica found the chance to join the conversation. "Why do you think I'm keeping you close?"

"It seems we stand on the same side, Miss Solodrey," Lord Vegner's dark eyes lit up. "Do you mind sharing a few secrets about the Captain? I'm sure we can seal a fair deal."

"Being the only one who knows Captain Khan's secrets is the best deal," Monica giggled. "I'm sure Lord Vegner agrees."

"A tough opponent," Lord Vegner laughed. "I guess I have to give up for now but don't consider me defeated so soon."

'Give up on what exactly?' Khan thought while trying to figure out Lord Vegner's intentions. Everything pointed toward a simple, friendly talk, but it still felt too random.

"Anyhow, don't let me steal any more of your time," Lord Vegner continued. "I just wanted to meet you in person and state my allegiance. You have many friends in the Global Army, Captain, more than you realize."

Lord Vegner performed another clumsy bow before going back to climbing the staircase. Monica and Khan let a few seconds pass before imitating him, and cold thoughts inevitably arrived.

That wasn't the first time Khan heard the word "friend" in those contexts. Colonel Norrett had said something similar before his promotion, which created a possible connection between Lord Vegner and Raymond.

However, many variables had joined Khan's understanding of the political environment. Powerful factions that went beyond the Global Army and families existed and operated in mysterious ways to reach different goals. The Hive was one of them, and Khan didn't know whether to put Raymond and Lord Vegner there.

'He can't be just a fan, can he?' Khan wondered while leaving the auction area and reaching for the roof with his booked car. 'Is he interested in the Nak too? Did Raymond send him to help me financially?'

Finding an answer to those questions was impossible. Khan could only develop vague hypotheses that lacked vital clues. He was learning a lot, but finding out the actual intentions of such influential and elusive figures required more than simple dinners and occasional talks.

'Strange and exotic objects,' Khan eventually repeated in his mind. 'Was that a hint? Does he have something Nak-related?'

Khan took a mental note about Lord Vegner. The network had to have more clues, and he planned to find them. Yet, those thoughts couldn't survive once the privacy of the cab arrived.

Monica let go of Khan's elbow to climb on him. She sat on his lap, taking his head between her palms while an entranced expression filled her face. Lord Vegner had been a distraction, but she didn't forget the mood that had ruled the last part of the auction.

"Do you have to go to the training hall tonight?" Monica whispered while closing her eyes and laying her forehead on Khan's.

"Even I would collapse after more than a week awake," Khan matched Monica's tone and also closed his eyes to let his other senses experience her.

Monica drew her waist closer before voicing another question. "What about the interplanetary regulation's notes?"

"Read them in the trips between the flat and the hangars," Khan responded.

"Interspecies treaties?" Monica continued.

"I'll review them before tomorrow's lessons," Khan stated.

"Basic diplomatic theories?" Monica pressed on.

"I'll study the notes in the breaks among tomorrow's classes," Khan explained.

"And review everything on the weekend," Monica added.

"And review everything on the weekend," Khan repeated.

"So," Monica announced, letting go of Khan's head to wrap her arms around his neck, "Are you mine tonight?"

"I'm always yours," Khan honestly said, and the symphony told him how much Monica liked those words.

"You know what I mean," Monica held back a bit longer. "Can I let go tonight?"

Monica didn't hide her true self from Khan, but his many tasks forced her to limit her more annoying and time-consuming sides. She took small acts of revenge whenever a chance appeared, but Khan's career remained her priority.

However, Khan was about to have a free night in which he wouldn't sleep much anyway. That was Monica's chance to be a simple girlfriend in love, which she desperately desired. She only needed Khan to flick that switch since she was scared of unleashing her crazy side by herself.

"I would be mad if you didn't," Khan whispered, and Monica barely let him finish his line before trapping his lips into a long kiss.

"I can't wait to reach the flat," Monica panted. "Khan, hold me."

Khan had started to move before Monica's words could reach his ears. He shared her mental state. He wanted to be a simple boyfriend for a night, so he grabbed her back to pull her into another kiss.

A buzzing noise resounded among the passenger's seats, forcing the couple to split. Khan pulled out his phone, and Monica didn't refrain from expressing anger when she read the name on the screen.

"Fuck you!" Monica shouted at the phone. "Do your laundry instead of ruining our night!"

Monica's outburst didn't stop there, but Khan pulled her head on his shoulder to turn her shouts into muffled complaints. Meanwhile, he brought the phone to his ear and mustered the entirety of his self-restraint to avoid sounding pissed. "Professor Nickton, to what do I owe the pleasure?"

"I've finished the report you requested," Professor Nickton explained. "Come to the lab to get it."

"Sir, it's-," Khan began to say, but the Professor interrupted him. "Yes, it's late, so hurry."

Professor Nickton ended the call before Khan could add anything, and he instinctively bumped the back of his head on the metal surface behind him. Khan even stopped keeping Monica still, and the expression that appeared in his vision made his mana boil.

"It's okay," Monica whispered, trying her best to hide her disappointment. "I'll wait-."

Monica couldn't finish her line since Khan sealed her lips with his thumb. Her questioning eyes followed him while he added new instructions to the car's menus, and she widened them when he lay her down on the seats.

"Why wait?" Khan muttered while setting Monica's mouth free and sliding his hands over her legs. She understood what was happening even before Khan lifted her skirt, but shyness didn't arrive. Her fingers were already unbuttoning his pants by the time their lips met again.

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Professor Nickton didn't grant Khan's car access to the specific landing area, so he had to reach the sidewalk, enter the building, and use the elevator to reach the lab.

Khan found Professor Nickton tinkering with holograms coming out of one of the three interactive desks when he entered the lab. The place was as dirty as always, and the Professor's clothes weren't any better.

"Professor, I'm here," Khan called since the Professor seemed to have no intention of turning.

"I know," Professor Nickton waved his hand dismissively without moving his eyes from the holograms. "Get your report and leave."

"Sir, my request involved a short explanation," Khan revealed.

"Did it?" Professor Nickton wondered, finally turning toward Khan. Yet, the dark-red mark partially hidden by the shirt's collar made the Professor change his question. "Did you always have that mole?"

Khan had to take out his phone and use it as a mirror to understand what the Professor meant, and seeing the dark-red mark opened the way for his shameless self. "Sir, it's lipstick."

"Oh, pity," Professor Nickton exclaimed, bending forward to make sure that Khan was telling the truth. "I thought it was an unknown mutation."

"It would have been blue in my case," Khan pointed out.

"That's why I was interested," Professor Nickton replied before looking at an empty interactive desk. "You used your merit points for this, so I guess I can't refuse."

Professor Nickton approached the empty desk and played with its menus to make them release holograms that reached the ceiling. The images took the shape of a strange bird that Khan had studied as thoroughly as possible in the last period.

"This is a Radola," Professor Nickton explained. "It's Lauter's apex predator and king of its sky. We think the planet had other flying species in the past, but the Radola wiped them out."

Khan already knew that, but the network didn't have such a detailed image, so he lost himself in the holograms. The Radola was a giant bird, at least five meters long, with two pairs of big wings and a long but slim neck.

The holograms didn't show it, but the Radola had red feathers. They could be paler or darker, but their color was usually fixed. A few exceptions had appeared throughout the years due to mutations, but they were sporadic and often died soon.

The Radola's long and bulky beaks were an iconic feature of that species, but experts preferred to focus on another detail. Those Tainted birds had no legs or talons. Anatomically, they couldn't land.

"Structurally," Professor Nickton continued, zooming in on the holograms to highlight the creature's insides, "The Radola are fragile. These Tainted animals fly in their sleep since they can ride the softest gales, which comes at the cost of light bones and muscles. Their innate defense is relatively weak.

"However, they move in packs, and their aggression is fearsome. They attack any foreign shape in their territory, and the same goes for members of their species with unusual shades."

Khan was no stranger to those notions. In theory, the Radola's innate aggression could be a big problem, but the missile put that feature on Khan's side. Many specimens would gather around the falling weapon, increasing the overall number of casualties.

"Their beaks allow them to swallow their prey whole," Professor Nickton added, and the holograms simulated the Radola's feeding process. "Their necks are flexible and elastic. In theory, the Radola can swallow full-grown men, but their instincts make them avoid that."

"They only kill them and let them rot in the ocean," Khan thought before addressing the core of the matter. "Professor, I contacted you for your expertise. I need to learn their unique abilities and occasional mutations."

"Sadly," Professor Nickton exclaimed, "The Radola's innate aggression makes any uncommon mutation or unique specimens go extinct. As such, their entire species only has two main families."

'Sadly for you,' Khan thought. He understood Professor Nickton's scientific perspective, but the limited number of variables in the Radola made his mission easier.

Professor Nickton tinkered with the interactive desk, making the holograms split into two similar figures. Both images depicted Radola, but small differences existed.

"Experts in the field gave this family the name hunters," Professor Nickton explained while pointing at the specimen on the right. "These Radola are slimmer, faster, but also weaker. They can bend light to turn themselves invisible to their prey in the sea, but their battle capabilities are quite poor."

"The other family is commonly referred to as fighters," Professor Nickton continued when he moved to the specimen on the left. "They are bigger, tougher, and stronger than the hunters. They are slower but have actual offensive abilities. Their ice element gives them fearsome battle prowess near the sea's surface."

"Do you have examples of said battle prowess?" Khan questioned, and his interest in the matter made him forget about addressing the Professor properly. Of course, the latter didn't even notice that.

"No thanks to those butchers from the embassy," Professor Nickton snorted while playing with the desk once again. The two specimens grew smaller to make way for a large screen that stretched through half of the lab and captivated Khan's attention.

A detailed video soon began to play on the screen. Six ships armed with four cannons each fired in precise directions to isolate a small pack of Radola. The camera stood above them, so Khan could see the vehicles establishing a perimeter to corner those Tainted animals.

Still, the Radola were close enough to the sea's surface to use its water, and many icy pillars grew from it before flying toward the ships. The attack was far from coordinated but showed a fearsome battle prowess. Twenty or so Tainted animals had been able to create more than forty frozen bullets.

The Radola's offensive wasn't precise, but the ship's perimeter worked in its favor and made it hit a few enemies. Some vehicles saw their hulls pierced by those icy pillars, which forced a deadly reaction out of them.

Of course, the Radola couldn't do anything under the all-out assault of the six battleships. All the Tainted animals died in a matter of minutes, and the video ended.

"Butchers," Professor Nickton cursed while turning off the interactive table.

"Sir?" Khan called, hoping that the Professor had something else for him.

"Just connect your phone to the desk to download the full report," Professor Nickton announced dismissively. "Leave afterward. I have work to do."

Khan didn't hesitate to comply. He couldn't wait to return to his flat and enjoy his sweet time with his girlfriend before finally getting some rest. Yet, when he began to interact with the desk, Professor Nickton mentioned another issue.

"Captain," Professor Nickton called, "If you get your hands on relatively intact specimens during your mission, bring them to me. I'll give you merit points or something else. You decide."

"Will you study them, sir?" Khan questioned, intrigued by that side mission.

"Study, update the Harbor's records, and smelt them into synthetic mana," Professor Nickton casually explained as a different interactive desk claimed his attention.

Khan was no stranger to that procedure. Beasts' King's waiter had already partially hinted at the topic, but Khan was in the same room with an expert now, and his curiosity was hard to contain.

"Is that how mana is synthesized?" Khan asked. "Does the Global Army use Tainted animals?"

"That's one of the accepted procedures," Professor Nickton replied, even if his eyes remained on the desk's menus. "You can also filter it from the right environment or concoct it through a specific process."

Khan couldn't help but find the matter odd. The first two methods didn't sound sustainable. They were bound to lead to an exhaustion of that resource, which forced a deeper question out of Khan.

"Where does mana come from?" Khan questioned. "Earth got it from the Nak, but where did they get it?"

Professor Nickton ended up peeking past his shoulder to look at Khan. The question had attracted his attention since it involved an exciting topic, and his dismissive behavior didn't arrive in that situation.

"There are many theories," Professor Nickton exclaimed, turning to face Khan. "Aren't you studying them?"

"I want to hear your opinion, sir," Khan opted for a blunt approach.

"Well," Professor Nickton muttered, scratching his unkempt beard. "It's possible that mana has always been around, just far away from Earth. It's a very aggressive form of energy, and expansion is in its nature, so it makes sense for it to end up on inhabited planets eventually."

"Aggressive?" Khan repeated.

"You should know better than most," Professor Nickton stated. "Mana infects any unprotected organism and changes it forever. The process might take longer in some circumstances but remains inevitable."

"So, was it just out of reach?" Khan asked.

"Probably," Professor Nickton partially confirmed. "Mana can also be the result of a mutation. A form of energy that evolved into a higher form of energy. Anything is possible."

"The expansion part," Khan returned to the previous statement, "Wouldn't that limit its range?"

"It depends," Professor Nickton declared. "Organisms that carry mana often end up leaking some into the environment. You and I unconsciously do that, and the same goes for plants and other living beings. You are part of the cycle as soon as mana touches you."

Professor Nickton avoided mentioning many details, but Khan didn't blame him. He was in no position to understand scientific speeches, and the explanation still conveyed the human perspective perfectly.

"See yourself out," Professor Nickton exclaimed when he understood that Khan had nothing else to say, "And don't forget my Radola. I want at least a few internal organs intact."

Chapter 472 Tour

Khan managed to stuff three dinners with his classmates' families in the two weeks that followed his meeting with Professor Nickton. Except for them, his routine remained mostly the same, with only the solo flights being a variable that disturbed his otherwise fixed schedule.

Of course, those disturbances didn't create many problems. After all, Khan could only spend a limited amount of time outside the domes. The ships' small tanks always forced him to return to the Harbor quickly, but he didn't dare to miss out on them, especially with the approaching test.

When the week ended, Khan had seventeen official flights under his belt. He only needed three more to gain access to the test that would grant him the license. He was almost done with that course, and his excitement kept him awake during one of the rare nights reserved for his rest.

Khan's eyes wandered around his bedroom's ceiling without looking for anything specific. He wasn't actually there. At least, his mind wasn't. His thoughts had gone back to the afternoon when he was pushing the ship to its limits on the moon.

'Two more weeks,' Khan thought, 'Three tests, and I'm done. Getting a ship comes next.'

Khan counted the days separating him from the next flight. The week would restart in the morning, so the situation didn't look good. Still, he couldn't find the strength to feel annoyed when his goal was so close.

In theory, Khan didn't need to limit his flights to the weekend. The Headmistress was paying for almost everything, so he could take ships out of the Harbor during school days. He didn't because the mission was a priority now.

The imminent license wasn't the only reason behind Khan's inability to feel annoyed. His day had been great, and his night had been even better. The woman sleeping on his right shoulder proved that, and her random snore eventually attracted his attention.

When Monica's sleeping face entered Khan's vision, his thoughts seemed to disappear. That rare free night had given them a chance to express their feelings adequately, and the room's symphony still carried traces of their affection. It was almost incredible how such wild influences could create such a cozy and peaceful environment.

Monica's mana grew peaceful whenever Khan resumed caressing her. She also let out soft moans and slightly snuggled on him from time to time to express her comfort. Her sleep couldn't stop those reactions, and Khan had long since memorized them.

The urge to wake up Monica tried to make its way inside Khan's mind. He wanted her. He couldn't stop wanting her. Yet, watching her sleep fulfilled another side of his love, which he couldn't refuse. The peace her presence created was almost intoxicating, and Khan couldn't get enough of that.

'How did she even do it?' Khan couldn't help but wonder.

Monica had been innocent in her approach to the relationship. Her feelings had been genuine since her very first kiss, and that had never changed. That purity was odd for someone with a similar upbringing, but Khan could explain it.

Outcasts had many forms, and Monica was a peculiar case. She hid her true character behind elegant and polite manners, but Khan had given her a chance to bloom. Her purity sounded obvious in that context. As for her courage, that was the astonishing aspect.

'You trusted me so openly,' Khan thought. 'You must have been so scared.'

Khan felt the need to leave a kiss on Monica's head, and a smile broadened on her face afterward. She was still asleep, but her mana had felt that gesture.

'Now what?' Khan wondered while pulling Monica closer.

A glance at the phone told Khan that morning was still many hours away. He should sleep, but his brain was fully awake, and the desire to watch Monica a bit longer added fuel to his state. He could feel his accumulated exhaustion, but his thoughts didn't let him give in to it.

Out of habit, Khan unlocked his phone to check the news. Monica and Lucian had become third-level warriors, so articles about them had come out. Madam Wildon had also stayed true to her word, putting George at the center of many interviews, with some even reporting his recent infusion.

The network obviously had articles about Khan. He had stayed put in the past weeks, but his fame wasn't easy to disperse. Multiple sites about him had appeared, and a few even spoke about his potential relationship with Monica.

Those sites didn't have actual proof, but clues had started to accumulate. Khan found a picture of himself from when he met Professor Nickton. Someone had managed to take a glimpse of the dark-red mark on his neck, connecting it with the lipstick Monica wore that night.

The comments were even worse. People kept track of Khan's schedule and shared it on the network, inevitably involving Monica in it. Anyone paying attention could see that she never returned to her flat in the seventh district, and the site made sure to report that.

The old Khan would have found the matter surprising, but he had been famous for a while, and everything had escalated after the Princess. He had learnt how that environment worked, so he didn't worry. He would have to kiss Monica in the open to make things official, and people would hesitate due to her background, even in that case.

'Madam Solodrey might have to make an official statement at this pace,' Khan found the matter funny.

After reviewing the news, Khan moved to a topic that had caught his interest in the past weeks. He had ended up looking for information about Lord Vegner, even using his clearance to get classified reports, and some of his guesses had turned out to be true.

Incriminating connections grew firmer in Khan's mind while he scrolled through a long list of pictures. He had found part of Lord Vegner's collections, and many items featured mutations caused by the Nak's mana. Rumors on the network even stated that he had a few Nak's cores in one of his estates.

Khan didn't believe everything he read, but the connection with Raymond felt obvious. It would make sense for a collector interested in Nak-related items to work with him. He simply didn't know how that relationship worked. It could be purely financial, as far as he knew.

'Why can't people just tell me what they want?' Khan cursed in his mind before disregarding his phone to turn toward Monica again. The exhaustion was finally getting to his head, so he planned to nestle among her curls and fall asleep.

Nevertheless, a message reached Khan's phone before he could proceed, and the name on the screen hinted at something urgent.

'The main ship just reached the Harbor,' Lucian wrote. 'I can give you a tour.'

'When?' Khan texted.

'Meet me in hangar 3 in two hours,' Lucian replied. 'Unless you want to postpone.'

'I'll be there,' Khan promised and put away his phone. It seemed that the very universe was against him resting that night.

Khan tried his best to be silent, but Monica was on his shoulder, and the pillows were in random spots in the room. Monica remained asleep when he sneaked out of bed, but her eyes opened when he put a cushion under her head.

"Is it morning already?" Monica asked in a sleepy tone.

"Lucian called," Khan explained shortly, rubbing Monica's cheek to ease her way back to sleep. "I have to go."

"Kiss," Monica whined.

Khan complied, leaving a kiss on Monica's lips and forehead before adjusting the pillows. He even pulled up the messy blanket to make her more comfortable.

"Kiss for good luck," Monica whined again, but a smirk appeared on her face at that time.

"I have this for good luck," Khan whispered, slipping a hand under the blanket to squeeze Monica's butt. She giggled and reached for Khan's face to pull him into another kiss.

The two separated shortly after, and Khan went into a different bedroom to get a clean military uniform. He left his flat in a matter of minutes, and a car was already waiting for him when he arrived on the sidewalk.

The second district was distant from the hangars, but two hours were more than enough to reach them. Khan would actually have to wait for Lucian. Still, he was on par with his studies, so he took a nap during the trip.

The driver's voice coming out of the speaker interrupted the nightmare and awakened Khan once the ride was over. The nap didn't disperse all his exhaustion, but he rubbed his eyes and left the car anyway to make his way into the hangar area.

A look at the phone told Khan that he was early, but a familiar presence touched his senses once he entered hangar 3. Lucian was there, wearing a military uniform with three stars on his right shoulder and talking to a group of soldiers.

Khan was approaching Lucian from behind, but the soldiers' reactions revealed his presence and made him turn. A vague smile appeared on Lucian's face, and the words that followed expressed his satisfaction. "Captain, early as expected."

"I couldn't sleep," Khan casually said before nodding at the military salute performed by the soldiers.

"I hope I didn't interrupt anything," Lucian said in a polite tone, but his voice gained a teasing purpose when it reached Khan's ears.

"I was killing time on the network," Khan feigned ignorance. "Are we allowed to speak here?"

Khan was genuinely curious about the ship, but the soldiers could be outsiders. Speaking openly in front of unwanted ears might lead to problems.

"No," Lucian directly stated. "Follow me. They should be ready by the time we get there."

Khan complied, following Lucian silently while he made his way through the hangar. The two ended up walking into the many corridors outside the area, and Lucian didn't hold back from starting a casual conversation once some privacy arrived.

"The doctors have yet to clear me," Lucian voiced while patting his left shoulder, "But I'm confident in getting my second third star once that happens."

"I'm sure your family already has tailor-made spells ready for you," Khan commented.

"It does," Lucian confirmed. "We actually have a vault with many spells collected over the years. I think it's almost a century old now."

Khan pretended not to notice the hidden meaning behind that boasting, and Lucian was smart enough to take the silence for an answer. Wealth couldn't make Khan falter, and human spells weren't too interesting for him.

"Did you check your site?" Lucian wondered. "You gathered quite the fanbase. They even know when your team practice ends."

"The tech expert is leaking info," Khan revealed. "He takes pictures of me whenever I leave the training hall."

"Why didn't you fire him?" Lucian frowned.

"He is good and cheap," Khan explained. "He should ask five times his current pay, but I never heard a single complaint."

The tech expert was a core part of the mission. That role was more important than the gunners due to the many calculations and responsibilities it involved. Khan was willing to trade a few harmless pictures for the sake of his career. Besides, firing Seth wouldn't save him from the consequences of his fame.

"Compromises," Lucian praised. "The foundation of good leadership."

"I'm not really leading," Khan admitted. "I'm just putting most of the mission on my shoulders."

"Is that the right choice?" Lucian questioned.

"You didn't give me much to work with," Khan stated. "I hope the unavoidable expenses are worth it."

"You'll be the judge of that," Lucian teased, and Khan couldn't help but feel interested. He didn't have the best relationship with Lucian, but ships had priority.

The conversation ended on those words. Lucian opted for silence since he knew Khan preferred it in that context. He would have attempted to talk a bit more under normal circumstances, but risking worsening things with Khan wasn't worth it when his mission was at stake.

The walk lasted for minutes, and a few soldiers even escorted the two when they reached specific corridors. It took a bit, but Khan and Lucian eventually entered a circular hall with a familiar oval

machine at its center. The consoles near the walls almost were an unnecessary clue there. Khan knew he was in front of a teleport.

"Come here," Lucian called when one of the soldiers at the consoles searched for his gaze. "I'm sure you'll like the scenery."

Khan followed Lucian to the console, and his eyes widened when he looked at the screen. The monitor showed a giant ship flying toward the Harbor's moon. According to the numbers on the machine, that vehicle could fill an entire dome by itself.

"The Harbor doesn't have hangars for this class of ships," Lucian explained. "They usually land on the moon when the situation requires it, but we are sending it directly toward Lauter."

"Does it have a teleport?" Khan asked due to the current location.

"Yes, even if with limited range," Lucian revealed. "Don't worry. These expenses won't add up to your mission."

"Sir, we have established a connection," One of the soldiers on the consoles shouted toward Khan and Lucian.

"Good job," Lucian praised while glancing at Khan. "Captain, do you want to see how it looks from the inside?"

Khan didn't want to give Lucian anything he could use, so he limited himself to nodding. The two stepped on the teleport, and synthetic mana filled the machine before activating its functions.

The teleport couldn't do anything to Khan. He didn't experience any side-effect after a different circular hall unfolded in his vision. The environment had changed, and his senses never stopped studying the environment.

Khan's eyes darted left and right. The new teleport area couldn't reveal much, but the people on the consoles were the first clue. They had white medical coats instead of military uniforms. They were specialized personnel who didn't show allegiance to the Global Army.

"Master Lucian," A bald, middle-aged woman bowed when Lucian's gaze focused on her. "The ship is ready for the inspection."

"Give us a tour, Viola," Lucian ordered, jumping off the teleport. He didn't need to glance at Khan since he followed closely behind him.

Exiting the teleport showed more differences. Many saw the Harbor as a glorified space station, but it limited the number of claustrophobic areas iconic of those structures. Lucian's ship didn't even try to do that, and the narrow corridors and cabins Khan noticed confirmed that idea.

The personnel met during the walk also added value to Khan's initial impression. The group encountered many soldiers with no special tasks, and they all prioritized showing respect to Lucian. The Global Army's ranks didn't seem to matter much up there.

Those thoughts vanished when a long and spacious hall unfolded in Khan's view. He entered an area divided into two floors connected by simple metal staircases. The lower part mostly had consoles and specialists, while the upper side had multiple holographic screens and a structure he recognized.

'How big is that control desk?' Khan shouted in his mind at the sight of the machine standing at the center of the second floor.

"Viola, it seems we got Captain Khan's interest," Lucian laughed. "Come and take a look. I'm sure the boss won't mind."

Khan snapped out of his amazement when Lucian headed for one of the metal staircases. He followed him and even ignored Viola performing a military salute and waiting on the lower floor.

Lucian nodded left and right whenever the personnel called his name. Those interactions never lasted too long, and the soldiers always went back to their tasks afterward, but the situation changed when the duo approached the control desk.

"Master Lucian, the control desk is a private area," The burly man standing in front of the central machine scolded without bothering to turn, "Not a tourist destination."

"Boss Edcoll is the pilot and Captain of the ship," Lucian explained while stopping a few meters behind the burly man. "Boss, this is Captain Khan. He is weeks away from getting his pilot license."

Khan didn't really care about Boss Edcoll. That spot at the center of the upper floor granted him a unique perspective on the various holograms. He felt unable to lower his gaze when so much was happening in the scenes around him.

On the right, multiple holograms were keeping track of the ship's course, obviously including the gravitational pull and other interferences of the planets in the system.

On the left, the holograms kept track of the ship's integrity, from the hull to the multiple engines and central core. Khan even saw a corner checking the state of the weapons onboard.

As for the holograms in the hall's front, they showed what the ship's scanners were recording. Khan could see the universe and the Harbor in the distance, and the onboard computer even added a grid to make everything easier to understand.

Khan couldn't help but look at the control desk once his inspection of the holograms ended. He even tilted himself to his left to peek past Boss Edcoll's big figure, and his eyes darted to no end.

The ship's control desk was at least four times what Khan had grown used to during his flights. Such a big vehicle obviously had more functions, but it still felt odd to be unaware of the purpose of so many keys.

"He is a lively one," Boss Edcoll commented before Khan's evident excitement.

"Is that area meant for weapon control?" Khan wondered while pointing at the control desk's left side. "What's the purpose of the consoles down there?"

Boss Edcoll showed some surprise, and Lucian nodded when he glanced at him.

"Leviathan class ships have many security protocols," Boss Edcoll explained. "Especially when involving weapons."

"But you can overrule them, right?" Khan questioned while still checking every corner of the hall. "Protocol 201-1 enforces martial law and gives the ship's Captain complete control over most functions."

"This ship doesn't belong to the Global Army," Lucian commented.

"But this quadrant does," Khan pointed out, "So the ship falls under the Global Army's regulations."

Lucian's comment had been an instinctive boasting that carried no real value, but seeing Boss Edcoll's slow nod revealed that Khan's words were spot on. He actually knew more than Lucian in that specific field.

Of course, Lucian didn't feel annoyed or angry. Seeing another proof of Khan's expertise put a confident smile on his face. He had chosen that figure for his mission. He deserved a share of the praises.

"Captain Khan, did you get your fill of the main desk?" Lucian eventually questioned.

"I'd need days for that," Khan admitted. Still, time was short, and the morning was only a few hours away, so he straightened his position and nodded at his employer.

"Until next time, Boss Edcoll," Lucian politely stated before heading toward the metal staircase. Boss Edcoll didn't bother to perform salutes but exchanged a simple glance with Khan when he smiled at him.

Viola resumed her role as a guide once Khan and Lucian reunited with her, and the group left the main desk to head to the lower parts of the ships. It took a few minutes, but they eventually reached a magnetic railroad with cabins able to cross most of the vehicle in a short time.

Lucian knew that speaking was pointless, but his confident smile remained. Khan couldn't hide his interest in that immense vehicle, and noticing Lucian's reaction didn't do much to his state. He couldn't care about giving things away in front of such magnificence.

Most of the math behind Lucian's mission became clear as Khan's knowledge fused with the images captured by his eyes. A leviathan class needed a crew of at least a hundred men to operate, and Lucian's ship probably had more than that. When Khan added fuel and weapons to those costs, the expenses stated in the reports actually felt too low.

The cabin led the group to a vast hangar filled with multiple ships, and Viola led Khan and Lucian among them to show off the Hencus family's wealth. That area alone seemed to contain more Credits than the entire Harbor, and Lucian had been able to summon it with his influence.

"Oh, there it is," Lucian eventually announced when a small battleship unfolded in the group's vision. The vehicle was rectangular, with four cannons at its sides and two engines on its back. Its metal was also pale blue, probably meant to mask it on Lauter.

Viola stopped in her tracks while Lucian and Khan approached the ship. Its side doors were open, so the two could inspect its insides and check its general state. A mere look at its control desk told Khan he could fly it, and his knowledge added details that only a test ride could provide.

'This is quite fast and nimble,' Khan thought while spreading his arms to gain a better grasp of the ship's size. 'It's a good ship.'

"You'll get down with this during the mission," Lucian announced during Khan's inspection. "I hope it matches your requirements."

"It might be too much even," Khan admitted, entering the cabin to memorize its contents.

"It depletes the same fuel as other ships," Lucian explained. "I found no reason to hold back. Obviously, any damage will lead to expensive reparations."

"I have established a security protocol for that," Khan revealed.

"That's reassuring," Lucian stated. "Still, if the situation requires it, I can afford to lose this ship as long as I get the outpost."

Another hidden message reached Khan's ears, and the privacy of the ship made him voice a rather straightforward comment. "I get it. Your family has more of these."

"Not as many as you might think," Lucian declared, "Especially this leviathan class. I think we have only four or five of them."

That was a lie Lucian didn't even bother to hide. Khan knew he would never reveal the true number of ships his family owned. Lucian was only giving Khan a vague idea of how rich he was.

Khan ignored Lucian and continued to inspect the ship, but the latter decided to speak more openly. "Captain, why don't we stop squabbling? We can help each other. We simply have to allow ourselves to do it."

"I might still fail at this mission," Khan remarked. "You should wait for after my success for additional offers."

"If you succeed," Lucian exclaimed, "The Solodrey family will get to you before anyone else. This is my only opportunity to get an edge over them."

Khan couldn't help but shoot a cold glance at Lucian, and the latter didn't hesitate to explain himself. "Don't take me wrong. This goes beyond that interesting topic of yours. Even without Miss Solodrey's involvement, her family would still have priority."

Lucian's words were accurate. Khan had gotten his spot in the Harbor thanks to the Solodrey family, which granted them multiple advantages when trying to recruit him. It would be seen as offensive to refuse offers after what they had given him.

"I'll see after the mission," Khan didn't change his mind. "It's pointless to make plans right now."

"On the contrary," Lucian objected. "Still, I respect your decision. I just want you to keep something in mind."

"Which is?" Khan asked.

"You'll always be a lapdog if you make things too easy for them," Lucian declared, "And lapdogs don't get the princess."

Khan wanted to resume inspecting the ship to hide his reactions, but those words touched the right keys in his mind. Lucian was onto something. To paraphrase, Khan needed the Solodrey family to see him as more than a soldier to get Monica.

"Let me guess," Khan voiced. "You want to help with that."

"I could give you an insane offer right below the Solodrey family's limits," Lucian suggested. "I'd obviously make the matter public, which would force their hand."

Khan didn't need to ask if that plan would work. He knew it would since Lucian had suggested it. The problems lay elsewhere.

"All of this to get me on your payroll," Khan commented.

"I changed my mind about that long ago," Lucian scoffed. "You can become a valuable ally and push me into the upper echelon of my family. You just have to choose what kind of relationship we can have."

Khan didn't answer. He simply couldn't in that situation. His silence was his best weapon when his opponent wielded all the available cards.

"Captain, everyone knows your goals," Lucian stated. "Scoring a job in the embassy will put you on the right path. With my family or Monica's help, you'd even get into a proper diplomatic office. You just have to choose how you want to play it."

Chapter 473 Mission

Lucian's words lingered in Khan's mind more than he wanted to admit, but other problems required his attention. With the leviathan class in the Harbor's system, the mission could officially start, and delaying it would only increase the overall expenses.

The team could benefit from more simulations, but everyone had already met Khan's requirements, so he finalized the preparations and got everything ready by the end of the following week. When the weekend started, the mission went online.

Khan, Lieutenant Clayman, Tyler, Leona, Manuel, and Seth teleported into Lucian's ship early in the morning and followed Viola toward the appointed vehicle. The leviathan class had reached Lauter by then, so the team only had to take their position to greenlight the mission.

Tension inevitably spread when the team reached the rectangular ship in the hangar. Tyler's mana was a mess, and the two gunners weren't any better. Seth was somewhat calmer than his companions, but even he showed signs of anxiety. Only Lieutenant Clayman appeared perfectly still, but his easy role could justify that.

As for Khan, he was far better than his companions, without a tinge of anxiety in his mind. He actually felt relaxed since he could finally carry his knife in the open. Also, the imminent arrival in an area full of natural mana put him in a good mood.

"Come on, people," Khan called when he saw the initial procedures falling behind schedule. "We only have to confirm that everything is how we left it."

"The cannons are loaded and ready, sir," Leona announced.

"And we won't empty them, boss," Manuel reassured, without hiding his joking tone.

"Security protocols ready for activation, sir," Lieutenant Clayman added.

"All of them?" Khan questioned.

"All of them," Lieutenant Clayman confirmed.

"The turrets are in position," Seth continued. "I've started a simulation. Once it ends, we are good to go."

"Tyler?" Khan called.

"The ship's tank is full," Tyler stammered. "The control desk is online. We are ready for set-off."

"Alright, stand by," Khan ordered. "We must wait for Seth's simulations."

The tension intensified in the following seconds. The team had completed many simulations and checked the actual ship in the previous days, but the real deal hit differently. Still, they found reassurance in the fact that most of them wouldn't face any danger.

Multiple glances fell on Khan during the wait. Most of the mission lay on his shoulders, but he was the calmest of the bunch. He remained perfectly in control while holograms flashed in his eyes and updated him about the preparations.

'Lapdog,' Khan sighed in his mind. 'Maybe it has always been impossible to get there on my own.'

"Simulation twenty percent complete!" Seth announced.

'Do I have to compromise myself?' Khan wondered. 'Is it necessary?'

"Simulation thirty percent complete!" Seth continued.

'That's better than killing,' Khan realized. 'It can't be worse than the village by the lake.'

"Simulation fifty percent complete!" Seth added.

'For love, it would be worth it,' Khan considered.

"Simulation seventy percent complete!" Seth shouted.

'But is Lucian the best I can get?' Khan wondered.

"Simulation ninety percent complete!" Seth exclaimed, and silence spread among Khan's thoughts.

"Simulation complete!" Seth eventually followed. "We are good to go, sir!"

"Calculate the ideal target," Khan ordered.

"Calculating, sir," Seth responded.

The tension reached a critical point in those seconds. There would be no turning back after the next order, but no one panicked, at least not openly. Khan's presence seemed able to suppress those reactions now that pure seriousness reeked out of his figure.

"Ideal target found, sir," Seth stated.

A few gasps resounded, and even Khan hesitated. Seconds went by as he reviewed the holograms in front of him, but the data confirmed Seth's words, ultimately forcing him to give the critical order.

"Fire," Khan muttered.

"Fire!" Lieutenant Clayman echoed, and Seth sent a message through the ship's menus to confirm the order.

"Initiate set-off," Khan continued. "Let's get out!"

The simulations had perfected the mission's execution. The ship wouldn't wait for the scanners to go online anymore. Instead, it would approach Lauter's atmosphere in the meantime to save some time.

Of course, Khan didn't leave that task to Tyler. A delay or a mistake would make the ship go off route, wasting time instead of saving it, so he left everything in the hands of the autopilot.

"Initiating set-off!" Lieutenant Clayman echoed, slamming his palm on a menu at his side to activate the previously planned protocol.

The autopilot voiced robotic words before making the ship leave the metal floor and approach the mana barrier at the end of the hangar. The vehicle crossed it as fast as possible before diving toward the blue planet under it.

The scanners gave Khan a complete view of the dive and even located the descending missile. He saw the weapon falling at high speed toward Lauter's atmosphere, and the vehicle followed it. Yet, it never got too close to avoid radiation-related problems.

Khan inspected everything closely. He was actually captivated by the scene. The universe always managed to stir his interest, but a different type of curiosity filled his mind now. He had only seen the missile in action during simulations, so he couldn't wait to witness the real deal.

The scanners couldn't pick up much, especially once the missile entered the atmosphere. Also, the ship had to stop outside the explosion's range, and the radiation was bound to mess up the equipment. Still, a few images remained, and they were enough to keep Khan captivated.

The spot chosen for the mission was quite cloudy, but all of that disappeared once the explosion unfolded. An azure flash overwhelmed the other shades and expanded to create a circular shockwave.

Khan didn't forget that he was watching a planet. The messy data on the holograms and the related images showed an insane range. The missile looked too strong even when he looked at its effect from outside Lauter's atmosphere.

"Scanners stabilizing," The ship reported as the shockwave began to disperse. "Initiating descent."

The ship dived toward the center of the shockwave in the now purely blue sky, and complete emptiness unfolded in the scanners. Nothing had survived in the area affected by the missile. There were only islands and a raging sea in the scene below.

'One of these could wipe out Reebfell,' Khan thought while moving his seat near the ship's side doors, 'And the Global Army must have stronger weapons.'

Suddenly, Khan felt small. He was strong, incredibly strong for his level, but the missile belonged to a superior realm. That wasn't something people could oppose. Even fifth-level warriors would die against that weapon.

'Could evolved beings survive this?' Khan wondered before rejecting that idea. He didn't know how strong evolved beings were, but nothing in his experience came close to the missile's power.

Khan had already reached similar conclusions, but seeing the missile in action forced his mind to accept them. Still, the situation didn't allow him to ponder on those matters. After all, he had a task to accomplish.

The ship dived at full speed through Lauter's sky while the scanners created a holographic picture of its surroundings. The area was clear, but things were bound to change soon.

The sea was the only source of prey, so the Radola never flew too high. That was an instinctive behavior, and their bodies had also evolved in that direction, so the ship could get close to the targeted island without entering danger zones.

"Adjusting calculated destination," The ship voiced at some point. "Reaching appointed destination."

The autopilot pulled the brakes as hard as possible, creating a violent stop that made the ship interrupt the dive and gain a horizontal position. That was also meant to save seconds, but the team felt the consequences of that bumpy ride.

"Seth!" Khan shouted while his companions had yet to recover.

"Targeting program initiated, sir!" Seth coughed while adjusting his safety belt. "Starting the clock."

"You know your orders," Khan announced while unfastening his belt and approaching the side doors. "Tyler, keep the ship steady at all costs. Leona, Manuel, fire only when necessary, and don't miss. Seth, update me at the agreed checkpoints."

"Yes, sir!" Tyler, Manuel, Leona, and Seth shouted simultaneously.

Khan opened the ship's doors, and a soft wind blew in his face. Due to the missile's effects, the air was cold and full of synthetic mana. However, he could catch wisps of natural mana among that mess, and his senses rejoiced.

"Keep the channel clear of useless talks," Khan stated. "Lieutenant, the deck is yours."

"Good luck, Captain," Lieutenant Clayman stated, and his loud voice resounded in the ship as soon as Khan jumped into the sky. "Silence!"

Lieutenant Clayman knew Khan's plan. Instead, the rest of the team had only gotten hints and vague clues, so the Lieutenant shouted before Khan's seemingly reckless gesture could make everyone lose their cool.

The shout worked, but only for Tyler. Manuel, Leona, and Seth showed no shock when Khan jumped. There was some surprise in their eyes, but that didn't come from the unexpected event. They simply couldn't contain that reaction when they saw Khan actually pursuing that path.

"The rumors are true," Leona ended up commenting without diverting her gaze from the cannon's scanner. "He can fly."

"He is only freefalling for now," Manuel pointed out while also studying his cannon's scanner.

"It shouldn't be a spell," Seth joined the conversation. "It probably is an alien technique or an evolution of his martial art."

"Wasn't he competent already?" Manuel asked.

"He must have reached advanced," Seth suggested. "Might, at least. I wish Nippe 2's factory revealed more."

"The nobles were involved," Leona sighed. "We were lucky to get rumors at all."

"But, isn't the Captain only nineteen?" Tyler stammered in disbelief. "How can he be advanced already?"

"Can you really be surprised anymore?" Manuel snorted. "Some say he even fucked Princess Edna."

"I won't allow such dangerous rumors in Captain Khan's absence," Lieutenant Clayman scolded.

"Come on, Lieutenant," Manuel complained. "You must also be curious."

"We have an official report for Nippe 2's events," Lieutenant Clayman remained stern.

"It's obviously fake," Seth declared before tapping on the communication device inside his right ear. "Landing area targeted, sir."

"Launch the turrets!" Lieutenant Clayman ordered.

"Launching turrets," Seth echoed, pressing on one of the menus and muting his communication device to resume the previous topic. "For Captain Khan to have a chance to save Princess Edna, her guards must have been incapacitated, and kidnappers would obviously opt for the gorge."

"Maybe he learnt to fly there," Leona guessed.

"And got a sweet reward out of it," Manuel snickered. "A commoner fucking a noble. That's a man I want to follow."

"That's just a groundless rumor," Seth explained. "The evidence about Miss Solodrey and him is more accurate."

"Hey, Miss Solodrey isn't hard on the eyes either," Manuel laughed.

"Gross," Leona scoffed.

"Enough!" Lieutenant Clayman shouted.

"Lieutenant, the sky is still clear," Leona stated, "And I know you are aware of the rumors."

"I bet he also knows what they call him," Manuel added.

Lieutenant Clayman had a stern disposition, but that part of the mission gave the team a chance to talk, which could help disperse their tension. The gunners had nothing to do as long as the scanners didn't reveal any Radola.

"The monster of Nippe 2," Lieutenant Clayman ended up whispering, and his words intensified the team's attention on the screens. Everyone wanted to see what Khan was capable of.

Khan let his body fall through the sky while his team gossiped about him. He was upside down, with his eyes fixed on the distant island below, but his senses were everywhere.

The ship could get quite low due to the Radola's innate behavior, but the distance to cross remained long. Khan would burn himself to death if he didn't affect his momentum, but a plan to delay that moment already existed in his mind.

Khan let his body experience the fall. He had never been at such heights without a ship or Snow, but no fear existed inside him. The synthetic mana released by the missile enveloped him and provided all the reassurance he needed.

The wind blew on Khan's face, slowly getting warmer due to his increasing falling speed. Ripples spread through the symphony as his figure and distant creatures affected it. He was one with the sky, and thinking about the incoming battle granted him peace.

Khan couldn't even try to hide it. He loved flying, especially without a ship. There was something priceless about experiencing the wind's friction and the symphony. He could lose himself in the environment and be free, freer than any space station or city could ever allow.

The warmth on Khan's face eventually turned into a scorching sensation that forced him to close his eyes. Yet, that didn't affect his senses. He could still see everything, especially the limits of his body.

'I can still go on,' Khan thought as a deafening whooshing noise started filling his ears.

Khan let the situation continue until Seth's report resounded through the device in his right ear. His eyes opened at that point, and tapping the air twice dispersed his momentum and put him in a horizontal position.

'Ten minutes,' Khan thought when he saw the ship releasing the four pillars. Small engines also activated on their top, generating an acceleration that pushed them toward their intended destinations.

Khan inspected the turrets for a few seconds before turning upside down again and slamming his feet in the air. The gesture made his figure accelerate, pushing him closer to the still-distant island, but he planned to get far closer before the first enemies arrived.

The plan was relatively simple. Khan was nowhere as big as the turrets, but being closer to the surface would attract the Radola's attention. He only had to make sure that they noticed him first.

Khan activated one of the pilot's techniques to create a warm barrier around him. That defensive spell couldn't protect him from actual attacks but did wonders for the friction, allowing him to accelerate even more.

"One minute!" Seth shouted in Khan's ear.

Khan had to slow down every few seconds, but a new acceleration unfolded whenever he dispersed his momentum. He also activated the barrier only when necessary, optimizing his overall speed.

"Two minutes!" Seth shouted through the device.

'They are coming,' Khan sensed before the ship's scanners could give any warning. The area was still clear, but ripples were running through the symphony, hinting at something Khan knew far too well.

Khan kicked to his left, pushing himself toward the source of the ripples. His senses couldn't actually reach those areas, but he could get a general direction out of them, and that was enough.

"Three minutes!" Seth shouted.

Khan kept accelerating until vague figures appeared in the distance. The number of ripples also increased. There was probably an entire pack ahead, but only a few specimens would enter the cleared area in the ten-minutes-window.

"Boss, two Radola entered the perimeter," Manuel warned through the device, and Khan didn't say anything since he was flying toward them.

Eventually, two big figures became completely clear in Khan's vision. He finally saw the Radola in all their might, and those creatures also noticed him. The Tainted animals fell prey to their aggression, changing their course to dive toward the foreign presence, which sealed their fates.

Khan basically ran in the air, adjusting his steps' strength to keep his high speed bearable without the barrier. Meanwhile, the Radola grew closer, and the mana inside them affected the light in the surroundings to hide their figures.

The ship had scanners capable of seeing through that cloaking technique, and Lucian had even provided special goggles to circumvent the issue. However, Khan didn't need any of that. His eyes were one with the symphony, granting him a vision that even some equipment would envy.

'Hunters,' Khan recognized from the cloaking technique while drawing his knife.

"Four minutes!" Seth warned, but Khan put those words in the back of his mind since the clash was only a few seconds away.

The Radola's invisible properties could be scary for many, and even Khan didn't see every detail. Still, his senses allowed him to distinguish their body parts, and the mana inside them created a picture that matched his preparations.

The missile had scared many Radola away, so the leaders of the nearby packs wouldn't face eventual invaders directly. They would send underlings and scouts, which had a limited amount of strength.

In Khan's case, he was against two specimens that barely touched the realm of first-level warriors. They were big, fast, and hard to see, but all of that looked like child play in Khan's eyes.

When the first figure got close enough, Khan kicked the air to dive under it. His movements were too fast for such a weak Radola, and a long red mark appeared in the seemingly clear sky when he slashed his knife upward.

The red mark didn't remain still. A cascade of blood fell out of it, and the cloaking technique broke, revealing a Radola doing its best to fly straight even if its belly was already open.

Khan didn't waste a single second on an opponent he had already defeated. He kicked the air again, surging through the sky to reach the second invisible creature. The Radola couldn't see him from its position and lost its neck before it could realize what had happened.

The second Radola's cloaking technique deactivated, revealing its headless corpse. Its wings were still unfolded, so it kept flying, but Khan couldn't consider it a threat anymore.

"Sir, you have one incoming North," Leona warned, but Khan was already on his way back to the turrets, and those ripples soon entered his senses.

"Boss, two more from East," Manuel didn't take long to give a second warning. "There's one more South too."

"Five minutes!" Seth shouted a few seconds later.

Khan compiled that information and applied it to the symphony. In theory, the Radola that would approach the cleared area during the turrets' descent wouldn't be dangerous. Yet, they could attack from any direction, and Khan alone wasn't enough as bait.

The first offensive had given Khan a chance to seize the initiative, but that window had closed now. He wouldn't have the time to return to the turrets if he tried to intercept every incoming enemy. He could only stick to them and deal with any threat.

Chapter 474 Racial Trait

Khan was faster than the weaker specimens converging on the turrets. Their flying speed wasn't even in the same realm, so he reached an area quite below the pillars before any Radola could get close.

The symphony and the team on the ship kept sending updates. The turrets had fallen for six minutes now, but more Tainted animals had entered the cleared area. The incoming Radola had become six, and only a few had chosen Khan as their target.

'The turrets are just too big,' Khan cursed as his eyes darted left and right while he let his body fall.

The turrets were faster than Khan due to the engines, so they would eventually catch up with him. Yet, that event would mark their entrance into the battlefield, putting them in danger. If possible, Khan wanted to keep them away and safe until their landing became imminent.

Still, the Radola didn't have Khan's interests in mind. They were aggressive beasts that attacked the first foreign figure they noticed. Khan could only try to attract their attention by playing on their instincts.

Half a minute had to pass before the incoming Radola got close enough to Khan's ideal reach. He couldn't fly too far away from the turrets, but that distance granted him some room.

The Radola's arrangement was the only issue. Three were East, two were North, and one South. Moreover, only two from the East and one from the North were diving toward Khan. The others were targeting the turrets and would reach them if Khan ignored them.

Khan tried to find an ideal attack plan, but the situation didn't look good. Flying toward the turrets would give him a better chance to defend those valuable goods, but it would also lock him in that position for the rest of the mission.

A few more seconds passed while Khan made up his mind. That delay allowed the Radola to get closer to their targets, but that worked in Khan's favor. He joined his palms while softly tapping the air to slow his descent, and a purple-red spear soon shone in that blue environment.

The appearance of the chaos spear made the Radola diving toward Khan angrier but didn't affect the others. So, Khan launched his spell, making sure that it would explode exactly where he desired.

The turrets were state-of-the-art equipment, obviously featuring chaos-resistant materials. They were also sturdy enough to survive many attacks from weak creatures, but design flaws existed.

The engines on the turrets' tops were weak spots that ordinary Tainted animals could affect. Their arrangement for the landing area also required troublesome precision, making attacks that could put them off route quite dangerous.

However, Khan was still decently distant from the turrets, and they were showing their bases to him, so he launched the spear toward their center. The spell exploded before reaching them, creating a bright pillar that the Radola couldn't ignore.

The explosion didn't affect the turrets. When they reached the purple-red light, Khan's mana had already started to disperse. They crossed that energy without altering their course or suffering any damage, but the Radola couldn't ignore the event.

The Radola spread their wings to halt their reckless descent when the chaos element expanded in their view. Then, when the explosion dispersed, they found another source of purple-red light. Khan was releasing his mana freely, and all the Tainted animals in the area decided to target him.

'Good,' Khan thought when he saw the other three Radola changing their course to dive toward him. 'Now, hurry.'

The three Radola that had targeted Khan from the very beginning converged toward his position only to lose track of his figure. They couldn't follow his movements, and one of them lost its head while they were still confused.

Khan flew toward the Radola on his right and severed its neck with a swift slash. It was easy to deliver those deadly blows when the Tainted animals had no idea about his position, which wasn't hard to achieve against weak opponents.

A series of screams filled the area when the two headless Radola bumped into each other and started freefalling. Purple-red light also shone on their previous spot, revealing Khan's position to the remaining Tainted animals. He made sure to have all the eyes on himself before sprinting toward the nearest opponent.

The last Radola that had targeted Khan from the beginning was a hunter, but no cloaking technique covered it. The Tainted animal didn't feel the need to hide after Khan disappeared, so everyone could see a purple-red flash running through its open beak and reaching its head.

Khan landed on the Radola's back while the severed half of its head slid off. The unfolded wings kept the beast afloat, and Khan's weight didn't affect its flight. He could stand on that feathered bed and glance at the other enemies above him without using a tinge of mana.

"Seven minutes!" Seth shouted, forcing Khan to peek past the Radola's wings. The island was getting closer, and the same went for the new Tainted animals that had entered the perimeter.

The peek only lasted a few seconds. Khan jumped without looking above him, and his gesture ruined the corpse's balance, making it fall. Meanwhile, three Radola converged toward his back, but their target disappeared before they could get a chance to reach him.

The team on the ship could see the entirety of the battle due to the powerful scanners, and those images left everyone stunned. Even Lieutenant Clayman didn't dare to blink in front of such a spectacular performance.

"Is he a human or a bird?" Manuel couldn't help but gasp.

"Gunners, don't get distracted!" Lieutenant Clayman scolded.

"Are we even needed?" Manuel wondered without moving his eyes from the cannon's scanners.

"Manuel, the Captain landed on the turrets," Leona commented.

"I know, I know," Manuel cursed while pressing on the device in his right ear. "Boss, you have inbounds from every direction. The scanners show eight of them."

"First shot on me," Leona reminded.

"I won't use this thing, will I?" Manuel sighed.

"Eight minutes!" Seth shouted, bringing that conversation to an end.

Khan couldn't stay away from the turrets anymore after dealing with the last Radola. Even sprinting toward the island below wouldn't put any distance from that equipment. The pillars were falling faster than him, and the air under them had also turned red, highlighting their incredible speed.

After killing the last three Radola, Khan let himself freefall until the turrets caught up with him. Quick and precise movements followed, placing Khan on a pillar's side with his body almost laid on that metal surface. He could keep up only if he used the equipment as footholds, but that would become troublesome soon.

Warnings reached Khan's ear as his companions updated him on the situation. The turrets only needed two minutes to land, but more enemies had appeared, and he had already been aware of them for quite some time.

Eight Radola approached the turrets from every direction, and Khan couldn't hope to intercept all of them. Some were already below him, which forced him to wait for the right opportunity to strike.

A Radola misjudged the turrets' speed and missed its opportunity to attack, but another flew directly toward one of them, seemingly aiming to pierce it with its beak.

Khan was on the opposite turret, but that wasn't an issue. He activated the barrier and forced his figure to stand horizontally to use the metal surface as a foothold. A single jump was enough to cross the distance between the other pillar, and a few quick steps followed to put him on the other side.

The Radola was almost about to hit the turret when a violent kick landed on its beak, shattering it in the process. The impact even pushed the Tainted animal away, forcing it to adjust its balance. The beast was still alive, but that delay put the pillars out of its reach.

Khan's palm slid on the metal surface for a few meters before he managed to restore his balance. Multiple momentums were at work there, and kicking wasn't ideal due to the rebounding force that would hit him. Yet, the Radola was about to crash on the turret, so he had to push it away.

Two more Radola rose to reach the turret to Khan's right, and he moved accordingly. He got closer to the pillar's base before jumping to end up in a similar position and summon a chaos spear.

Khan threw the spell at the incoming Radola, but the latter dodged the attack. Still, the explosion that followed engulfed one of them and pushed the other off course. The Tainted animal missed the turret by less than a meter but remained in Khan's range.

A torrent of blood fell on Khan. He had only needed to stretch his arm to make his glowing knife pierce the Radola's belly. The Tainted animal had continued to fly upward, but its insides didn't follow it.

That small victory didn't give Khan any chance to rest. The high speed also hindered his vision, but he forced himself to glance at the turrets before performing another jump.

The metal surface welcomed Khan in time to make him perform a straight kick. His foot crushed the beak of a Radola in a collision course to the turret, and the head behind it suffered a similar fate. However, the rest of its body bumped into the turret, which held strong due to the momentum Khan had dispersed.

Khan had to jump again in the next second since another Radola was in a collision course with a turret. The Tainted animal was aiming directly for the pillar's base, which forced Khan to run downward and cross the scorching area to intercept it.

Burns appeared on Khan's body, but he ignored them while spinning mid-air. He eventually stretched his leg, and his heel fell on the incoming Radola, crushing its head in the impact. The attack also pushed it away, making it cross the empty area among the turrets.

The pillar's scorching base ended on Khan's back right after the attack, but tapping on the air allowed him to push himself away and return to a safe surface.

The last two Radola were targeting different turrets, and Khan knew that his normal speed wouldn't be enough to deal with them. A whisper left his mouth, and mana gathered around his legs to grant him an acceleration that surpassed his limits.

Khan almost teleported near another turret, and his knee landed on a Radola's wing. The violent impact pushed the bird away, but Khan managed to kick its back with his free leg to fling himself onto the metal surface. He even prepared another sprint empowered with Maban's technique, but an azure flash unfolded before he could move.

A bullet had crashed on the last Radola before it could touch the tower. Leona had decided to fire since Khan seemed unable to reach the Tainted animal. She was wrong, but Khan was to blame since he didn't share detailed explanations about his strength.

"Nine minutes!" Seth shouted in Khan's ear.

Khan raised his hand to show his thumb while glancing at the island below. A violent landing was about to unfold, but he had to hold the fort a bit longer.

More Radola had entered the perimeter. There were at least forty of them, but only a handful had a chance to reach the turrets before their landing, and Khan made sure to deal with them.

The gunners shot two more bullets during those seconds but stopped firing once twenty seconds remained before the landing. No Radola could reach the turrets in that window, and Khan would be more than enough afterward.

Khan put the entirety of his strength into an upward jump once the time was right. He dispersed most of the turrets' momentum while they crossed the last meters that divided them from the surface. Many Radola were above him, diving after the pillars, but a loud noise arrived before they could meet.

Smoke and crumbling noises filled the area when the turrets touched the ground. The violence unleashed during the landing seemed able to make the very air tremble, and the event forced the Radola's dive to a stop.

A few weak specimens lost control of their bodies during the chaos, and the smoke that enveloped them worsened their situation. Instead, the others flew upward to escape the grey cloud and wait for everything to calm down.

Khan had to perform a few more jumps in the air to disperse the entirety of the turrets' momentum, but the grey cloud eventually turned into his perfect hunting ground. He could see perfectly in that environment, so he cleared it as soon as he regained complete control of his movements.

The winds were stronger on the surface, so the grey cloud didn't last long. The four turrets eventually appeared in all their magnificence, marking the corners of a perfect square, with Khan performing short jumps above them.

"One and a half minutes for the turrets to go online," Seth updated while Khan stared at his imminent opponents.

The absence of speed-related problems would make things easier for Khan, but the Radola also had advantages. More than ten minutes had passed since the missile. Many Tainted animals had entered the cleared area, and a considerable number of them could reach the turrets before their activation.

Khan was mentally ready to fight an entire swarm. He was perfect for the job, but Lauter's fauna surprised him. Many screams filled the sky, but a louder screech pierced them and enforced an eerie silence.

On the ship, the team was at a loss for words. Khan's performance had surpassed their wildest expectations. Even the most unbelievable rumors about him didn't do him justice. Yet, the scanners eventually warned them about something dangerous.

"Boss, you have something big coming your way," Manuel warned before leaving the rest of the details to his superior.

"Sir, the scanners put this Radola near fourth-level warriors," Lieutenant Clayman said through the device in his ear. "Correction, it's a match for fourth-level warriors."

"Beginning descent-!" Tyler shouted since he thought Khan needed air support.

"Remove manual control!" Lieutenant Clayman declared before Tyler could perform any maneuver.

The ship's robotic voice informed Lieutenant Clayman that his requests had been approved, and the autopilot took over. The vehicle didn't move and stuck to the parameters set by Khan in the past few days.

"Captain, do you need air support?" Lieutenant Clayman questioned once everything on the ship was in order.

Khan could have a better view of the scene from his position. The symphony had already warned him about that powerful presence, so seeing it cross the Radola gathered above him didn't bring any surprise. Instead, the weaker specimens' behavior managed to stir Khan's interest.

There were mostly weak Radola above Khan. They were part of the initial scouts sent after the missile, and their strongest specimen barely came close to second-level warriors.

Still, all those creatures didn't dare to move when a Radola far stronger than them gave the order. They only flapped their wings and let that superior specimen fly past them.

'They don't belong to the same pack,' Khan thought. 'Is it a racial trait? Does it want to be the only one hunting me?'

Khan couldn't find explanations for that odd behavior. Even Professor Nickton's notes didn't describe anything similar. However, Khan felt intrigued by that apparent challenge. If the powerful Radola wanted a one versus one, Khan would at least think about it.

'I know,' Khan thought when Lieutenant Clayman's evaluation echoed in his ear. 'It contains as much mana as a fourth-level warrior, but is it as strong as one?'

"Captain, do you need air support?" Lieutenant Clayman's question eventually reached Khan, and his mana clarified his inner desires. Khan felt a need to test himself against that powerful opponent.

"Negative," Khan stated while tapping the air to take a step toward his new opponent. "Stay where you are and stop updating me. I want to focus."

Chapter 475 Cocktail

The stronger Radola crossed the weaker specimens before flapping its wings to stop its advance. It lifted its long neck and pointed its big beak at the sky to launch another loud screech, and the Tainted animals behind it echoed it.

Khan was genuinely bewildered. That behavior went against everything he knew about the Radola. According to the reports, they hunted in packs, and their aggression was impossible to keep in check. Yet, the very opposite was happening.

The weaker specimens' cries and the main Radola's stance gave clues that quickly built a hypothesis inside Khan's mind. Those Tainted animals hunted in packs, but that wasn't a hunt. It was a formal challenge from one king of the sky to another.

Everything Khan knew about the Radola and the information captured in those seconds fused to give him an idea of his opponent's strength. Those creatures had frail bodies, and their packs were their biggest advantage. Still, the monster looked anything but weak when Khan inspected it.

The Radola was seven meters long, with a wide body and wider wings. Its beak was bigger than Khan's torso, and its feathers shone bright red in the middle of that blue sky.

The mana inside the Radola didn't only grant Khan an understanding of its level. It also allowed him to notice the differences with the other specimens. He couldn't be sure when all he had were reports and holograms, but now he knew. His opponent was a fighter.

Khan kept his gaze straight and tapped the air to remain in his position, but his senses spread elsewhere. The island was big, but the turrets had landed near its shores. The sea was close enough for the Radola to use its spells.

In theory, Khan didn't have to face the Radola. Time was still flowing, bringing the activation of the turrets closer. His opponent also belonged to the slower family. Khan could probably run circles around it until the countdown reached zero.

However, more inconsistencies became clear as Khan studied the situation. It didn't make sense for such a strong specimen to have joined the scouts so soon. The Radola must have decided to fly toward the turrets for a specific reason, and Khan only found himself as an explanation.

'I won't get another chance like this anytime soon,' Khan thought as his gaze tried to wander toward the ship in the distance. He knew what was waiting for him after the mission. He didn't hate it, but it couldn't satisfy him completely.

Khan closed his eyes, and his senses rejoiced. The natural mana had finally replaced the missile's synthetic energy, his knife felt weightless, and the sky was his playground. He had nothing to fear.

The Radola eventually screeched, flapping its wings to fling itself toward Khan. He opened his eyes at the same time, and a tinge of mana left his body while he sprinted ahead.

Khan's face burned when he touched levels of speed that his body couldn't endure properly. Maban's technique pushed him beyond his limits and made him reach the incoming Radola instantly. A frontal clash seemed inevitable, but that idea had never crossed his mind.

Milia 222's events had granted Khan experience hard to find elsewhere. He had already faced someone stronger than him, so he knew the dangers of the battle. The Radola probably didn't have the Orlats' superior spells, but its reflexes were bound to be powerful, so Khan couldn't challenge it head-on.

Khan stomped a foot in the air before he could crash on the Radola, and the mana in the environment enhanced his move. The monster didn't expect that sudden acceleration but reacted in time and tried to throw its beak after him. However, its neck couldn't keep up with Khan's speed.

Khan crossed the Radola, reaching its left side before performing a third acceleration. Another stomp unfolded, making Khan spin in the air and deliver a descending kick on the base of the monster's wing.

Surprisingly enough, the Radola felt the attack. That was Khan's most powerful kick, executed after relying on Maban's technique three times in a row, and the monster bent under it.

Khan's knife lit up at that sight. He had attacked the first pairs of wings in an attempt to limit the Radola's movements, but another reason existed. Aiming directly for the monster's neck would have been dangerous due to its reflexes and flexibility. Instead, if Khan forced the Radola to lose the initiative, he could seize the upper hand.

The Radola's neck was long enough to reach the first pairs of wings. Khan was still in its beak's range, so it made sense to expect that type of attack. He also had his knife ready for the event, but the Radola resorted to a different tactic.

An immense and seemingly unstoppable force fell on Khan's leg. The Radola was lifting its wing to fling him away, and the sheer physical strength carried by the move made him unable to counterattack.

Khan found himself rolling away before he could even realize what had happened. The Radola had unleashed enough strength to send him flying and even flapped its wings to chase after him. However, one of them failed to work correctly.

A gentle tap on the air dispersed the momentum and made Khan stop. He was upside down, but that stance didn't hinder his inspection. The Radola had tried to reach him during that moment of weakness, but the damage suffered by the wing turned a dangerous acceleration into something he could notice before it was too late.

Khan hurriedly kicked the air to fling himself downward, and the Radola crossed his previous spot in the next second. An angry screech followed that miss, but the Radola kept track of Khan's movements and folded its wings to follow after him.

No thoughts ran through Khan's mind, but a realization arrived anyway. His kicks could hurt the Radola but left him too exposed. He couldn't give the monster a chance to make him lose his balance again, and a new plan formed.

The island's surface grew dangerously close during the descent, but Khan didn't change course. He slightly held back to bait the Radola into accelerating, and his plan worked.

Two bodies fell at high speed toward the rocky surface while the distance between them shortened. The Radola almost caught up with Khan, but he threw a powerful kick to his right to change his direction at the last second. The Radola tried to do the same by unfolding its wings, but the damage suffered by one of them turned that attempt into a violent landing.

The Radola crashed on the rocks, and Khan pushed himself upward before joining his palms and turning toward his opponent. A chaos spear took form when he stopped mid-air, and he instantly threw it toward the monster.

Being accurate while flying was hard, but the chaos spear didn't need to be too precise. The spell's explosion engulfed the landing area, filling everything with a blinding purple-red light. The symphony shook in the aftermath of the attack, but Khan remained still and waited for his senses to capture anything.

A huge and fuming figure came out of the bright pillar before it could lose power, and a screech followed. The Radola had survived Khan's best attack but had suffered injuries.

That damage didn't stop the Radola from unleashing a fearsome speed, which Khan welcomed with open arms. His knife lit up as he waited for the perfect opportunity to move, but his mind grew cold when he noticed a familiar scene.

The Radola wasn't as fast as before, but more was at work during that flight. Mana left its figure and stretched toward the nearby shore in an attempt to create a connection with the water. The sea wasn't too close, but the Radola's energy found and reached it easily.

Khan was already aware of that ability. The Radola belonging to the fighters' family could easily contact the sea, but seeing their methods with his own eyes reminded him of the Niqols. There were heavy differences, but Khan couldn't control how his mind worked.

The Radola soon reached Khan, making him jump to his right again while swinging his knife. He dodged the attack, and the monster did the same by retracting its wings and escaping his reach. The two crossed each other without inflicting any injury.

Khan only needed a few steps to turn and prepare for the next attack, but the Radola continued to fly straight. Burned feathers also left its body and removed the smoke hiding its figure. Khan became able to see exposed flesh as well as bloodied wounds.

The Radola shortened the distance from the sea, reinforcing the mana channel connecting the two. Its energy also spread through the water, giving it control of that liquid, which began to freeze.

Khan was too distant to see all of that, but his senses generated that image in his mind. He knew what was happening because Liiza did something similar.

In that situation, a smart soldier would put as much distance from the shore as possible. After all, fighting a stronger opponent in its element was simply mental. Khan had no reason to chase after the Radola, but his body moved on its own.

Khan's emotions went wild while his mind remained cold. The Radola had Liiza's element, similar methods, and even resembled the monster that cut her arm. That was a perfect cocktail to stir Khan's anger, and he fell prey to it almost willingly.

Maban's technique activated almost on its own. The mana in the environment reacted to Khan's intentions and helped his sprint to push him beyond his natural limits.

Khan ran toward the shore, disregarding that more Tainted animals had gathered above him. Those specimens respected the one versus one battle, and he did the same. His focus never moved from the powerful Radola.

The wounded Radola turned to face Khan once it reached the shore. Its wings flapped weakly to keep it in position, but its screech continued to retain immense power, and figures soon surged from the water below.

Three icy pillars grew from the shallow waters and left the shore to fly toward Khan. Those structures weren't big, but they shattered mid-air to turn into a rain of sharp shards.

Khan had continued to fly toward the Radola in the meantime, so the rain of shards unfolded right before him. His speed made dodging the entirety of the attack troublesome but not impossible. Yet, the symphony warned him about a second spell brewing the sea, and that wasn't the end of it.

The frozen rain was fast. Each shard didn't contain much mana, but the entire attack was fearsome enough to put the turrets behind Khan in danger. He didn't know if the spell could reach them, but facing that risk was pointless, especially since his feelings had other plans.

Khan opened his mouth, and his wild feelings took the form of a clicking growl that echoed in the area. A seemingly random release of mana accompanied the monstrous cry, enveloping Khan into a purple-red mass that expanded from his figure.

Many shards survived the impact with the wild mana but crumbled before they could reach Khan. That type of attack was perfect for his new spell, and its performance didn't disappoint.

Khan could continue to sprint freely and without worrying about the turrets. However, the Radola's second spell had taken form by then, and a giant pillar left the shore to fly toward Khan.

The Radola didn't stay still anymore either. It flew after the pillar, which was only a few seconds from crashing on Khan. The amount of mana it carried almost forced him to dodge, but the monster behind it was a problem he couldn't ignore.

Destroying the pillar was a possibility. The Radola's spell wasn't too strong when performed without a pack. Khan felt sure that his knife could pierce it. Yet, that would leave him defenseless, creating an opportunity for the monster.

Dodging also featured similar issues. The Radola could follow Khan's movements, so it would most likely intercept him on his escape route.

Instead, retreating could be a wise choice since it would give Khan the time to deal with the Radola, but he didn't opt for that path. When the pillar was about to reach his chest, he dodged to the right and unleashed the spherical version of the Wave spell.

The expanding purple-red sphere pushed the pillar away and opened cracks in its structure, but the Radola didn't care. It dived straight into the spell and pointed its big beak at Khan.

The glowing knife stabbed the beak before it could reach its target. However, Khan couldn't complete the slash, which left his weapon stuck inside that tough body part.

Time slowed down in Khan's vision. He saw his spell eroding the Radola's already damaged tissues, but the monster's angry eyes told him nothing would stop that assault. The hand on the knife's handle even gave him an idea of how strong that impact would be if he let it happen, and he wasn't sure his rib cage would survive that.

During that desperate situation, Khan held strong on the knife and kicked the air with both feet to match the Radola's momentum. He began to fly backward, using the monster's tough body part to remain outside of its reach.

The Radola didn't initially understand what was happening. It continued to fly forward, but Khan didn't grow any closer. He remained right in front of it without ever entering its range.

Khan acted before the Radola could come up with another plan. He used the knife as a handhold and slammed his knees on the beak's lower part. The monster didn't like that and began to struggle, but Khan summoned his strength to remain attached to its head and keep hammering it.

Cracks eventually opened on the beak, and a last attack with both knees shattered it. Khan had planned to destroy only its lower part, but his legs broke the upper side too due to the damage already inflicted by the knife.

The knife became free and took away Khan's handhold, allowing the monster to get closer. Khan had just completed an attack and didn't have the time to perform a sprint, so he summoned the [Blood Shield] and waited for the inevitable impact.

The Radola had slowed down during its struggles and had even tilted its head. What remained of its beak had gained many sharp edges after shattering, but only its smooth side crashed on the clotted blood vessels on Khan's torso.

The impact made Khan's internal organs shake. He felt the urge to puke as his body flew toward the ground. His senses also became unreliable, but he managed to hear a beeping noise accompanied by a series of clanging sounds.

Khan crashed on the rocky surface while more noises filled his ears. Hell seemed to have broken loose around him, and he forced himself to straighten his back to understand what was happening.

A huge figure fell in front of Khan as soon as he managed to sit, and blood splashed on his face. His senses stabilized while he wiped his eyes, and the scene became clear once his vision returned. Bullets were flying everywhere, and the many Radola in the area were powerless against them.

Khan looked past his shoulders to inspect the scene. The four metal pillars had opened, revealing sixteen rotating cannons that automatically targeted and fired at the enemies in the area. Soon, no Radola would dare to approach the island.

A sigh escaped Khan before a cough forced him to cover his mouth. Blood fell on his palm due to his internal injuries, but the corpse in front of him claimed his attention anyway.

The strong Radola had been the first to die under the cannons' assault. Bullets had pierced its head, wings, and torso, killing it on the spot. The turrets had taken care of something so strong in the short seconds that Khan had needed to recover, showing once again how strong the Global Army's weapons were.

The barrage of bullets continued for entire minutes, and Khan watched everything unfold. He probably had to meditate and see a doctor, but the scene was too captivating for him. That abundance of screams, blood, and death was his home, at least one of them.

The Radola's aggressive behavior made many dive toward the turrets, but none survived. Corpses filled the rocky surface, and large puddles of blood expanded, creating something resembling small rivers.

'[Be it planting countless flowers],' Khan repeated Jenna's words, '[Or creating bloody rivers].'

Khan reached for the dead Radola before him and patted its head. Their battle had been good, and the monster had even shown him how part of his feelings would never change.

The insanity that Khan labeled as "dark sides" would never leave his character. It could only grow deeper, especially after inheriting the Nak's fear. His desperation would always make him extreme in ways humans couldn't understand.

Still, that wasn't the end of the matter. The anger experienced during the battle confirmed Khan's remaining affection for Liiza. Loving another woman didn't make him forget her, which he found strangely reassuring.

'I guess I can be happy without cutting you away from my life,' Khan smiled before his intense feelings made him curse in his mind. 'I can't wait to see Monica.'

That introspection didn't last long since familiar tremors spread through the symphony and made Khan lift his gaze. The cannons had stopped firing by then. The area was clear, so a square outpost with four engines had left the leviathan class to reach the island.

'He didn't waste time,' Khan snickered and closed his eyes to perform the check-up technique. There didn't seem to be any internal bleeding, but he meditated anyway.

The outpost took a few minutes to reach the island, and its landing raised a cloud of smoke that Lauter's winds needed a while to disperse. An earthquake also spread, but nothing could disturb Khan's meditation.

When everything calmed down, Khan opened his eyes to look at the new structure. The outpost was nothing more than a short metal building with a square base that had fused perfectly with the turrets. The latter stood at its corners and would protect it throughout the following operations.

The outpost's door opened, and the presence that joined the symphony made Khan stand up to approach it. Lucian left the structure, and a broad smile bloomed when he noticed Khan walking toward him.

"Captain, I must say," Lucian announced. "You surpassed yourself."

"Did we stay within the budget?" Khan questioned.

"You saved me more money than you think," Lucian stated. "Now, come inside. I brought doctors for you."

Khan nodded and began to follow Lucian, but two soldiers left the outpost before they could enter. The two men were third-level warriors who reeked of battle experience, and Lucian didn't hesitate to address them.

"Start cleaning the area," Lucian ordered. "Gather the corpses and deploy the equipment."

"Yes, sir," The two soldiers responded and began to inspect the scene, but Khan didn't let that continue.

"On that matter," Khan called. "I'd like to take these corpses."

The statement brought some tension, forcing the two soldiers to focus on Khan. Even Lucian had to turn to inspect his face, and the scene surprised him a bit.

Khan's appearance was a mess. His military uniform had holes everywhere, and its upper part had almost turned into mere rags. Blood had also fallen all over him, and he didn't bother to wipe it.

Moreover, the wild feelings from before still ran through Khan's mind, which added a certain intensity to his presence. His words almost sounded like threats because of that and his bloodied face.

"Captain, this area belongs to the Hencus family now," Lucian pointed out.

"So, will you stop me if I take them?" Khan wondered in a tone that gained mocking features when it reached Lucian. The statement definitely wasn't ideal in a political environment, but Khan felt especially uncaring at the moment.

The two soldiers stepped forward to reach Lucian's sides. Their stance told Khan they were ready to fight, potentially putting three third-level warriors against him. Yet, no fear appeared inside Khan. Actually, those guards' mana showed the hesitation they felt in front of such a fearsome opponent.

"You have good guards," Khan admitted before sighing and opting for a calmer approach. "Look, just see it as a favor if you really need to."

Lucian's eyes lit up at those words. He read between the lines and understood that Khan was ready to join the political game with him. He only wanted those Tainted animals in exchange.

"In that case, how could I refuse?" Lucian chuckled before boasting his deep knowledge. "Make sure to convey my regards to Professor Nickton when you deliver them."

"Since you are already here," Khan ignored the boast while a shameless smile appeared on his face. "Can you pack and deliver them for me? The leviathan class should have all the equipment ready."

"No problem at all, Captain," Lucian promptly replied, showing no hesitation.

"Right," Khan pretended to recall something and turned to point at the stronger Radola. "Don't send that specimen to Professor Nickton. Leave it in a private area for me."

Chapter 476 Leak

"Your ribs took a good hit," The doctor said while scanners rotated around the bed to inspect Khan, "But there is no internal bleeding. Though, you have many burns. You should get an ointment for them."

"I'm used to burns by now," Khan reassured as his eyes darted left and right. The outpost's insides were simple but functional, featuring a single open space split into different areas. A corner had the medical bay, while the others had equipment, supplies, and other useful items.

"We do have something for them here, Captain," The doctor pressed on.

"Leave it," Khan shook his head. "The burns will heal soon enough."

"Then, I can only advise you to rest," The doctor exclaimed. "Sleep a lot, and don't forget to eat. I'd skip the lessons for a few days to stay in bed."

"I'll see about that," Khan chuckled, and a grunt followed when he stretched his legs to leave the bed. With the adrenaline gone, he felt how stiff his torso was, and bending it caused some pain.

The doctor could only nod and leave the bed, and another soldier reached for Khan. The latter had a clean tracksuit in her arms and kept her gaze lowered to avoid looking at Khan's messy state.

"Captain," The young woman called, "Mister Hencus apologizes for the outpost's state. The bathroom needs another hour to be operational."

"It's fine," Khan replied, seizing the tracksuit to change on the spot. He couldn't return to the Harbor with a tattered uniform full of blood and Radola's insides.

"We-!" The woman gasped and covered her eyes when Khan started undressing. "We can set up a changing area!"

Khan ignored the soldier and proceeded to get changed anyway. His burns stung a bit during the process, but the situation didn't look too bad. Nothing was broken for once.

The soldier had peeked at Khan through her fingers, so she noticed when he nodded at her and walked toward the exit. Another gasp escaped her mouth as she performed a military salute, but Khan waved his hand without turning and ended that interaction.

The rest of the personnel in the outpost lowered their heads or performed military salutes at Khan's passage. He left the outpost without encountering any resistance and found Lucian giving orders to a small team busy setting up metal tents.

One of the soldiers noticed Khan and warned Lucian, who turned to welcome his return outside. "Already on your feet, Captain? I was under the impression you needed rest."

"I'll rest in the Harbor," Khan stated. "I believe the leviathan class' teleport is still online."

"Of course," Lucian responded. "It will remain online for the next weeks due to all the resources and structures this outpost needs."

"I'll take my leave then," Khan revealed.

"You can rest here for a while," Lucian suggested. "There is no hurry. You can sleep, take a bath, and maybe exchange a few words with me afterward."

"I have homework to do," Khan laughed. "I also have reports and other bureaucratic stuff to handle. I'm sure you understand."

"Certainly," Lucian confirmed. "I guess we'll have our talk another time."

"Sure," Khan nodded. "As for-"

"Professor Nickton will get his Radola by midnight," Lucian interrupted, "And I've already requested special equipment for your specimen. I'll text you its location once it reaches the Harbor."

"Perfect," Khan stated. "Thank you, Lucian."

"This is the least I can do for a friend," Lucian replied with words full of hidden meanings. "I'll contact Boss Edcoll to get you a more comfortable ride."

"No need," Khan reassured while pointing at the ship far above the island. "I want to have a briefing anyway."

"I guess I'll see you in the Harbor then," Lucian smiled. "Once again, wonderful job, Captain Khan."

Khan granted Lucian a similar friendly smile before jumping upward. He returned to his playground, and the soldiers busy with the tents couldn't help but stare in awe as he flew higher and higher.

The flight highlighted the doctor's diagnosis. Khan's face burned when the wind blew on it, and the blood covering his skin only made things worse. The same went with his torso, which hurt whenever he performed wider moves, but his thoughts wandered elsewhere.

The fight with the Radola had revealed details that the training halls couldn't provide. It was painfully clear that Khan couldn't handle Maban's technique perfectly. His skin needed conditioning, even after the transformation.

Moreover, the Divine Reaper had finally shown its limits. The Radola's beak was the hardest part of its body, but Khan had been confident in his skills, especially with his new knife. Yet, reality had turned out to be very different.

As for everything else, Khan could consider himself pretty satisfied. His new defensive spell had performed well, and his overall battle prowess had been incredible. He was leagues above ordinary third-level warriors. He only needed to perfect a few details.

The ship with Lieutenant Clayman and the others had remained in its original position, and gossip had filled the wait. Still, silence fell as soon as the scanners noticed Khan, and the Lieutenant didn't hesitate to open the side doors afterward.

Khan took his time to reach the ship, and cheerful voices landed on his ears as soon as he stepped on its entrance. Praises flew from all his teammates, and even Lieutenant Clayman showed a rare smile.

"Alright, calm down," Khan ordered through a laugh. "I need to go back to the Harbor."

"You heard the Captain!" Lieutenant Clayman shouted. "Enable manual control."

The ship's robotic voice confirmed Lieutenant Clayman's order while he exchanged a meaningful glance with Khan. He only needed that to understand that the pilot had messed up.

"Bring us back to the ship, Tyler," Khan stated while closing the door behind him. "Lieutenant, I expect a full report by tomorrow."

"You'll receive it this afternoon, sir," Lieutenant Clayman declared.

Khan glanced at the Lieutenant's stern face once again. He wanted to talk openly about what had happened while he was away, but that wasn't the right time.

The ship began to rise, and Khan reached for one of the seats before fastening his belt. The mission was over, so he didn't owe anything else to the team, but a short speech sounded mandatory with all those glowing eyes on him.

"I didn't set anything with Mister Hencus," Khan announced, "But I'm sure the crew on the leviathan class will treat you nicely. If you don't have anything urgent, you can take advantage of their hospitality."

"Boss, we should go out drinking to celebrate," Manuel laughed.

"I'm not going anywhere," Khan rejected in a happy tone. "Doctor's orders."

"Sir," Lieutenant Clayman called while bringing his seat next to Khan to hand him a wet handkerchief. Khan took it and used his phone as a mirror to remove the blood on his face.

"I'll write individual evaluations once I get the Lieutenant's report," Khan revealed while throwing the handkerchief in a trash bin at his side. "Anyway, gunners, you did well. The tech part went smoothly too, Seth. I just wish you took fewer pictures of me."

Khan's happy tone softened that revelation, but Seth's eyes widened in surprise anyway. He experienced some fear but still mustered an apology. "I'm sorry, Captain. Disrespecting you wasn't my intention."

"I let it slide because it didn't affect the mission," Khan continued, "But I expect some privacy next time. If there will ever be a next time."

Seth went from scared to grateful. He had pursued a personal agenda, but Khan didn't only forgive him. He also expressed his willingness to work together in the future.

Truth be told, Khan was mainly testing Seth's reaction. If he felt any darkness, he would have blacklisted Seth from his potential tech experts.

"Sir," Leona called before Seth could add anything. "I'm sorry for firing so soon. I-."

"It's fine," Khan interrupted. "Actually, it's my fault. I withheld information, so you couldn't possibly know I could reach that Radola."

"No, sir, you have been incredible," Leona couldn't bear to see Khan taking part of the blame.

"She is right, boss," Manuel added. "You kicked some bird's asses down there. Even fourth-level warriors can't stop you."

"I would be dead if I had to face a fourth-level warrior," Khan snickered. "Trust me on that."

"Still, boss," Manuel continued, "If you even need someone to fire for you, I'm your man."

"Same here, sir," Leona stated. "And you know who aims better."

"I thought we were on the same team!" Manuel complained, and Leona scoffed before ignoring him.

Khan smiled at those interactions but didn't add anything. Building a trustworthy team was an important task for a Captain, but he had to look at the reports first. For now, he would limit himself to public evaluations, at least for those who performed well.

The team wanted to exchange more words with Khan. Their excitement was palpable, but he wasn't in the mood for frivolous talks. He closed his eyes to meditate, and his companions respected his need to rest.

Tyler couldn't do much damage in that part of the mission since the autopilot kicked in when the landing became imminent. The ship entered the leviathan class' hangar safely, and a welcoming party approached the team once they reached the metal floor.

Viola and a group of good-looking men and women dressed in revealing clothes smiled at Khan's team. A cart with a few refreshments stood behind them, and the alluring gazes they shot said a lot about their intentions.

"Master Lucian wishes to congratulate you," Viola announced while her group opened a path for the cart. "We have already prepared a room with more refreshments. You can rest there if you wish."

Refusing official invitations was always problematic when they involved important families, but Khan had the perfect words for the occasion. "I'm afraid the Harbor is waiting for me, but my team is more than willing to accept Mister Hencus' generosity in my place."

The statement granted Khan a few surprised looks from his team, but he ignored them to focus on Viola, and she didn't disappoint.

"Of course, Captain," Viola responded. "I'll personally escort you to the teleport while my companions take care of your team."

"I'm sure they'll enjoy your hospitality," Khan stated, finally glancing at his companions to deliver a wink.

Manuel couldn't hold back from grinning, and the others had similar but more polite reactions. Khan had used them to get out of those political obligations, but they didn't dare to contradict him since the event wasn't exactly a punishment.

The two groups split, and something curious happened. Leona, Manuel, Seth, and Tyler followed Viola's companions, but Lieutenant Clayman remained at Khan's side.

Viola wore a questioning expression that transformed into a polite smile as soon as Khan nodded in approval. She began to lead the two men across the ship at that point, and a silent march eventually brought them to the teleport area.

"Farewell, Captain Khan, Lieutenant Clayman," Viola exclaimed once the two men were on the teleport. "Until our next meeting."

Lieutenant Clayman performed a military salute, and Khan limited himself to a nod. Synthetic mana soon filled the platform, and the teleport activated, bringing them back to the Harbor's hangar.

The soldiers on the various consoles voiced loud salutes as soon as Khan and Lieutenant Clayman appeared, but the two didn't linger in the area. Khan even refused an escort as he led his companion into the many corridors past the room.

"So, what do you have to report?" Khan asked once the corridors granted some privacy.

"Sir, the team engaged in slightly disrespectful gossip after you jumped," Lieutenant Clayman explained.

"What was that about?" Khan casually questioned.

"Rumors, sir," Lieutenant Clayman revealed. "Rumors about you."

"Bad rumors?" Khan wondered.

"Depends on the perspective, sir," Lieutenant Clayman responded.

"I understand," Khan sighed. "What about their performance?"

"The gossip didn't hinder the mission, sir," Lieutenant Clayman declared. "Both gunners and the tech expert performed well."

"But not Tyler, right?" Khan asked.

"The pilot tried to provide unauthorized air support, sir," Lieutenant Clayman summarized. "I had to activate one of the protocols."

"You did the right thing," Khan reassured. "I guess I won't praise everyone in the evaluations."

The conversation ended on those words, and the two crossed corridors until they arrived at a hangar. Khan had already sent orders, so he found two cars waiting for him in the area, but Lieutenant Clayman decided to add something before the inevitable separation.

"Sir, what I witnessed today was the most breathtaking battle of my life," Lieutenant Clayman said while performing a military salute. "I'm honored to have received the rare chance to see you in action."

"Thank you, Lieutenant," Khan nodded. "Now, get some rest. Don't stress too much about those reports."

"They'll be ready in the afternoon, sir," Lieutenant Clayman repeated.

"Alright," Khan chuckled. "By the way, good job back there."

At that point, Khan headed for one of the cars, and an annoyed grunt left his mouth when he sat. He needed to rest, but sleeping was out of the question. Still, his injuries made it hard for him to attend the pilot's lessons, theoretically freeing him of most duties.

'I guess I'll study today,' Khan thought before sending a message to Monica to warn her about his imminent return. After that, he was about to store his phone, but another idea popped into his mind and made him search for a different contact.

'What should I even say?' Khan wondered while staring at Colonel Norrett's contact. He couldn't think of anything specific, so he limited his text to short and honest words. 'Lieutenant Joe Clayman is good.'

Khan didn't know if his message would do anything, but his influence ended there. His eyes also closed as his mind slipped into a meditative state, and the long drive transformed into mere minutes in his perspective.

Seeing the familiar building rekindled some of the feelings experienced during the battle. The previous anger didn't return, but its intensity was there, even if applied to a different emotion.

Leaving the elevator reinforced that emotion. Khan found Monica waiting for him at the end of the room, and the mixture of worry and happiness on her face made her figure irresistible.

"Khan!" Monica cried and almost jumped on Khan, but the sight of the tracksuit made her stop at the last second. She knew he had gone out with his uniform, and its absence could mean only one thing.

"Are you injured?" Monica questioned, refraining from placing her hands on Khan's chest. Yet, a better view of his face told her everything she needed to know. Khan still had red marks on him, which answered Monica's doubts.

"Kha-," Monica tried to call, but Khan's intense gaze interrupted her words. She lost herself in the complete attention she was receiving and didn't oppose the kiss that landed on her lips.

A muffled moan left Monica's mouth when Khan gently pushed her into the wall without interrupting the kiss. She had countless questions, but the intimate moment made her mind blank.

Someone eventually cleared his throat to claim the couple's attention. Khan calmed down, leaving a last quick kiss on Monica's lips before turning toward the room's entrance. George and Anita were standing there, and the two wore very different expressions.

"Sorry to interrupt," George grinned.

"Girl, show some self-restraint," Anita scolded before mustering some politeness. "Khan, welcome back."

Monica was almost ready to leave the wall, but Khan pulled her closer. The gesture hinted at his mood, and she didn't even try to oppose it. She reached for his neck, and her warm breath spread on his skin while she rubbed her nose on it.

"Another time," Khan said to his friends without even trying to sound apologetic. "We need to take a bath now."

Anita blushed and prepared a glare for George, but he wrapped an arm around her waist and spoke before she could do anything. "We'll postpone the celebratory drink."

Khan couldn't find the strength to nod at George. Monica was so impossible to resist in his current state that he turned toward her without saying goodbye. Of course, George had countless jokes for the occasion, but he held them back while pushing Anita into the elevator.

"You stink," Monica complained once privacy arrived, but the comment didn't stop her affection. She didn't even notice that her hands got dirty when she ran her fingers through Khan's hair.

"And I need help in the bathtub," Khan whispered when he managed to stop assaulting Monica's lips.

Usually, Monica would take that as another hint about Khan's condition, but she was powerless in that situation. Khan was dictating the rhythm, and she felt trapped in it.

Some actual realization arrived when Monica was on the verge of jumping on Khan. He stopped her before she could attempt the leap, which told her how bad it was. Still, she didn't have the time to ask questions since Khan's passion soon overwhelmed her again.

Needless to say, reaching the bathroom ended up being problematic. Khan was at his wildest, and Monica indulged his every move. The only break happened when the two ended up naked in the bathtub and Monica could see the extent of his injuries, but even that did little to quell their mood.

Minutes turned into hours, and the bathroom rarely fell silent. The two weren't even trying to clean each other up, but that happened anyway due to how much they moved.

It took a while, but the couple eventually calmed down. Khan found himself at the edge of his large bathtub with Monica sitting on his lap. His arms were wrapped around her waist, and she often turned her head to request kisses.

"Again?" Monica giggled when she felt a reaction under her. "I thought you were wounded."

"A few cracked ribs and some burns aren't a big deal," Khan teased. "They stop hurting as soon as I look at you."

"Then, don't you dare to look elsewhere," Monica used her tempting tone. "I'll help."

Monica left Khan's lap and turned to show the entirety of her beauty, but buzzing noises resounded in the bathroom. The couple's pants were near the bathtub, and both phones were going crazy.

Khan groaned and stretched his arm to seize his phone. Meanwhile, Monica crawled back to Khan's chest, planting her lips on his cheek and reaching for his crotch. She knew mere messages wouldn't stop them that day.

The urge to get rid of the phone as quickly as possible filled Khan when he felt Monica's hand, but the nature of the notification made him frown. George was telling him to check the network.

Khan connected the phone to the wall to use more comfortable menus and opening the network immediately told him what George meant. He didn't need to apply any filter or keyword. His name was on top of the news with a video attached to it.

Monica also focused on the screen on the wall when she saw Khan playing the video. Surprisingly enough, a recording of the mission had reached the network, and skimming through it told Khan that the images covered most of the turrets' descent and activation.

"What the fuck?" Khan couldn't help but curse. The video featured all his battles, but that wasn't its most surprising feature.

The excellent angle, high definition, and clear sound weren't details Seth could capture with the ship's scanners or his phone. That quality required better equipment, which only the leviathan class had. It seemed that Lucian had recorded Khan's battles only to release them anonymously on the network.

Chapter 477 Evaluations

Monica couldn't hold back her curiosity. She reached for the menus and restarted the video to watch it in its entirety. As for Khan, he focused on the network to see what the various sites said about the matter.

A sea of comments had already appeared, which wasn't surprising. Still, their contents turned out to be more extreme than Khan had expected, at least when it came to a fraction of those anonymous users.

Khan had gathered a few haters after his many exploits. His background, general fame, and women had attracted a series of jealous and resentful people who saw everything wrong with the Global Army in him.

An opposite side existed, and the fight between the two gave birth to nasty comments. Moreover, the video generated more rumors and made many conversations degenerate.

In the meantime, Monica fell prey to the video. Khan was a fantastic warrior, and seeing him in his element deepened her arousal. Still, worry arrived whenever Khan got hit, and her hands instinctively went for the spots highlighted by the images.

Monica checked Khan's back when one of the pillars hit him there. She carefully touched his face when his fast sprints caused burns, and her gaze fell on the big bruise on his chest after the strong Radola's blow.

The inspection took as long as the video, which gave Khan the time to read tens of comments. He almost couldn't believe the things he saw, and his mood ended up suffering.

The haters used Khan's mutations and powerful techniques to insult his battle prowess. In their eyes, he was nothing more than a kid who owed his strength to the Nak and his alien lovers.

Instead, the fans saw Khan as the best expression of human potential. He was a source of inspiration for any young soldier, especially those without background.

Those sides weren't too bad on their own, but the clashes in the comments led to awful topics. Xenophobia, arrogance, death threats, and much more filled the sites, putting Khan in a sour mood.

Khan wouldn't usually let fame affect him, but that scene was depressing. Strangers who knew nothing about his life shouted random opinions and even fought because of them. One side wanted to put his face on a banner, while the opposite was ready to exile him.

'Is that all I amount to?' Khan couldn't help but wonder. 'Is this all I have achieved in the past years?'

The side didn't matter. Haters and fans alike could come up with hurtful and insulting comments. Most of them had clearly never been on the battlefield but still felt entitled to give their biased opinions.

Khan saw his worst memories flying through his vision. All the death, killing, struggles, and desperation needed to achieve his current power had led to that pathetic scene. His life had turned into a show with an unknown audience spouting judgments about things they didn't know.

A specific comment ended up standing out from the others. Khan finally learnt his nickname, the monster of Nippe 2, and those words deepened the expanding depression.

'Is this my reward?' Khan wondered. He hated the idea of strangers spreading misconceptions about his life, but the fact that some comments hit the mark annoyed him even more. He knew what he had become to pursue his goals. He knew the word "monster" suited him.

Monica realized that something was off when the video ended, and one look at the comments told her everything. She immediately grabbed Khan's head, making sure to avoid his burns while turning it toward her, and her careful touch conveyed her affection.

"Hey," Monica called in a scolding tone that managed to sound lovely. "Look at me. Look only at me."

Of course, Monica couldn't understand how deeply Khan had been affected. After all, she lacked Jenna's senses. Her reaction had come from how well she knew him, which managed to have some effect.

Khan had almost begun to doubt the value of his struggles, but one look at Monica reminded him of the truth. He had killed out of desperation and survival instincts, but there was something else in his life, something he valued a lot more, and that had taken him a long time to accept.

For someone so used to suffering, striving for personal happiness was a big deal. Liiza had created that path, Jenna had pushed Khan into it, and Monica had fulfilled it. Nothing could make Khan forget his desperation, but that beautiful face covered in curls granted him a type of peace that allowed him to smile honestly.

Khan lowered his head, and Monica welcomed it in her chest. It was rare for her to see him in that vulnerable state, and unreasonable anger filled her mind when the comments fell into her vision again. Even Monica didn't know what she would be capable of if those anonymous users entered her reach.

Monica's reasonable side quickly prevailed, mainly because Khan needed her. She turned off the menus and pampered the head on her chest with affectionate caresses. She even left a kiss on that wet hair, and her mouth remained there to show her support.

The Niqols' traditions kicked in soon enough. Khan knew the best cure for his mood, and Monica turned out to be a natural in the treatment. The two were so caught in their passion that they completely ignored the bathtub's water getting cold.

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The doctor had told Khan to rest, but he interpreted the order in his own way. His tasks wouldn't just disappear due to a few injuries, so he spent what remained of the afternoon reviewing Lieutenant Clayman's report on his bed, surrounded by wet sheets.

To no one's surprise, Lieutenant Clayman had been extremely thorough in his recollection of the mission's events. His descriptions even carried precise timestamps with minutes and seconds, and many files from the ship's scanners accompanied them.

Khan didn't focus on the mission for now. His priority was to evaluate his team, and the report confirmed his initial guess. Except for the pilot, everyone had done well.

'What should I even write?' Khan wondered as Lieutenant Clayman's name shone on the device between his hands. 'Reliable, trustworthy, unflinching. That should do.'

Seth, Leona, and Manuel received similar praises that Khan added to their profiles. He could be more accurate and even nitpick on certain details, but adding negative reviews to his teammates wasn't part of his plans.

Tyler was the only troublesome topic. Khan could lie and praise him anyway to improve his image as a Captain, but that could lead to dangerous consequences. He didn't want someone to rely on that pilot because of his evaluation.

However, leaving negative comments could also create problems. Khan already suspected that Tyler had received external help to pass his pilot's test, which hinted at a powerful background he didn't want to mess with.

In the end, Khan decided to ignore that evaluation. It wasn't mandatory, and experienced soldiers would understand the meaning of a lack of praise anyway. He simply avoided delivering the killing blow to that already catastrophic profile.

Usually, Monica would help Khan deal with those tasks, but her mood was far from ideal. She wasn't even on the bed with him. She was pacing left and right through the bedroom, and the symphony reeked of her fury.

"I'll nuke his fucking outpost," Monica muttered once Khan lowered his device. "Who does he think he is? He is mocking us openly!"

The previous hours had been full of passion, but the couple had found the time to talk a bit. Khan had shared his thoughts on the leak, and Monica had agreed with his guess. Lucian had to be the culprit, and Monica seemed ready to skin him alive.

"Monica, let it be for now," Khan teased, knowing how his girlfriend would react. "The video might actually do wonders for my career."

"That's not the point!" Monica snapped and crawled on the bed to point an admonishing finger at Khan's face. "He has to ask permission for that stuff. He must come to you first and then beg me to agree."

"I kind of like it when you get all bossy," Khan joked, and his words carried some truth. The two didn't even dress up yet, which made the whole scene sexier.

"Shut it!" Monica almost shouted. "This is serious!"

"Alright, ma'am," Khan chuckled. "I'll threaten him properly next time I see him."

Khan's casual behavior added fuel to Monica's anger, who squinted her eyes before jumping off the bed. She stomped her feet through most of the flat as she went to retrieve her phone, and a statement left her mouth when she returned to the room. "I'll call someone from my family."

"Wait, wait," Khan laughed but still hurried outside the bed to seize Monica's phone. In the past hours, the device had buzzed to no end, and Khan almost answered a call in the following struggle.

"Give it back!" Monica ordered while trying to retrieve the phone Khan was hiding behind his back.

"Calm down," Khan snickered. "Let's not involve your family."

Monica didn't want to listen to reason and continued her attempts to seize the phone. Yet, she ended up bumping into Khan's chest during that playful struggle, forcing a groan out of him.

The anger instantly dispersed, and worry replaced it. Monica gasped and carefully reached for Khan's cheeks to make sure he was okay, but the tongue he showed after pretending to be hurt made the fury return.

"You damned scoundrel!" Monica complained, forgetting about the phone to push Khan onto the bed. "You are always teasing me, even when the situation is so serious!"

Monica crawled on Khan and kissed him, trapping him in a suffocating hug. It was unclear whether she wanted to choke him or have sex again, but he was having too much fun to interrupt her.

"I would have never called my family," Monica snorted while straightening her back to sit on Khan's abdomen, "But we must do something."

"I might be to blame for the leak," Khan realized in that moment of peace. "I might have told Lucian I want to work with him."

Khan and Lucian had never exchanged those exact words, but the hidden meanings in their last conversations were enough for people like them.

"What?" Monica frowned. "Why?"

"Because the lapdog doesn't get the princess," Khan sighed.

"Princess?" Monica questioned. "Are you talking about Princess Edna?"

"I'm talking about you, dummy," Khan laughed. "I don't want to wait ten years to be with you in the open."

Monica knew the political environment better than Khan, so she could understand everything with that hint. Khan could get Monica on his own, but that would take a lot of time, which Lucian could shorten.

"For me?" Monica asked as disbelief filled her face and her hand reached for her curls.

"I didn't expect him to release a video," Khan explained. "We didn't actually talk about anything, but yes. For you."

Monica melted. She played a bit longer with her curls before getting down and cuddling at Khan's side. She laid on his shoulder and wrapped her left arm and leg around his torso to keep him close.

"You shouldn't make these decisions on your own," Monica tried to scold, but her tone came out too sweet. "You should also consult me before accepting any plan. Lucian is skilled."

"I never planned to do otherwise," Khan declared.

Monica lost herself in that smiling face. Her feelings seemed on the verge of bursting out of her chest, and a random thought suddenly popped into her mind, making her shy.

"What is it?" Khan obviously noticed that reaction.

"You know I'm on birth control, right?" Monica decided to reveal as anticipation mixed with her shyness.

"You told me your mother accepted your request," Khan exclaimed. That news was recent, but Khan followed with a simple question. "So?"

Monica almost felt disappointed, but a realization arrived when she looked at Khan's clueless face. He probably didn't know anything about the topic or what it implied.

"So," Monica announced, diverting her gaze but snuggling closer, "It means you don't need to use-"

Monica couldn't finish her line since multiple letters lit up on the walls and a ringing noise spread through the bedroom. Someone was calling Khan's flat directly, which only professors and similar figures could do.

"Voice only!" Khan promptly ordered and forced himself to sit. The menus confirmed that his directive had gone through, and the call started without needing to answer.

"Captain Khan," Professor Nickton's voice came out of specific areas of the wall. "Did you lose your phone?"

"I was asleep, sir," Khan lied. "Is something the matter?"

"Write a complete report of Lauter's events and send it to me," Professor Nickton stated. "Also, Professor Parver requested your presence in tomorrow's meeting. Someone will text you all the details."

"A meeting on the weekend?" Khan felt confused. "Sir, what is it about?"

"You discovered an unknown racial behavior in the Radola," Professor Nickton explained. "Professor Parver will probably give you access to a private course as a reward."

Khan opened his mouth in surprise and prepared another question, but Professor Nickton spoke before him. "Don't forget my report."

The call ended at those words. Professor Nickton had hung up since he didn't care about the conversation anymore, leaving a speechless and confused Khan staring at the empty wall.

"I should probably get my phone," Khan eventually sighed.

Dinnertime was close, and Khan had yet to review some notes, but another task had appeared. Still, the situation didn't look too bad since his injuries would keep him in the flat all night.

Khan prepared himself to retrieve his phone in the bathroom, but something in the symphony made him turn toward Monica. Her mana almost called him.

"What were you telling me about birth control?" Khan somehow knew the right question for the situation.

Monica remained shy but still sat on the bed to approach Khan's ear. Whispers entered it, and his eyes widened, but that surprise only lasted a second since his lust took over him. Part of him had already decided to move the report to the night.

Chapter 478 Bedridden

With the simulations, flights, and nights inside the training halls out of the equation, Khan managed to attend to all his tasks without forsaking his rest. He caught up with his studies, sorted through the many messages reaching his phone, and even took a long nap.

As for the report requested by Professor Nickton, Khan managed to write it during his rare breaks. The task didn't occupy much time since Khan knew what the Professor wanted and could copy notes from Lieutenant Clayman's story.

The chaos caused by the leaked video didn't vanish the following day. Actually, Khan found an even greater number of people attempting to contact him for various reasons. Some reporters directly

claimed to be on their way to the Harbor to meet him. His fame had touched insane levels now that everyone could see his strength.

Khan ignored almost every call since he had already sent reassuring messages to his friends, but the Headmistress wasn't someone he could refuse. When her name appeared on the flat's walls, he immediately reached for his phone lying right past the mattress.

"Headmistress!" Khan exclaimed as soon as he put his phone on his ear and returned to his pillow.

"Captain, does your phone need fixing?" Headmistress Holwen questioned.

"No, ma'am," Khan stated. "I was merely resting."

Headmistress Holwen seemed able to smell the lie in Khan's statement, which prompted her following words. "The Harbor would be happy to provide a PR manager to handle your calls."

Khan could only hold back a sigh. He wasn't equipped for that kind of fame. In theory, he should have already hired a professional. He had hoped things wouldn't come to that, but the situation gave him no choice.

"I will set an appointment in the embassy next week," Khan promised. "Ma'am, can I ask for your advice in terms of firms?"

"The Global Army has good specialists," Headmistress Holwen announced. "However, you might require someone at the level of the descendants."

Khan lowered his gaze. Monica was lying on his abdomen and going through the news on her phone. She could partially hear the conversation and nodded when she noticed Khan's gaze, so he gave a simple answer to the Headmistress. "Understood."

"Now, about the reason behind my call," The Headmistress continued. "How are your injuries?"

Khan didn't expect the Headmistress to be worried about him, especially since she had seen the video. The question made so little sense that Khan understood it had to have a hidden meaning.

"I'm fine?" Khan wondered. He was telling the truth. All his burns had healed during the night. Only his ribs still needed some care.

"Wrong," Headmistress Holwen rebuked. "You are bedridden and in agonizing pain. Are we clear?"

"I'm bedridden and in agonizing pain," Khan repeated, and Monica couldn't hold back a giggle that made her put away her phone. She started scratching Khan's chest to tease him, and he pretended not to notice her to ask a question. "May I know why, ma'am?"

"Your stunt on Lauter attracted too much attention," Headmistress Holwen explained. "You aren't answering your phone, so that attention falls on me."

"Oh," Khan uttered as some shamelessness joined his voice. "Thank you for taking care of me, Headmistress."

The lack of attention annoyed Monica, but she couldn't speak during the call. Yet, one glance at Khan's groin told her how to solve that problem.

"Quit it," Headmistress Holwen scoffed. "I need you to stay put for a few days while I handle this mess. There are some people I can't refuse, but the rest only requires time."

"Who-?" Khan began to ask, but a grunt he had no intention of voicing left his mouth and forced him to lower his gaze. He could only see a mess of curls hiding his lower waist, which told him everything he needed to know.

"Captain?" Headmistress Holwen called.

"Yes, I'm sorry, ma'am," Khan promptly said while closing his eyes to save some attention for the conversation. "May I know who these people are?"

Khan was genuinely curious. The Headmistress held incredible authority in the Harbor, and most wealthy descendants were his classmates, so they didn't need to go through her. He couldn't think of anyone outside of a few figures who could force the Headmistress' hand.

"I'll give you a list once I'm done," Headmistress Holwen stated. "I'm only sure about a few reporters for now since they have high clearance."

"I'll be in your hands, ma'am," Khan uttered without thinking whether his answer made enough sense. It was hard to concentrate while Monica played with him.

"Though, there is this one persistent man," Headmistress Holwen continued. "Mister Chares is pulling every string to speak to me directly."

"Chares?" Khan repeated. "Is he related to Tyler, my pilot?"

"He is his uncle," Headmistress Holwen revealed, "And he didn't sound happy."

'I knew it,' Khan cursed in his mind. He had done his best to remain polite, but the lack of official praises was too easy to spot. Tyler's family's intervention felt almost inevitable.

"Ma'am, how can the Chares family affect you?" Khan wondered. He had done a background check on his teammates, so he knew that Tyler's family wasn't too influential.

"It doesn't," Headmistress Holwen declared. "It's only this Mister Chares. He has surprising connections."

The wording told Khan that the Headmistress didn't know that man. She probably was also in the dark, which wasn't ideal.

'He did receive help to pass the pilot's test,' Khan felt sure. Still, the problem remained, and Monica wasn't exactly helping him think straight.

"There is one thing, ma'am," Khan decided to change the topic. "I have a meeting tonight. I'm not sure I can refuse."

"I'm aware of Professor Parver's invitation," Headmistress Holwen revealed. "I've already arranged everything. A car will pick you up after dinner."

"Perfect," Khan exclaimed, but his tone carried something that made the Headmistress suspicious.

"Captain, did you understand what I said?" Headmistress Holwen unleashed her cold tone.

"I'll stay put, ma'am," Khan confirmed. "Is there anything else?"

"No, that's all," Headmistress Holwen concluded. "Have a good recovery, Captain Khan."

"I won't leave the bed, Headmistress," Khan promised, and a laugh arrived from under him right after the call ended.

Khan threw away his phone in time to watch Monica turn to face him. She even supported her head with a hand while her elbow was on his waist, and her playful smile spoke louder than words.

"Do you know anything about the Chares family?" Khan used the last shred of reason to ask that question.

"Your pilot's family?" Monica frowned. "What's there to know?"

"Nothing," Khan replied. Monica's ignorance matched Khan's background check, which reassured him about that variable.

It still felt odd that a member of that family could annoy the Headmistress, but Khan didn't know where else to look for answers. Moreover, the playful smile that returned on Monica's face made him forget about the matter.

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The Headmistress' order made Khan decide to forsake his flight. He had been conflicted about it before that due to his injuries and the delay that the test would have. Yet, he could only obey and use his free time well.

The idea of having a celebratory drink with George crossed Khan's mind, but that would imply clothes, which the couple had forsook since the end of the mission.

Luckily for Khan, George understood the situation perfectly and even approved it. The two only needed to exchange a few messages to decide to postpone that drink.

Khan ended up spending his day between his studies and Monica, often mixing the two since the couple never left the bed. Still, the car appointed by the Headmistress eventually arrived, forcing Khan to wear his military uniform and head outside.

The sidewalk was surprisingly empty, but Khan hurried inside the car anyway to avoid risks. As soon as he closed its doors, the vehicle set off, and he pulled out his phone to review some notes or kill time.

Needless to say, messages and calls were still coming, but Khan only scrolled through the names without addressing anyone. The entire Global Army wanted to talk to him, but an exception existed. Lucian had yet to contact him.

The matter annoyed Khan a bit, but he let it slide. He would simply take things into his own hands if that situation continued for too long. Besides, the new outpost was a perfect justification for the lack of messages.

The flight took less than Khan expected. The car didn't head for the district where Professor Nickton had his lab. Instead, it reached a small dome with sealed entrances, which happened to be near the embassy.

Khan had memorized the Harbor's layout by then. Only authorized personnel could enter that small district, but there he was, and his curiosity inevitably took over in the last phases of the flight.

The district resembled a military camp. Tent-like structures covered its surface and divided it into four blocks. Soldiers also roamed among those short buildings, but not out of fun. They were patrolling the area to protect what stood under the floor.

'There is an entire battalion down there,' Khan commented in his mind as the car began to descend. The vehicle reached the western district and landed in a specific area to complete the trip.

The pilot didn't leave the car, but a couple of soldiers were already waiting for Khan outside the specific area. Military salutes unfolded when he reached them, and the two managed to remain respectfully silent while leading him toward one of the metal tents nearby.

The building was only as big as one of Khan's bedrooms, but he understood its purpose as soon as he saw its empty insides. He felt no surprise when the floor began to descend, but wonder arrived when the district's true face revealed itself.

The elevator was similar to what Khan had witnessed on Milia 222. It descended through a transparent channel that granted a complete vision of the outside world, which turned out to be an immense area as tall as the embassy.

A huge tree that connected the floor to the ceiling was the first thing that fell in Khan's vision. The plant's huge brown trunk and immense green crown were too eye-catching to notice anything else, especially when descending into the area. Still, that was only a small part of the vegetation.

The upper floor was split into four sections, and the same went for the lower. The underground version of the western area was a vast garden that almost matched the borders of the block above.

Khan saw all kinds of plants growing around the giant tree. Scarlet bushes, yellow woods, purple flowers, and much more filled the garden, creating a colorful spectacle that didn't match the Harbor's usual style. It almost felt like an actual planet, but the other details of the area soon broke that belief.

The elevator was too distant from the other sections, but Khan recognized huge warehouses in the distance. He even noticed immense containers surrounded by scientists in another corner, and cars ran everywhere, partially filling the generally wide roads stretching in multiple directions.

Moreover, the ceiling had tracks that mechanical arms, cranes, and other machines used to reach their appointed destinations. Many carried metal containers as big as trucks, while others had proper ships in their grasps. That was Milia 222 all over again, or at least, that was what Khan felt due to his experience.

The soldiers stayed in the elevator once it reached the floor, but Khan didn't remain alone. A car similar to what he had driven on Onia was waiting for him, and the soldier on the steering wheel only had to perform a military salute to get his attention.

"How much can you tell me about this place?" Khan questioned as soon as the car started advancing. The driver was a young man, a second-level warrior, so Khan hoped to establish a friendly conversation.

"I'm sorry, sir," The soldier responded, destroying that hope. "I'm not authorized to share any information."

"I see," Khan sighed, focusing his entire attention on the symphony. The place had a mixture of natural and synthetic mana, allowing him to learn a lot with simple glances.

The ride didn't last nearly as long as Khan had hoped. The car soon reached the garden's edge, which consisted of an interactive metal wall surrounded by tables. Only one of them was occupied, and the vehicle stopped in front of it to let Khan jump out.

Khan had obviously inspected the table while the car was getting close. Four people were sitting at it, and he recognized two of them. One was Professor Nickton, who had surprisingly worn clean clothes. Instead, the other was the often-ill Professor Parver, who had tubes stretching out of his right forearm and ending in a rectangular machine behind him.

"Professors," Khan performed a military salute after landing on the floor. Still, he couldn't hide his curiosity toward the machine, and Professor Parver didn't miss that.

"Captain Khan," Professor Parver announced, revealing an amiable smile interrupted by a violent cough.

That scene was far from unusual. Everyone in the advanced classes knew that Professor Parver was chronically ill. Khan had only seen that skinny and pale man twice in the lessons, and violent coughs had afflicted him both times.

"Is everything okay, Professor?" Khan couldn't help but ask once the cough had ended.

"Captain, don't worry about me," Professor Parver reassured, cleaning his mouth with the handkerchief in his chest pocket. "I'm actually sorry for asking you to come while you are still injured."

Khan shook his head to reassure the Professor. Truth be told, he had a good impression of the man. His mana described him as a gentle and passionate person, and his lessons reflected that. Even Khan's peers agreed that the alien environments course was far more engaging when Professor Parver attended it.

"Let me introduce you to my friends," Professor Parver continued, pointing his hand at the only woman at the table. "This enchanting woman is Carla Bevet. She specializes in alien botany and takes care of the garden behind me, among other things."

Carla Bevet looked only a few years older than Khan, but her mature gaze hinted at a different truth. She had short brown hair, dark eyes, and tanned skin, and she wore a genuine smile when she stood up to shake Khan's hand.

"Captain Khan, it's a pleasure to meet you," Carla announced. "I admit I am a bit of a fan."

"I'm flattered, ma'am," Khan chuckled.

"And don't mind Professor Parver," Carla continued. "He is too kind with his words. I'm only one of the experts in charge of the garden, and the enchanting part is also arguable."

"I beg to disagree, ma'am," Khan joked.

"Oh, such a player," Carla giggled while returning to her seat, "Just like the rumors say. If only I were thirty years younger."

'Excuse me?' Khan shouted in his mind without letting a single twitch reach his face. 'Thirty what?'

"The gentleman here is John Nore," Professor Parver continued, pointing at the white-haired man in front of him. "He specializes in robotics but also manages countless functions of the Harbor. His team is the very best."

"Captain Khan," John stood up, showing a firm and lively grip when he shook Khan's hand. "Your battle with the Radola was inspiring. I'm glad the new generations have someone like you to look up to."

"I still needed to rely on the turrets, sir," Khan remained humble.

"I would have put my money on you even without the turrets," John chuckled, and his smile highlighted the many wrinkles on the corners of his mouth and bionic eyes.

"You already know Professor Nickton," Professor Parver added once John returned to his seat. "He told me you gave him a shipment worth of Radola yesterday."

"Mostly maimed Radola," Professor Nickton corrected.

"He isn't angry at you," Professor Parver winked at Khan. "It's the turrets that he hates."

Khan laughed, but an awkward silence followed. He had yet to take a seat since it wouldn't be proper without an explicit invitation, and the purpose of that meeting was still a mystery. Luckily, Professor Parver didn't let that situation continue for too long.

"Captain," Professor Parver stated, "If you allow it, I'll keep the first part brief."

'It's not just one thing,' Khan realized while far different words left his mouth. "Certainly, sir."

"You have a unique insight into alien environments and species," Professor Parver declared. "I would like you to lend me that power."

Khan had to hold back a frown. Professor Parver had spoken the truth, but Khan remained unqualified for those scientific tasks. He wasn't even sure he could explain what he felt to people loyal to the human arts.

"Sir, I'm just a student," Khan tried to explain his situation in the best way he could.

"Far from it," Carla giggled.

"Indeed," Professor Parver continued. "Besides, you want to become an ambassador. With my recommendation and the experience accumulated in these tasks, you'll score a job in the embassy's offices as soon as the semester ends."

Chapter 479 Offers

The entire Global Army knew about Khan's goals, and that wasn't even his first time receiving similar offers. He firmly believed they would increase in number as his fame spread, but the core issue remained.

Khan's broader perspective and deep understanding of mana were priceless qualities in the scientific field. He could provide insights that even advanced machines couldn't notice. Yet, he had no foundation in those subjects.

However, Khan also knew he had to start somewhere, and the Harbor was one of the best places in the Global Army for that. Some of the embassy's offices would need to deploy him, which was what he wanted to achieve.

That knowledge wasn't the result of a single research. Khan had studied the topic and questioned his friends multiple times during the past months. He was almost sure that the Harbor's embassy was ideal for his goals. He only wanted a more fitting starting place, but reality rarely matched his desires.

"If I may, sir," Khan decided to probe into the matter a bit more, "What tasks?"

"Why don't you take a seat in the meantime?" Professor Parver invited, pointing at the empty seat next to John Nore. "Linus, can you help the Captain understand?"

Professor Nickton cleared his throat and took out his phone while Khan sat down. Holograms soon came out of his device, creating a long list that shone above the table.

Khan had already seen many of the list's tags. They were job offers located in the Harbor with the addition of a few tasks that even the network didn't show.

"This system has six planets," Professor Parver explained while Khan browsed the list. "You have already seen Nippe 2 and Lauter, but the others also have valuable resources. This list shows all the possible tasks that concern them."

Professor Parver wasn't saying anything new. Khan had learnt that weeks ago, but the explanation put the conversation on a path he recognized. It seemed that Professor Parver wanted Khan to take over all those tasks.

"Do you want me to handle them, sir?" Khan wondered as some disappointment joined his thoughts.

Khan had already considered those jobs, but they felt beneath him now. The fact that the Professor was considering him seemed to show how little he thought of him.

"I wouldn't waste your talents over these," Professor Parver promptly revealed. "I only wanted to give you an idea of how valuable this system is."

"That's one of the reasons behind the Harbor's location," Khan stated. "Most courses highlight this."

"For good reason," Professor Parver continued, nodding at Professor Nickton to make him put away his phone. "Still, there are classified jobs that the network will never show, and I can't think of a better expert for them."

That flattery didn't affect Khan. He was no expert. He was just alien in many ways. Also, the nature of the offer featured a problem he couldn't ignore.

"I mean no disrespect," Khan announced, hoping that the Professor wouldn't take it the wrong way, "But won't a specialized team be better for them? I'm not sure these jobs suit me."

The question went beyond Khan's qualifications. He was willing to do random jobs to get money and fame, but they wouldn't push him closer to his goals. He wanted something concerning alien relationships or similar fields when it came to real offers.

"Captain, you have good senses, don't you?" Professor Parver laughed.

"Relatively speaking," Khan played it humble. He was good even among aliens, but the Professor didn't need to know that.

"Tell me what you see," Professor Parver requested.

Khan didn't take the matter too seriously but still pretended to focus. After all, he had already studied the Professor. The latter was a fourth-level warrior who didn't rely on cloaking techniques, so Khan had memorized his presence.

However, a new presence suddenly appeared among Professor Parver's mana. Khan frowned when he saw a different shade joining the man's energy and clashing with it. That foreign mana was located in the Professor's lungs and pushed on the rest of his organs to come out.

The process wasn't as simple as it looked. Both energies belonged to Professor Parver, but one was violent and wild, almost angry. It always tried to expand, and any success made a small chunk of the man's peaceful and gentle mana disappear.

"Is your mana eating itself?" Khan couldn't help but ask.

The question made Carla, John, and Professor Nickton shoot stunned gazes at Khan. They appeared genuinely surprised that he could see so much, but Professor Parver only showed a confident smile.

"Mana allowed us to get rid of many incurable illnesses," Professor Parver revealed as the hostile presence inside him vanished, "But also brought new ones. I caught this one during my reckless phase, and I'll probably spend the rest of my life needing machines and treatments to suppress it."

A violent cough took control of Professor Parver's throat at that point. Carla even left her seat to attend to the machine and change some parameters. It seemed that revealing the illness had weighed on the Professor's health, forcing him to take a minute to calm down.

"It's truly amazing," John praised in the meantime. "We are aware of Professor Parver's illness, but for you to learn about it with a simple glance... Truly stunning."

'I'm surprised he could keep it hidden from me at all,' Khan thought as his gaze remained on the Professor. He suspected the treatment had something to do with it, but the matter amazed him nonetheless.

"That's my whole point," Professor Parver spoke again as random coughs interrupted his lines. "Most teams would need special scanners and expensive equipment. You wouldn't even require teammates."

'So, it's about money,' Khan concluded. Professor Parver was right, but that didn't make Khan more inclined to accept his offer. It only forced him to be straightforward with his next line.

"Professor," Khan exclaimed, "I'm flattered, but I don't see how this will help me get into the embassy. I'm obviously not talking about your recommendation. It's just, the Global Army already knows I have muscles and senses."

Strangely enough, the Professor didn't show any disappointment. Actually, his gentle smile grew brighter after that honest refusal.

"I knew you had brains, Captain," Professor Parver praised. "Linus, can you please call a car for us?"

Professor Nickton picked up his phone again, and Professor Parver stood up. Carla helped him and even removed the tubes attached to his forearm.

"I hope I can steal a bit more of your time, Captain," Professor Parver requested.

"Of course," Khan replied while also leaving his seat.

"Well," Carla exclaimed, stretching her arm above the table to shake Khan's hand again. "I enjoyed this brief encounter. May it be one of many."

John also stood up, and knowing words left his mouth when he shook Khan's hand. "It was a pleasure, Captain. Professor Parver is a hard man to refuse, so I'm sure I'll see you around."

"I just want to make sure the Captain understands the entirety of the situation," Professor Parver chuckled. "I'll accept any decision afterward."

A jeep with no canopy approached the tables while those respectful salutes resounded, and Professor Parver reached for it before voicing another question. "Captain, can you drive one of these?"

Khan felt curious. He nodded, and the driver left the car to perform a military salute before leaving the area on foot. The Professor was asking for a private meeting, and Khan wanted to hear what he had to say.

"Do you need help, sir?" Khan wondered when the Professor opened the car's door.

"Don't worry about me," Professor Parver reassured. "Take the wheel. I'll give you directions along the way."

Khan complied and reached the driver's seat. The jeep had simple commands similar to what he had used on Onia, so making it start and accelerate wasn't an issue. The wide streets of the floor also allowed Khan to avoid other vehicles.

"I understand your concerns," Professor Parver announced once the jeep put enough distance from the tables. "Being a delivery boy isn't the best starting point, but this particular offer comes with great advantages."

"Such as?" Khan questioned, making sure not to go too fast due to the Professor's poor health.

"You would build connections with the Harbor's specialists," Professor Parver explained. "Miss Bevet and Mister Nore are only some of the important figures you'd work for. You'd gain a reputation among most offices and only for the tasks that really matter."

'Most descendants can offer that,' Khan thought.

"These jobs would come from the Global Army," Professor Parver said as if he could read Khan's thoughts. "They wouldn't have any connection to the families, at least in your specific tasks. You'd be able to climb the political ladder without pledging allegiance to any faction."

That point was genuinely interesting. The political environment was complicated, and Professor Parver was offering Khan a way out, even if only temporarily.

"Also, these connections would help once you start working in the Harbor," Professor Parver continued. "The various offices would already trust you at that point. Oh, take this left."

"But, sir," Khan felt the need to intervene while entering the street stretching on his left, "An ambassador mainly requires knowledge of multiple alien subjects. What kind of value would I have in an office if I entered it as a simple errand boy?"

Khan was ignoring his feats on purpose to make his question clearer. His best grades were on subjects that involved alien species or environments, and he had already proven himself on the field a few meaningful times.

"Specialists on Earth study for years to get a chance to be deployed," Professor Parver declared. "You'd take the opposite path, being deployed and filling the gaps in your knowledge in the following years."

"Is this feasible?" Khan wondered.

"It's rarer," Professor Parver admitted. "Many offices tend to hinder the careers and ambitions of simple soldiers to prioritize specialists from Earth or families. However, you are a special case."

Khan couldn't help but take his time to consider the offer properly. The advantages were real and great. The job would even play on Khan's skills without cornering him in the political field. He simply didn't know if it was the best for him.

"I need more time," Khan eventually stated. "I can't accept right away."

"I never expected you to," Professor Parver laughed. "Take the next right."

The car left the garden area to enter a block with a few buildings and narrower streets. Those structures were simple enough to be habitations, but the unique location probably granted them a deeper purpose.

"Not so brief as a first part," Professor Parver joked in front of Khan's silence. "I'm sorry. I might have miscalculated a bit."

"It's no problem, sir," Khan reassured. "If I may, how many parts there are to this meeting?"

"Only two," Professor Parver revealed. "The second involves an invitation to a private class. It's an intensive course for those wanting to deepen their understanding of alien environments and their branches."

"I guess the invitation goes alongside the offer," Khan voiced.

"Not at all," Professor Parver. "Your grades make you suitable for the intensive course, so you can join it even if you refuse my offer."

Khan fell silent again. Everything was too much to take in a single meeting, and he had yet to consider the biggest problem. Even if he wanted to accept the offer, he would need to figure out where to stuff those tasks in his schedule.

"Oh, stop there," Professor Parver eventually ordered while pointing at a nearby building. "That's my lab."

Khan complied, and Professor Parver stepped out of the car once it reached the building. The entrance required his genetic signature and phone to open, which he provided while Khan watched him from his seat.

"Follow me, Captain," Professor Parver ordered. "Let me offer you a drink while we finish our conversation."

Khan became a bit suspicious. The Professor had already shown that he could hide part of his mana. Khan felt unable to trust his senses anymore against him, and the structure even isolated them. The invitation could be a trap, but orders were orders.

The entrance closed behind Khan when he stepped inside a small office with two interactive desks, a few chairs, and a full bookcase that covered one of its long walls. The room had another door that led deeper into the building, but Professor Parver didn't use it.

"Your reservations are reasonable, Captain," Professor Parver announced while reaching for a drawer under one interactive desk to take out a bottle and a couple of glasses. "Why would you waste your limited time completing these tasks when you can accept one of your many offers?"

Khan remained silent and joined the Professor on the chairs. The latter left the glasses on the floor to pour the booze before picking them up to hand one to Khan.

"I'm sure your past only makes you more hesitant," Professor Parver continued, gulping down the entire glass in a single sip. "My offer is closer to scientists than ambassadors. What happened to your father will make you look at it in a bad light."

Khan had yet to reach those topics, but the Professor was right once again. If he accepted the offer, it would make more sense for him to expand his scientific knowledge, which wasn't his priority.

"If you know so much," Khan decided to speak, "Why did you make the offer in the first place? You must already have someone for those tasks in the end."

"The Harbor does," Professor Parver confirmed, "But I feel you are underestimating the length of our procedures. We can waste months waiting for scouts and teams to come back with anything."

"My senses don't make me able to accomplish miracles," Khan uttered.

"So you say after bringing back key knowledge about the Tors," Professor Parver pointed out, "Or discovering hidden racial traits of a species we observed for decades. Your survival instincts and general strength are also off the charts. I can't name a better scout."

"But I'm aiming higher than scout," Khan pressed on.

"Ambassadors have scouts in their teams," Professor Parver responded. "Many learn scouts' skills themselves during the job. The Global Army will most likely send someone with those abilities when dealing with new or unfriendly species."

Khan didn't know what to say. The more he thought about the matter, the more sense it made. Yet, he had to put it among his other opportunities and compare the benefits before deciding.

"Is your head fuming already?" Professor Parver joked. "Take your time, Captain. I'll be happy as long as you fulfill your potential. That's my job as your Professor."

The kindness carried by the Professor's words made Khan's mind wander. The drink was strong enough to help the process, so the silence that followed didn't feel awkward.

The Professor coughed a few times before heaving a deep sigh and adjusting his position on the chair. He appeared tired, and his wandering eyes highlighted his paleness. The Professor almost seemed to grow older during the silence.

"You know," Professor Parver eventually muttered, "I knew your father. He was one of the best scientists the Global Army has ever enlisted. I owe some of the treatments that keep me alive to him."

'He isn't dead yet,' Khan thought before diverting his eyes. 'Probably.'

"Scientists tend to be eccentric," Professor Parver chuckled, "But he went beyond that. His grumpy character was legendary, but true skills backed it up."

Khan didn't know how to take those praises. Things with his father were still odd, and he felt unable to face them until he gained access to the knowledge he sought.

"It's a pity the new generations won't learn about him," Professor Parver continued. "The Global Army disgraced him. Though I believe he doesn't regret it."

Khan lifted his gaze to look at the Professor. The latter wasn't looking at him, but something felt strange.

"The Global Army has many secrets," Professor Parver declared, "Especially in the scientific fields. There are horrid and disgusting things that will never reach the public.

"Some rumors even involve Tainted humans. It is said that the first generations always go crazy in a few years. I don't know how much I can believe that after seeing you."

'Crazy?' Khan wondered. 'Is he talking about the nightmares?'

"However," Professor Parver added, "Your father was one of the few experts able to fix this problem, probably the only one. He would have even had every reason to come up with a miraculous solution."

"What do you mean?" Khan couldn't remain silent anymore.

"Bret only loved one thing more than science," Professor Parver revealed, "And you look exactly like her."

Chapter 480 Burn

'What is he trying to say?' Khan wondered as his paranoia kicked in.

Professor Parver seemed to have good intentions, but his words sent mixed signals. They almost hinted at the secrets Khan was seeking, but their vagueness made the whole revelation suspicious.

Somehow, Khan couldn't believe Professor Parver only wanted to state how much Bret loved his mother. The part about the Tainted humans added a deeper meaning that touched on the right topics, and Khan couldn't hold back from asking more questions.

"Why are you telling me this?" Khan questioned, ignoring whether he was being disrespectful. "Is there something I should know about Tainted humans?"

"Many things, obviously," Professor Parver chuckled in his usual kind tone. "The entire scientific field is flooded with reports and theories."

The answer didn't say anything. Professor Parver could have remained silent, and nothing would have changed. Still, Khan saw something different in it. Actually, he found two hidden meanings inside it.

Professor Parver coughed before Khan could ask more questions, and that violent reaction continued for almost half a minute. Even with the paranoia, Khan accepted that the man's suffering was genuine, which enforced his silence.

"I'm sorry, Captain," Professor Parver eventually spoke while some lighter coughs still afflicted his throat. "It seems that I reached my limit for today."

The illness' good timing deepened Khan's suspicion, but his hands were tied. If the Professor didn't want him there, he had to leave.

Khan would lie if he said that he didn't consider violent paths. Yet, the Professor was a fourth-level warrior who had shown nothing but kindness to him. Besides, the unique location prevented any rule-breaking behavior, making Khan disregard those dark thoughts and depart.

The jeep was still outside the lab, and Khan felt to have every right to ride it. He recalled the road back to the elevator, so he started the engine and let his mind wander.

The Professor's second-last line told Khan two things. The Tainted humans' topic had many secrets, and the scientific field could uncover them.

Those hidden meanings could be a ruse to make Khan accept the Professor's offer. They could also be the result of his paranoia in front of an honest answer that didn't plan to have any secret purpose. Anything was possible, and Khan could only try to guess the truth from the vague pieces accumulated throughout the years.

Khan had gathered many clues since his enlistment. He had yet to find proper answers. Yet, something had begun to take form in his mind, and those thoughts kept him busy even when he returned to the car in the western district above.

Elizabeth, Khan's mother, was probably a noble. He could quote Madam Solodrey, Ella, and maybe Raymond to prove his point. That lofty status would even explain the harsh punishments applied to his family, so Khan decided to start from there.

Princess Edna couldn't be sure, but her idea of Nak on Earth could make sense. It would also stand to reason that the Global Army had learnt how to control them, and that reasoning made the Second Impact suspicious.

The existence of a rogue Nak's ship was possible, but Khan inevitably thought about conspiracies. He had learnt how strict the nobles were, so the Second Impact could have been a punishment for his parents' unauthorized union.

Of course, the fact that the Second Impact had happened when Khan was five went against that hypothesis. A noble family would have acted far before that if they were against his parents. Still, Khan felt the need to keep that option open to avoid missing details.

With Elizabeth gone, Bret had done anything in his power to save Khan, and no one seemed to know exactly what. Both Raymond and Professor Parver had confirmed that, but Khan couldn't exclude other possibilities. Someone inside the Global Army or families could be aware of Bret's methods.

Professor Parver's vague words also added value to Raymond's interest in Khan. According to the former, first-generation Tainted humans always went crazy, which could hinder eventual studies.

Khan didn't know why they were special, but the Professor's revelation was something he could agree on.

'Could the nightmares make someone crazy?' Khan wondered as the car headed toward the second district. 'They definitely made me crazy.'

Khan realized that the Professor was probably talking about a different type of crazy. Yet, when he added his father's unknown procedure and the nightmares' secrets scenes uncovered on Nitis, he could find a few explanations.

'What if he suppressed part of the nightmares to help me retain my sanity?' Khan questioned in his mind. 'What if my current nightmares were always supposed to be their true version?'

The other Tainted humans probably didn't experience the Nak's hand's influence, but no one had suppressed their mutations either. Maybe, Khan would have obtained his current appearance and nightmares after the Second Impact if Bret didn't intervene.

'But, why?' Khan asked himself while looking at his palms. 'The following generations still get the mutations. Even Professor Nickton said that I'd pass them down. Unless there is something specific that only the first retain.'

Khan saw the nightmares as a possible answer once again. They didn't only weigh on his sanity. They also carried a map or, rather, a picture of a system. Maybe, Raymond and others inside the Global Army were after it.

There were other possible answers, and Khan realized his unique position after considering them. The following generations could probably get the nightmares, but that would likely lead to madness too. Maybe, he was special because he could retain his sanity without forsaking that crucial mutation.

Khan obviously knew that his idea was frail since he had built it on guesses and vague clues. Getting a single thing wrong could make everything fall apart. However, that was the best he could come up with after being enlisted for more than three years.

The situation wouldn't look too bad if Khan had a few concrete answers, but no one wanted to give them. He had even found possible leads, but they were impossible to pursue for now. The families' upper echelon, the nobles, and the top of the Global Army were out of his reach, and his other options were far from ideal.

'Raymond is a big no,' Khan sighed. 'He can trick me too easily. Lord Vegner is probably connected to him, so I don't know. Is Professor Parver really the best I have?'

Khan couldn't help but find the situation annoying, and landing in front of his building only deepened that feeling. He realized he wasn't alone as soon as he stepped on the sidewalk. Another car was there, and the luxury it reeked revealed the owner's identity.

"Captain, the Headmistress-," The car's pilot tried to call Khan when he saw him heading toward the other vehicle, but the glare that landed on his vision made him shut up. The gesture had generated an instinctive fear that made him unable to speak.

Khan reached the second car and entered it without bothering to knock. His expression didn't change when he found Lucian and a few soldiers inside, but his mana had a different reaction, which he managed to suppress for now.

"I'm sorry I couldn't call earlier, Captain," Lucian announced. "Lauter's outpost kept me quite busy."

"Just go," Khan stated as his gaze fell on the window. "We'll talk once we land."

Lucian smiled and gave the order to the pilot, who set off to head toward the private location used in the previous meeting. Lucian made his guards stay behind when the vehicle landed, and Khan followed him into a familiar private room.

"I think apologies are in order," Lucian exclaimed as soon as he sat at an interactive table. "I wanted to warn you, but the timing was more important."

Khan sat on the other side of the table without uttering a single word. He could almost hear his mood worsening before Lucian's casual behavior. The explosion was imminent. It only needed a trigger.

"Still, things went perfectly," Lucian laughed. "The video went viral in mere minutes."

Lucian showed a satisfied smile, but his expression froze when the interactive table flew on his chest and slammed him into the wall. The impact made him unable to breathe for a few seconds, and the hand that reached his throat prolonged that state.

Khan held Lucian's throat in his right hand and pulled him out of the table to slam him into the wall again. He was lifting him with a single arm, and his fingers didn't move even when Lucian tried to open them.

Monica could make Khan feel better about the video's comments, but those emotions remained. The previous reasoning had also put him in a bad mood, which fueled those extreme reactions.

Truth be told, Khan acknowledged the value of Lucian's actions. He simply hated to be a pawn in someone else's game. That had already happened with Raymond, and Professor Parver looked ready to imitate him, so Khan decided to vent on Lucian.

Lucian's training kicked in. He calmed down and lowered his arms to pour mana into them, but Khan tightened his grip and disturbed his concentration. His cold glare remained on Lucian for the entire time, and the latter finally experienced some genuine fear.

"Snap your fingers," Khan threatened, "And I'll snap your neck."

Khan softened his grip when he saw that Lucian understood his situation. Some air managed to reach his lungs at that point, but Khan didn't put him down. He kept him on the wall as new threats formed inside his mind.

"What is it?" Khan questioned. "Did you think that an infusion put you at my level?"

Lucian's eyes had long since widened. The situation felt unreal. Khan's reaction was way too extreme, and inspecting the room only reminded Lucian that the area had no cameras.

"You left your guards outside," Khan continued, "And money can't save you here."

"K-Khan!" Lucian whispered, but Khan didn't let go. Too many people were trying to use him, and he couldn't stay put anymore. Lucian's case was also worse since many of his ploys involved Monica.

"I thought I was the monster of Nippe 2," Khan scoffed. "Isn't that what you wanted everyone to see? If you wish, I can show you the monster."

"Y-you can't-," Lucian tried to argue, but Khan tightened his grip to interrupt the line.

"I can't what?" Khan asked. "No one can stop me here. Before you get any ideas, your guards wouldn't make any difference either."

Softening the grip allowed Lucian to breathe again, and he didn't hesitate to speak. "Will you ruin your life just to punish me?"

There was some scorn in Lucian's tone, which told Khan how he had yet to understand the nature of the situation. Luckily for Khan, he only had to be honest to clear that confusion.

"Do you think I care about my life?" Khan chuckled. "I killed children for Liiza. I can kill you for Monica."

Lucian didn't want to believe those words, but Khan's eyes weren't lying. That was a crazy truth he had to accept. If things really went south, Khan was willing to go far and beyond.

Khan waited until Lucian's mana released the desired scent before voicing one last threat. "No more games."

Lucian could only nod, and Khan let him go afterward. Lucian's legs gave up as soon as they touched the floor, but Khan ignored that crash and returned to his seat.

A few coughs resounded in the room. Lucian took some seconds to calm down and clear his throat, and a worried expression followed. Yet, he quickly suppressed it to sit on an empty chair.

"You could have just told me," Lucian complained, stretching his neck to disperse the soreness caused by Khan's grip. "Though, I'm glad we are finally speaking openly."

"Do you think it's wise to joke right now?" Khan wondered.

"I'm not joking," Lucian stated, pulling the table closer to open one of its drawers. "We can't be allies if we keep holding back our words."

Khan's attack had shattered the glasses in the drawers, but the bottle had survived, and Lucian drank from it. He even handed it to Khan once he was done.

"You have some crazy in you," Khan admitted while taking a long sip from the bottle. "I just threatened to kill you, and you talk about being allies."

"I'm a proud descendant of the Hencus family," Lucian declared. "I'd be unworthy of my name if I let this much scare me away."

Khan had to admit that some respect had appeared inside him. Lucian had stones.

"What?" Lucian asked. "Did you think I'd run away?"

"I only wanted to make my position clear," Khan revealed. "What happened afterward wasn't my problem."

"I understand," Lucian stated. "I won't act on my own anymore. You have my word."

"I don't know how much it's worth," Khan openly mocked before changing the topic. "So, the video was your first move. What's your grand plan, and how does it involve Monica?"

"It's quite simple, really," Lucian snickered. "Your value already skyrocketed due to the video. You only need to get closer to a different family to force the Solodrey's hand."

"Another family?" Khan asked. "Do you mean yours?"

"Oh, no," Lucian shook his head. "I'd lose face if you got close to mine just to return to the Solodrey. You need someone you can abandon, someone you can afford to offend."

"I'll think about it," Khan replied as ideas already formed in his mind. "What then?"

"You get close to them," Lucian explained, "You keep increasing your value, and you wait for the Solodrey family to make their move."

"What if they don't?" Khan questioned.

"I'll give you another mission," Lucian revealed. "It probably won't come directly from me, but it will give you another chance to show your strength. Of course, a second video will reach the network at that point."

Lucian wanted to make the Solodrey family scared of losing priority over Khan, which could work. However, there was a key aspect that Lucian still needed to explain.

"What's in it for you?" Khan asked.

"I already got my outpost," Lucian responded. "This friendly relationship is another big reward. If something happens, I'll come to you as a friend and ask for your help."

"What if I ignore you?" Khan wondered. "Will we go back on veiled threats?"

"Ca-," Lucian began to speak before choosing to use different words. "Khan, you can threaten me all you want, but I know you at least try to do the right thing."

"How is plotting against my girlfriend's family the right thing?" Khan mocked himself.

"I call that normality," Lucian laughed. "Welcome to the political game. I hope you enjoy the ride."

Khan and Lucian exhausted their topics at that point. They took a few more sips from the bottle but eventually decided to leave. It was getting late anyway, and Khan couldn't stay outside for too long.

The arrival in the building's main hall put Khan into a pensive state once again. Lucian's plan was reasonable, but Khan could play with that. He could establish a game within the game.

If Khan accepted Professor Parver's offer, he would grow closer to the Global Army without risking offending other families. Moreover, he would also build connections that might help him against powerful forces if necessary. He would grow independent while sticking to Lucian's plan.

The idea lingered in Khan's mind during the climb in the elevator, but his actions against Lucian eventually reappeared. He felt better after venting, but some negativity remained. He had shown his true face, and hiding it didn't feel right.

The flat didn't agree with Khan's mood. The cheerfulness that filled the symphony invaded him as soon as the elevator opened and almost washed away his negative feelings.

A series of steps resounded through the flat before three faces appeared past the elevator area. George, Anita, and Monica showed broad smiles before shouting simultaneously. "Surprise!"

Khan was at a loss for words, but Monica didn't hesitate to approach him to explain the situation. She had worn a new dress, and the sight almost made Khan unable to hear the words she whispered to his ear.

"It's to celebrate your mission," Monica revealed. "There is even a cake."

"Ask him where he keeps the good bottles," George called while Khan was still busy looking at Monica in disbelief.

George's words put a smile on Khan's face, and Monica grew happier seeing that. She kissed his cheek before taking his elbow and voicing a request he couldn't refuse. "Shall we go?"

Khan nodded and let Monica pull him. He couldn't help but feel happy, and the return of his previous thoughts didn't ruin his mood anymore. They only filled him with a latent resolve. He knew he would burn the entire world to protect those smiling faces.