

Chaos' Heir 531

Chapter 531 Pain

Khan didn't know how long had passed since the beginning of the battle, and keeping track of the flow of time was simply impossible. Wayne was a formidable opponent that didn't allow distractions. A single mistake would result in broken bones or worse.

Still, one thing was clear. Khan had to hurry if he hoped to do anything about the bomb and his companions. It was probably too late for the weapon already, but he would be fine with the terrorist attack as long as he saved his friends.

Khan and Wayne stared at each other for a few seconds. Wayne merely smiled while Khan did his best to gain as much information as possible in that short time.

Wayne's element was a mystery. Khan had his hypotheses, but they were useless in that situation. He simply didn't have time to find and exploit specific weaknesses.

Instead, Wayne's body was something Khan could study and understand in a short time. The darkness inside him and the mana flowing through his flesh were bright lights in Khan's eyes, and they brought their fair share of surprises.

Khan had cut Wayne twice but had failed to pierce his bones both times. The wound on his chest had severed the flesh, but the rib cage had protected the organs underneath. Wayne had also stopped the attack before the knife could touch his throat, making the injury far from fatal.

The same went for the wound on Wayne's left arm, even if the knife had cut deeper there. A chunk of flesh hung from Wayne's forearm, ready to fall. Khan could almost see the bone. Yet, Wayne's dark tracksuit got in the way, limiting Khan's inspection to the lack of leaking blood.

The previous exchanges made that lack of blood easier to believe. Khan had cut all kinds of flesh but had never found something as unique as Wayne. His body wasn't only unreasonably strong and tough. It also showed functions that normal human beings shouldn't have.

Khan's perspective was quite broad. He had met multiple species, and his very body was unusual. Accepting that Wayne's flesh didn't stick to human standards was the easy part. Instead, understanding its limits was hard, especially when it seemed that his muscles instinctively reacted to incoming threats.

A realization quickly spread in Khan's mind. The amount of mana inside Wayne's body and its flow created a precise and sad picture. Even after the transformation, Khan couldn't hope to overpower Wayne, and that annoying element seemed to lock him out of any spell-related approach.

"Are you hesitating, brother?" Wayne asked. "Don't tell me that you built your fame running away."

There was a time when Khan would have considered that option. After all, survival instincts were a core part of every living being, and even someone as hurt as Khan still experienced their effects.

However, Khan dreaded a different kind of pain over his own death. He had lived the life of a survivor who lost everything and would do anything to avoid returning to it. Dying was almost easy when he compared the emptiness of his nightmares to the recent period's happiness.

"You talk about fame," Khan coldly said, "Feelings, light, and darkness. It's time you learnt about desperation."

Wayne laughed, but Khan materialized in front of him before he could say anything. He lifted his glowing knife, aiming directly at the center of Wayne's rib cage, but the debris under him moved, making his feet dig into the rocks and disrupting his balance.

The mana around the knife also lost power, but Khan pushed it forward anyway. The weapon missed its initial target but stabbed Wayne's left side right under the rib cage. The blade dug deep into the flesh before the muscles tightened their grip on it, stopping its advance.

Wayne appeared unperturbed by that new injury. Excitement shone on his face as he spread his arms. The broad movement opened the wound on his chest and revealed his rib cage, but Khan ignored that sight to focus on his mana.

Khan let go of the knife when he felt the obstruction of Wayne's muscles. Mana gathered in his palm right afterward, transforming into a flare that tried to take the shape of a spear. Another tremor arrived, destabilizing and attempting to disperse that energy, but Khan doubled down on his attack.

Wayne was closing his arms, aiming his open palms at Khan's head. Yet, the purple-red mana between the two grew blinding, making them unable to see. Khan even sent more energy to that unstable flare, triggering an explosion before Wayne could complete his attack.

A bright pillar replaced the two men, flinging them away in opposite directions. Wayne quickly tried to restore his balance, sliding on the rocky ground to stop his momentum. However, his abdomen couldn't accumulate strength, making him fall headfirst into the ground.

Wayne planted his hands on the rocks to stand up, but his body went against that move. He couldn't send power into those muscles, so he relied on his back to sit on his knees, revealing the reason behind his recent failures.

One peek at the torso told Wayne everything he needed to know. Charred, fuming, and missing flesh filled his vision. His abdomen and chest had become a mess of injuries, making certain moves anatomically impossible.

Wayne didn't let that damage discourage him. His back and legs were still fine, and he would keep fighting even if his waist fell off. However, a fuming figure suddenly materialized before him, and its horrid state left him speechless.

Khan had deployed the [Blood Shield] before the detonation, but his skin had still paid a hefty price. Clotted blood vessels covered his right arm, torso, and face but didn't hide his injuries. His skin had disappeared in many areas, and even his head carried the consequences of the scorching attack.

"What?" Wayne gasped when he saw Khan stretching his right arm to summon his mana again. A tremor tried to disperse it, but that only made Khan send more energy, ultimately generating another explosion.

Wayne's face burned as he rolled backward. The explosion wasn't as intense as the previous one, but he lacked the muscles to interrupt the force it generated.

As for Khan, he also flew backward. His eyebrows, eyelashes, and hair burned as he slid on the rocky ground. He couldn't move his fingers, and pain assaulted his mind from every direction. However, he didn't falter. His legs still worked, and nothing else mattered.

The rocks' friction force eventually stopped Wayne. He found himself belly up, with the knife stabbed deeper into his side. His body was mostly unresponsive, but he could see Khan accelerating toward the underground passage.

Azure mana flared out of Wayne's body, enveloping his entire figure into thin threads that became invisible once the technique was complete. Then, his back oddly bent upward, allowing him to plant his feet on the ground and straighten his position.

The underground passage was about to enter Khan's range when a bright figure appeared on his right. Wayne was running at full speed as if all his muscles were still intact, and a quick calculation told Khan that he would intercept him.

Wayne wasn't actually shining. That was only a side-effect of Khan's superior vision. He could see the mana around him replacing his muscles and allowing him to move normally. Those threads were clearly part of an incredible non-elemental spell, but Khan only took notice of their lack of defensive features.

Khan lifted his fuming hand to summon mana. The spear managed to take shape at that time, but another annoying tremor escaped Wayne when he jumped forward.

The glowing weapon lost its stability, threatening to detonate on the spot. Khan tried to wield it, but his fingers didn't answer, so he limited himself to pushing it in Wayne's direction.

The spear exploded, generating a violent pillar that sent the two men flying away. Khan resorted to the [Blood Shield] to protect himself from fatal damage, and Wayne crossed his arms for a similar purpose. However, his long hair and eyebrows burned under the heat released by the attack.

Khan flew, lightly tapping on the air a few times to land comfortably on the rocks. He could use his martial arts to their fullest when Wayne was distracted and far away, but his body rebelled, generating violent coughs that made him bend forward.

"I see, I see!" Wayne's hoarse laugh resounded from the other side of the dispersing bright mana. "You are amazing, brother. I'm feeling so much I might explode!"

Khan forced himself to peek at the dispersing mana while coughs still controlled his throat. The radiant energy vanished, revealing Wayne's standing figure walking toward him. His condition was far poorer than Khan's. Some of his organs were literally in the open, but only a small amount of blood escaped his body, and none of that damage hindered his movements.

"However," Wayne continued, spreading his arms and showing even more of his hideous state, "Luck is my reign. You shouldn't have challenged me in that field."

"So," Khan coughed one last time, "It was luck."

"Bad luck, to be precise," Wayne declared, his voice carrying the seriousness of his injuries. "Things go bad because I exist, but you are showing me new heights!"

"New heights," Khan scoffed, straightening his position. "You are so clueless."

"We'll see about that," Wayne shouted. "Come! Fight away the pain and show me more!"

"Pain," Khan sighed, a clicking growl fusing with his voice. "You have no idea what pain really is."

Chapter 532 Memories

Wayne's mana reacted to Khan's statement, sending more tremors into the environment. The symphony shook, causing consequences that even an expert in the field would struggle to believe.

A wave crashed on the distant island's shores, sending drops everywhere. The wind picked up one of them and flew it toward Khan and Wayne's location, releasing it between them.

The drop fell on the ground, hitting a crack that dug deep into a rock. The event made the item break, destabilizing the balance of that firm surface and causing faint movements that only scanners could pick up.

Khan followed the event through his senses. He saw the movements stretching toward him, destabilizing the ground under his feet. He lightly pressed on his right foot, sending a rock into the surface to remove his foothold.

The event didn't affect the battle. It was too slight to have any effect when the two men were so distant from each other. Yet, noticing it finally shed light on the power of Wayne's element. It was almost limitless in an environment that could break in his favor.

Khan absorbed that information and put it in the back of his mind. The range of Wayne's element was shocking, but Khan couldn't experience that emotion now. His mind only had room for the joint power of his coldness and wildness.

Still, one detail was worth noticing, and Khan didn't miss it. The statement had intensified Wayne's influence. Maybe, there was a connection between his view of Khan and his power. That hypothesis would also fit with his burning interest in Khan.

"Did I make you angry?" Khan didn't hesitate to employ his talking skills. Clicking cries still fused with his voice, but nothing happened while he continued to talk. "Let me guess. The experiments on you hurt a lot, and now you feel entitled to unload that pain on everyone else."

"Not everyone else," Wayne laughed. "For once, I found a worthy target, and my element finally agrees."

Khan's eyes almost lit up at the arrival of that second clue. He knew a lot about unruly elements, and Wayne seemed to be in a similar situation, which created an opportunity he wouldn't miss.

"Was it worse than this?" Khan questioned, nodding in the direction of Wayne's torso.

"Much worse," Wayne exclaimed, seemingly excited to discuss that topic. "My muscles burned for weeks afterward, and they spoke loud words directly into my brain when I slept. I lost count of how many times I changed."

Khan didn't know much about that field. He could imagine the existence of terrible training programs meant to enhance a soldier's power. Yet, the specifics escaped his mind.

However, Khan had experienced similar pain, and his transformation had worsened it. His nightmares were his greatest curse, and he planned to use them as a weapon now.

"Do you know what my mana thinks about that?" Khan scoffed, stretching his arm to summon mana. The tremors tried to get in his way, but his energy released a clicking grow that grew louder and louder until a purple-red cloud materialized in his palm.

Khan didn't need to add anything. The clicking growl released by the cloud was the best answer he could muster, and Wayne's smile brightened at that sight. Still, his darkness also intensified, making him accelerate to shoot at full speed toward Khan.

The cloud wasn't necessarily Khan's ally in that situation, but they still shared deep feelings. They both wanted to eliminate the man blocking their path, so the spell didn't hesitate to fly toward Wayne.

A wild clash unfolded. Wayne faced the cloud head-on, closing his palms on it to prevent the impact. However, the spell was almost formless. It accepted Wayne's hands in its insides and let the chaos element do its work.

Wayne laughed loudly, uncaring of the chaos element turning his skin into a spiderweb of wounds. He kept pressing on the cloud as if his attack could squash it. That was theoretically impossible, but the tremors released by his body ended up affecting the spell.

The cloud cried in anger, expanding over Wayne's arms and reaching for his chest. The chaos element destroyed many of the thin threads, making Wayne's attack lose power, but more materialized and restored his strength.

"Did you catch it?" Khan questioned, appearing on Wayne's right with a fully formed chaos spear in his palm. "It thinks that you can't match our pain."

Khan pushed the spear toward Wayne before retreating at full speed. The spell was already unstable, so the first tremor it encountered triggered an explosion that engulfed Wayne and the cloud.

A bright pillar grew toward the sky and illuminated the area, filling it with its purple-red light. Some rocks melted and shattered under the power released by the spell, and winds blew in every direction.

Khan was ready to head toward the underground passage, but a fuming figure flew out of the pillar, shooting toward him. He tried to summon his mana, but the tremors in his surroundings told him that nothing would work. Even walking would trigger Wayne's bad luck and put him in a disadvantageous position.

Staying still and preparing for the imminent clash was the only way to contain Wayne's element, so Khan did exactly that. The cloud had disappeared to fuse with the pillar, so he was alone against the fuming body descending toward him.

Khan half-crouched and half-turned, stretching his right arm forward. His fingers didn't listen to his commands, but that was still fine. The fuming body crashed on him, but he was ready to receive it.

Wayne stretched his arms forward, planting them on Khan's shoulders. Still, the latter let that impact push him backward, making the two men fall and roll on the ground.

The surface had rocks of all sizes and shapes, but all the sharp ones ended on Khan's back during the roll. When the two men stopped, Wayne found himself sitting over Khan's abdomen, and his excitement skyrocketed as he lifted his arms.

"What pain?" Wayne laughed, joining his fists to prepare his attack. "You lived in the light, found love and fame. You can't speak about pain!"

Wayne was too entranced by the conversation to notice Khan's hand on the knife on his side. Khan's fingers didn't really work, but his thumb could create a weak grip, and the weapon's sharpness handled the rest.

While Wayne lowered his arms, Khan slashed the knife upward, sliding it over his rib cage to aim for his neck. The weak grip worked in his favor, preventing the weapon from diving too deep into Wayne's remaining muscles and avoiding their hindrance.

Wayne couldn't focus on his attack anymore. The knife was about to hit his throat, so he manipulated his technique to make his back arc unnaturally. The sudden movement made him escape the weapon but also gave Khan an opportunity.

The slash missed, but Khan promptly let go of the knife to perform a sharp movement. His palm ended on the handle's tip, and he pressed it to stab the weapon in Wayne's chest.

The knife stabbed Wayne's deeply, puncturing his right lung and halting his breathing for a second. Khan used that chance to arc his back and send Wayne to the ground. He ended up on top of him, and his stretched hand already had mana flowing out of it.

"I'm talking about nightmares," Khan explained as mana gathered on his palm. "Whenever I sleep, I relive the Second Impact with all its death and pain."

Wayne's smile finally shook. Surprise flowed into his expression, but the purple-red light soon hid it. An explosion unfolded between the two men, sending Khan flying away and digging Wayne deeper into the ground.

Khan almost fainted. The pain from his burning flesh kept him awake, but his body was reaching its limits. He had successfully protected his limbs and fingers once again, but his heavy chest became a hindrance.

Landing on the ground worsened Khan's condition. He opened his mouth to breathe, but no air flowed through his throat. His body was paying the price of abusing the [Blood Shield], and only time could solve that situation.

The mana helped. Khan's energy responded to his emotions, boiling and forcing his body to recover quickly. His chest slowly lightened, allowing him to struggle to his feet. His balance felt off, but he still stepped forward, using all his awareness to eye the underground passage.

However, Wayne's element was as troublesome as always. A rock under Khan's suddenly moved, making him slip and fall to the ground. He quickly forced himself onto his knees, but his vision grew blurry, and his senses depicted a sad scenery.

"Since when?" Wayne's hoarse voice came from the explosion's glowing mana lingering on the ground.

"Since the Second Impact," Khan sighed. "Whether I faint or sleep, I experience it again."

"You can't take a break," Wayne laughed, the mana completely dispersing to show his sorry figure. "I guess you have it bad too."

"We all have it bad," Khan scoffed. He tried to stand up but swayed to his right, having to plant his arm on the ground to remain on his knees.

The darkness inside Wayne retreated, and his element's effects waned. The tremors stopped, and the symphony regained its natural flow. Yet, Khan couldn't find any happiness in that sight. That change was too late to have any use.

"I don't know who they are," Wayne revealed, a cough interrupting his explanation. "My family is involved, but I don't know the full extent of the organization."

"Nobles?" Khan asked, doing his best to remain awake.

"On my father's side," Wayne explained. "My mother was from a small family, but they killed her when she tried to claim nobility."

"And they turned you into a weapon," Khan understood.

"You had it better," Wayne stated. "The nobles accepted your parents, but your mother's death made them cut any connection."

"Was my mother a noble?" Khan questioned.

"Yes," Wayne confirmed. "Though I don't know from which family. They just shared that information with me to fuel my resolve."

"I knew it," Khan chuckled. It felt good to be right, no matter how pointless that information was now.

"The five minutes are almost up," Wayne mentioned. "The bomb should explode soon."

"I figured," Khan sighed. "Do me a favor. Let me enjoy a silent death." Gét latest *novel* chapters on *nov(e)l*bj/n(.)/om

Wayne surprisingly complied, and Khan closed his eyes to immerse himself in his thoughts. His pain vanished as his life flowed through his vision.

'It has always been impossible, wasn't it?' Khan mocked himself.

It felt annoying to fail after suffering for so long, but Khan could accept it. He had done his best, killing, lying, struggling, and even performing political acts. However, he remained a single man in the middle of immense organizations that didn't want him to uncover their secrets.

Khan simply couldn't find the strength to blame himself. In another life, he would have gotten closer to the Nak. He would have even reached them if he had more support. Yet, the reality was very different, forcing him to make peace with his desperation.

Khan's thoughts inevitably moved to Monica. He hated that he had basically killed her. Still, those were his last moments, and some selfishness arrived. He would have loved to die in her arms if possible, but the two had the chance to hold hands before the teleport. That was more Khan believed to deserve, so he was fine with that conclusion.

As the seconds slowly flowed, another thought popped into Khan's mind. Long white hair flowing in the cold wind and glowing eyes able to pierce any fog filled his vision. He could see a dark and aloof face breaking into a smile as soon as it looked at him.

'[Liiza],' Khan thought as a nostalgic coldness washed over his body.

Khan loved Monica. He was certain about that. His thoughts about Liiza came from his current selfishness. He could accept failing to find the Nak. He couldn't have stopped Monica, and the two

had a decent goodbye. His only regret involved Liiza. He would have given anything to see her one last time.

Loving memories invaded Khan. He recalled the coldness of Liiza's kisses, how she slipped her hands under his clothes, and her cute blush. Their separation had been unfair, and Khan couldn't find peace because of that.

The ground began to shake, disturbing Khan's memories. He could feel the end growing close and hoped his love could reach Monica during those final moments. His eyes opened, almost searching for her in that blue environment, but he only saw his opponent standing a few meters away.

"It's coming," Wayne declared, almost knowing what Khan was thinking.

Khan looked at the sky. He wasn't ready to go, but that was a death he could accept. The earthquake intensified, and he almost closed his eyes to bathe in the imminent explosion. Yet, a sudden burst of dark and red gas in the distance distracted him.

Wayne and Khan pointed their eyes toward the big cloud forming in the distance. It almost seemed that something had erupted in that location, sending fuming and scorching boulders into the sky. Some darkness replaced the overall blueness, and Khan couldn't help but smile when he realized what was happening.

"Is that the bomb?" Wayne asked.

"No," Khan chuckled. "That's my girlfriend."

Chapter 533 Volcano

After the teleport, Monica awakened in complete darkness. Rocks pressed on her face and right side, and her head hurt like during a light hangover. Yet, memories of the recent events quickly invaded her, forcing her to put aside the discomfort and straighten her position.

Monica's first instinct was to call for Khan, but he would have reacted faster than her in that situation. She could immediately realize that he wasn't there, and making noise wasn't ideal when she had yet to understand where she was.

While standing up, Monica came into contact with more rocky surfaces. A whole wall was on her right, and stretching her arms upward revealed a short ceiling. She was in a tunnel of some sort, and the lack of sounds in her surroundings told her she was alone.

'Did the teleport split us?' Monica wondered, drawing her phone to check the time. Only a minute had passed since the teleport, but the device showed more important news. The current location had no connection to the network.

'This is a hideout,' Monica quickly understood, storing her phone and closing her eyes to summon her mana.

Monica's eyes burned a little when mana gathered there. A blue color took over and gained different hues when her eyelids opened. Her technique dispersed the darkness, adding shades of azure to the world in her vision.

The shades were quite detailed, allowing Monica to differentiate among rocks, ceiling, and ground. The technique also granted a good sense of distance, effectively making her able to see in the darkness.

The technique confirmed Monica's initial guess. She had ended up in a narrow tunnel, but the area didn't have other clues. She could see the passage branching out in the distance, but nothing added information about her actual location.

Inspecting and feeling the rocks didn't help either. Monica accepted that finding out where she was had the priority, but her plan stretched past that. Her headache didn't make her forget about the crisis.

Reuniting with Khan and the others would be ideal, but the bomb posed a threat Monica couldn't ignore. She couldn't just abandon the issue to follow her feelings. Actually, part of her wanted to solve everything to make things easier for Khan.

'The bomb must be nearby,' Monica guessed, 'Which means specialists.'

Get your *favorite novels* at [no/v/e/lbin\(.\)com](http://no/v/e/lbin(.)com)

Monica didn't know about the timer, but her teleport had been scuffed, so it stood to reason that the bomb had suffered a similar fate. The area had to have personnel charged with retrieving and managing the weapon, and she planned to find them.

Slow and careful steps unfolded as Monica made her way through the tunnel. She helped herself with her hands and prioritized remaining silent in her advance. Her technique gave her a big advantage in that darkness, and she planned to retain it.

Monica halted her steps when she reached the first branches. The tunnel split into four almost-identical channels, and her quick inspection didn't reveal anything valuable. Still, she followed the most reasonable approach, walking into the passage that grew bigger in the distance.

The approach paid off. The tunnel grew larger until Monica spotted faint light from a branch in the distance. She deactivated her night vision, and the white color of that illumination confirmed its artificial nature.

Monica took a deep breath and half-crouched, slowly advancing and minding her steps to avoid slipping on the rocky ground. Her training allowed her to be perfectly silent, and peeking into the illuminated branch revealed a completely different environment.

The illuminated and short tunnel ended in a vast underground hall. A smooth and clear floor replaced the rocky surface to create a bright environment full of consoles. Monica even spotted a circular platform from her position, and faint, distant voices reached her ears from time to time.

Nevertheless, the man standing at the tunnel's edge soon captured Monica's attention. He stood mere meters from her, smoking a cigarette while keeping his eyes on the hall. He appeared in the middle of his break, but his position turned him into a perfect target.

Monica inspected the man and the area past him for a few seconds. The soldier looked in his forties, and nothing about his clothes revealed his level. Still, his smoke was almost over, and the underground hall didn't seem to have other guards nearby, so she chose to strike.

The man breathed the smoke deep into his lungs, doing his best to appreciate the faint intoxicating sensation rising into his brain. He even stretched his left arm lazily, but his throat suddenly stopped working.

The soldier began to panic, but that worsened his situation. Only faint grunts and smoke left his mouth while he lowered his gaze. A hand had appeared before his throat, and its middle finger was pressing at its base, interrupting his breathing ability.

The man tried to move his left arm but found it stuck too. Monica was holding his shoulder with a precise grip that prevented any movement. The soldier could still use his other limbs, but Monica pressed her middle finger deeper into his throat before he could get any strange ideas.

"Come with me," Monica whispered, taking a better look at the hall. The underground area had two more soldiers, but they were too busy with the consoles to look at the tunnel.

Monica pressed harder on the man's throat and pulled him back. That light struggle gave her an idea about the soldier's physical strength, placing him among second-level warriors. She could easily overpower him, and nothing stopped her from leading him deeper into the tunnel.

After crossing a corner, Monica delivered two precise kicks on the back of the man's knees. The soldier fell on the rocky surface, and she kept her finger on his throat to prevent any loud cry.

"Where are we?" Monica questioned, pressing on the man's left shoulder to keep him on his knees. She also softened the pressure on his throat to let him speak but continued to apply enough strength to feel threatening.

"L-Lauter," The man stammered.

Monica knew as much as Khan about the Harbor's system, so she reached the same conclusions, which made her anxious. Lauter was a good target for a terrorist attack, meaning the bomb would probably explode there.

"Where is the bomb?" Monica continued. "How do I disarm it?"

"I-I don't know," The man gasped for air that the finger on his throat continued to block.

"Answer me," Monica threatened.

"The teleport," The man tried to gulp, only to be interrupted by the finger. "The teleport malfunctioned. Soldiers went looking for it."

Hope invaded Monica. If those criminals had yet to retrieve the bomb, she might be able to disarm it. Her knowledge was the only issue since she was ignorant about the topic.

"Who is in charge of the bomb?" Monica questioned. "Who knows how to disarm it?"

The man didn't answer. To Monica's surprise, the soldier directly closed his eyes and relaxed. His fear seemed to vanish, which made her press harder on his throat.

"I asked you a question!" Monica stated, slightly raising her voice to convey danger.

"The teleport started the timer," The soldier revealed. "A quarter of the planet will vanish in a few minutes."

Monica froze. She didn't have Khan's senses, but the soldier's apparent calm spoke for his honesty. That wasn't the behavior of a man doing anything in his power to escape the situation. That was faith and deep loyalty.

"There must be someone who can stop it," Monica didn't give up.

"Maybe," The man chuckled. "Maybe not."

Monica did her best to remain calm and reviewed what she had learned. A discrepancy in that story soon appeared, and she didn't hesitate to mention it.

"Why would soldiers go look for a bomb set to explode?" Monica asked. "What's the point of finding it?"

"We are the Hive," The man chanted, wearing a peaceful smile, "And we are everywhere."

"I don't care what you are!" Monica shouted, flicking her middle finger into the man's throat to make him feel pain. "What's the point of finding it?"

The man coughed, but Monica promptly stopped his breathing again. She even showed her face to convey her resolve. Her expression told the man that she would do anything in her power to get the answers she sought.

"That place," The soldier gasped for air, pointing toward the hall. "That place ensures the best blast radius."

Monica couldn't help but freeze again. According to that story, stopping the bomb was impossible. She could only limit its destructive power, which was probably pointless considering its range.

"Josh, what's happening?" A male voice echoed through the tunnel while Monica was immersed in her thoughts. Steps also resounded, getting closer with each passing second.

Monica didn't know what to do. Escaping that situation seemed impossible. She didn't have any option, but an idea soon appeared. A slim chance that Khan had ended up outside the bomb's range existed. He might also be busy leaving the area, so she wanted to do anything in her power to make things easier for him.

Of course, Monica was simply desperate. She knew Khan would never escape on his own. He wouldn't leave her. He would probably prefer to die with her than survive alone. Still, a slim hope existed, and Monica didn't hesitate to pursue it.

Monica let go of the man's shoulder to slam two fingers on the back of his neck. The soldier gasped before fainting on the spot, and Monica let him go, uncaring of the noise his fall generated.

"Josh?!" The voices in the tunnel grew closer, and the same went for the sounds of steps. Still, Monica faced that threat head-on, crossing the corner and sprinting through the tunnel.

Two soldiers had come looking for the kidnapped man, a third and a second-level warrior. The artificial light shone behind their backs, creating some darkness inside the tunnel, and Monica's sudden appearance left them surprised enough to give her the initiative.

Monica sprinted forward, instantly reaching the two men. The soldier on her right was shorter, so she aimed her stretched fingers at his throat. Meanwhile, the enemy on her left was too tall for that swift attack, so she targeted his knee.

The man on the right became unable to breathe. His throat transformed into a wall that blocked the passage of air. His blood failed to flow, making him light-headed and eventually faint.

Instead, the other man lost control of his left leg, violently slamming one knee on the ground to stabilize his position. He tried to stand up right afterward, but a precise blow landed on the back of his head, making his mind go dark.

Monica briefly looked at the two fainted men before hurrying into the hall. The place was empty, so she approached the console closer to the circular platform to learn more about its functioning, but more voices arrived before she could reach it.

"What was that noise?!" A female voice resounded into the hall.

"Hurry!" A male voice followed, and Monica could only stop in her tracks as a team of six soldiers came out of another passage and fixed their eyes on her.

"What is happening?" One of the two women on the team asked.

"Wait, I know her," A man on the team stated. "She is Monica Solodrey!"

"Miss Solodrey?" A second man questioned.

"She has been all over the news for the past months," A third man declared. "How can you not recognize her?"

"I don't watch the news," The second man shrugged his shoulders.

"Shut up!" The second woman ordered. "Restrain her!"

The team eyed Monica, but she clapped her hands toward them to send a scorching heatwave. The spell engulfed them, but no one retreated. Hair burned, and small flames appeared on a few tracksuits, but the soldiers suffered no significant damage.

"What was that?" One of the men asked.

"Was that a spell?" One of the women questioned. "Wasn't she a third-level warrior?"

"I guess the families truly are overrated," The second man laughed. "How long to the explosion anyway?"

"Fifteen seconds," The second woman revealed after drawing her phone.

"No point fighting," The third man sighed. "The Hive wins."

"That's right!" The second man shouted, eyeing Monica. "Did you see, Miss Solodrey? Your family can't do anything against the Hive!"

The team wanted to laugh, but Monica had closed her eyes. Smoke had also started to emerge from her figure, and its grey color grew darker as the seconds passed.

"I guess I'll die a murderer," Monica sighed, but a smile soon bloomed on her face. "At least I'll be more similar to you."

Monica opened her eyes to look at the team. The latter couldn't help but gasp when they saw the bright red color they radiated. Flames seemed on the verge of coming out of her pupils, but her face carried only love.

"Tell me," Monica voiced as her smile grew sad. "Can you do anything against a volcano?"

Chapter 534 Spirit

George groaned as his senses came back. A light headache invaded his mind and caused dizziness, attempting to disrupt his balance. Yet, the sheath was still in his hands, and he tightened his grip on it to gain awareness of his current strength.

That awareness spread to the rest of George's body. He slightly bent his knees and steadied his legs to stabilize his balance. He also found a tough surface to his left and used it to help himself during that uncomfortable situation.

George kept his eyes closed to focus on the process, but auras eventually touched his senses and forced him to open them. His dizziness made the white artificial light that landed in his view blinding, but only a few seconds had to pass for him to get used to it. Still, the surprises didn't end there.

The artificial illumination shone on a corridor full of metal and rocky columns. The passage itself was narrow, so those hindrances made crossing it quite annoying. The pillars also stood two meters apart, revealing their connection to the ceiling's stability.

Nevertheless, the columns were only part of the problem. A team of seven soldiers between the second and third levels stood behind those pillars, blocking the way forward.

George instinctively leaned backward but found a rocky wall waiting for him. He didn't need to turn to know that advancing was the only way out of the situation, and another groan escaped his mouth when he went over the problems with that approach.

Using a sword in that narrow environment was problematic. A quick inspection told George that he could cut through those pillars, but that would be pointless if the ceiling ended up crumbling on him.

George's senses also warned him about the threat posed by the team. His perception wasn't as accurate as Khan's, but he knew that dealing with so many opponents without his sword would be difficult.

Thoughts about the location and situation barely touched George. He didn't care about where he was. The teleport had happened in enemy territory, so he instantly labeled those soldiers as opponents. Everything else was pointless for now.

"Come with us quietly," The man closest to George stated when he realized that words would reach him, "And no one will get hurt."

"I have a counteroffer," George snorted, pressing his left thumb on the sword's guard to partially sheathe it. "The first who tells me how to deal with the bomb gets to live."

George's mind had already gone battle mode, so his voice carried no sarcasm. However, his face still showed the annoyance of the scuffed teleport, adding a careless vibe that made the soldiers underestimate him.

The man near George glanced at the sword before looking at the two rocky walls at his sides. A quick calculation happened in his mind and gave positive results. Even if George could unsheathe his weapon, the corridor would get in the way of his techniques.

The soldier laughed at that realization, and his companions echoed that cry. George's sudden appearance had initially startled them, but it was now clear they had the upper hand. They would never let him dictate the pace of that encounter.

"Let's just kill him," A woman behind the first soldier suggested. "He is useless to us anyway."

"Do you think a random guy could find the location of the teleport?" The first soldier cursed, glancing at the speaker behind him. "We can interrogate him and share information with the other cell before everything explodes."

"Is the bomb already active?" George questioned, heaving a helpless sigh and scratching the side of his head on the wall. "How is Khan getting into these situations all the time?"

"Listen, boy!" The first soldier shouted, facing George. "Do you know who we are? We are the Hiv-!"

The soldier couldn't finish his line since a dark-silver ethereal sword pierced his forehead, crossing his head. The man died on the spot, and George seized that chance to sprint toward his still-standing corpse.

The rest of the team didn't initially understand what was happening. The white illumination also partially hid the ethereal sword, and the corridor's layout made it hard for the soldiers to notice George's advance.

George had already taken into consideration all of that. His careless behavior didn't make him any less of a master of the battlefield. He had also devised a plan, and that moment of surprise gave him a chance to implement it.

The team peeked past the pillars and got closer to their dead companion when George disappeared behind him. Yet, an ethereal sword pierced the corpse's torso and grew until it reached a woman behind it.

The sword hit the woman at the center of her chest, piercing it to reach her heart. She only had the time to gasp before blood spurted from the wound. She tried to close it with her hands, but her organ had already suffered fatal damage. ALL new chapters on [nov\(e\)lbin\(.\)com](http://nov(e)lbin(.)com)

George had been smart enough to make the sword disappear right after the attack, but the team wasn't completely clueless. Even if some had yet to understand how George was fighting, it was clear that he had become a threat, which required a response.

"Kill him!" One of the soldiers shouted, triggering a chain reaction that made multiple spells fly toward the standing corpse.

Scorching bullets, wind slashes, snakes made of water, and ice shards flew toward the corpse. A rocky worm also grew from the ground and crawled forward to explode into a storm of debris. The attacks made a mess of the end of the tunnel, digging holes into the dead soldier and sending blood in every direction.

George had initially used the corpse as a shield, but the spells quickly pierced it, forcing him to move behind a nearby column. However, that barrier also crumbled, slamming him back at the end of the tunnel.

The storms of attacks didn't end even after cornering George. The explosions had actually lifted enough smoke to hide his features, so the team kept launching spells to ensure his death.

After four rounds of spells, the team finally showed signs of slowing down, and one soldier eventually voiced a loud "Stop!" that interrupted the offensive. Silence broken only by the crackling noises of the rocky surfaces unfolded at that point, forcing everyone to wait for the smoke to disperse.

The silence grew deafening. The tension intensified, and each falling and breaking rock almost made the team resume their offensive. No one dared to advance, but an exchange of gazes soon unfolded, reassuring the most anxious soldiers.

A mere look was enough to remind those soldiers that the bomb was about to explode. Their death was set in stone, so worrying about that intruder was pointless. Even keeping him in that corridor was superfluous, but growing complacent so close to the success of their mission wasn't an option.

Strangely enough, the smoke didn't show any ripple. A breathing body would disturb that slow dispersion, but nothing similar afflicted the grey cloud. Complete stillness filled the tunnel, seemingly hinting at George's death.

Two minutes passed in that situation, eventually dispersing part of the tension. A chuckle even resounded among the team when the smoke grew thin enough to allow the inspection of the tunnel's end.

A standing figure slowly became visible, and the never-ending dispersion of the smoke added more details as the seconds passed. The team could see George lying in the deepest corner of the tunnel, wielding his sheath with both hands while his arms protected his chest and face.

Injuries soon became visible. George's abdomen had a few bloody spots, and the same went for his legs. His arms were no better, showing burns and icy shards still stabbed in his flesh.

The scene reassured the team, but the most experienced among them raised their hands to prevent reckless behavior. George was clearly injured, but his body didn't carry anything fatal. Even a second-level warrior could survive those wounds, and he had already shown to be stronger than that.

The fall of a small rock next to George's shoulder startled the team and distracted them for an instant. Yet, nothing moved afterward, bringing more reassurance. George appeared to have really died, putting an end to that invasion.

Still, a murmur eventually resounded. A faint voice spread through the tunnel, forcing the team to lean forward in an attempt to hear it. It clearly came from George, but no one saw his lips moving.

The voice grew louder, but George remained still. However, that was enough for the team. They understood he was still alive, so they pointed their hands forward and summoned their mana to prepare their next offensive.

Nevertheless, George's lips finally moved, and a firm voice capable of filling the entire corridor escaped them before spells could fly in his direction. "My spirit burns."

Dark-silver flashes replaced the artificial illumination at that point. George performed a series of slashes before his opponents' mana could turn into spells. His sword barely appeared in the open, returning into the sheath as soon as the instantaneous attack ended. His right leg also kicked the wall behind him, pushing him forward to perform a fast sprint.

Everything had been too quick for those soldiers. The slashes and the sprint had barely occupied a few seconds. They managed to react only when George approached them, but their bodies refused to move. Even their mana didn't answer their commands.

George ran as if his life depended on it. He ignored the soldiers, sprinting past them and even bumping into a few to make his way forward. Still, the first impact triggered a chain reaction that spread throughout the corridor and affected the entire team.

The first impact happened with a woman. George slammed on her shoulder to open his path, revealing that her torso wasn't connected to her abdomen. The upper side of her body fell, bringing part of the column behind her down with it.

Rocks fell, generating tremors that caused more reactions in the tunnel. Cuts opened on all the soldiers, pillars, and walls, making everything crumble and aim for the ground.

The ceiling grew unstable and soon caved in. Boulders fell, accumulating on the ground and covering the tunnel. George had to jump to escape a big rock aimed directly at his head, but his speed turned out to be high enough to make him escape the danger.

Everything trembled as George fell to his knees and slid on the rocky ground, ultimately slamming into a wall past the tunnel. He peeked past his shoulder in time to see the collapsed passage stabilizing and transforming into another firm surface. No one would understand that the place used to have a cave, but a detail of its past existence stood at its base.

George's eyes grew colder when he looked at the base of the new wall. A head, an arm, and a pair of shoulders were peeking out of a boulder that fused with the ground. The soldier at the end of the team had fallen backward, allowing part of his body to touch the safe area.

Blood accumulated under the man's head, but George only looked into his eyes. That lifeless gaze full of surprise, fear, and terror was a familiar sight for him. George recalled the battlefield very well, and a conclusion popped into his mind after re-experiencing it.

'I didn't miss it,' George realized, nodding in approval.

A grunt escaped George's mouth at that point. His injuries were very real, and glancing at them made him aware of the copious amount of blood they leaked. He tried to stand up, but his legs had given everything during the last sprint. He needed to rest before being able to move again.

However, an earthquake suddenly invaded the area, making George inspect his surroundings. He was in another illuminated passage, but nothing explained the reason behind those tremors. He knew they weren't his fault, and his brain could only muster one answer.

'What did Khan do now?' George cursed.

Chapter 535 Sparks

A loud thudding noise reached Francis' ears and awakened him from his slumber. A sharp headache welcomed him and made the white artificial illumination hurt his sleepy eyes. He caught a glimpse of a dark figure standing before him, but his stomach soon opposed that effort.

The urge to puke invaded Francis, and he succumbed to it. He opened his mouth only to notice that rocks were standing under it. He instinctively put strength into his arms to push himself away. Still, the struggle intensified the retches, turning his stomach upside down by the time he separated himself from the ground.

Francis puked, but only saliva and gastric fluids escaped his mouth, forming a yellowish puddle on the ground. The uneven rocks tried to push that liquid toward his chest, making him turn to his right to dodge it. Still, the sudden gesture slammed him into a wall, hurting his head in the process.

A painful cry escaped Francis' mouth, but a hand promptly sealed it. The event initially scared him, but calm arrived as his teary vision grew clearer. His breath also stabilized when he recognized Andrew, and memories returned during that break.

Francis recalled everything. The underground hall, the bomb, and the teleport filled his thoughts, bringing awareness about his current situation. A quick inspection of the area also added clues, and noticing the body behind Andrew confirmed most of them.

Andrew and Francis were in a relatively spacious tunnel. The rocks on the ground were quite smooth, and a few metal pillars also stood near the walls to improve the area's stability.

Those details told Francis that the tunnel had seen a lot of action, but the body behind Andrew remained the main attraction. A middle-aged woman lay on the ground a few meters from them, and the blood flowing out of her open mouth hinted at the worst.

"We are in an underground hideout of some sort, sir," Andrew whispered, slowly retracting his hand when he saw that Francis had calmed down. "I took out a criminal who spotted us, but we should remain quiet."

Francis' eyes darted between Andrew and the woman. The latter's weak breathing confirmed that she was still alive, allowing Francis to focus only on his companion. The side effects of the scuffed teleport also waned, dispersing what remained of his anxiety and forcing him to review the situation.

Andrew's explanation had been superfluous. Even while heavily lacking in experience, Francis was a descendant who had received a thorough education in all kinds of fields. He could easily understand the danger and think about appropriate responses. Accepting and employing them was the only problem.

"W-where are we?" Francis stammered before steadying his voice. "Where did we get teleported?"

"I'm not sure, sir," Andrew shook his head, straightening his position and showing wariness. "It's hard to say from here."

Francis wiped his mouth with his sleeve while using his other arm to support himself on the rocky wall. He stood up and inspected his surroundings, but nothing revealed his location. He only knew that the place was dangerous, and the presence of a bomb cleared the rest of his doubts.

"We must leave," Francis declared. "This planet isn't safe."

"Sir, I must prioritize reuniting with Captain Khan," Andrew responded. "His life might be at risk."

"Captain Khan is probably on his way to orbit already!" Francis pointed out.

"Sir, I must remind you to lower your voice," Andrew scolded, placing a finger on his mouth.

"Andrew," Francis called, keeping his voice down, "Captain Khan assigned you to me for this mission."

"Captain Khan ordered me to protect you, sir," Andrew reminded. "I must preserve your life, but accepting your orders isn't part of my duties."

Francis wanted to complain, but looking at Andrew's serious face reminded him of everything that had happened. He could barely call himself a descendant right now. He was at Khan's mercy, with no authority or influence. His very family had agreed to that outcome.

Nevertheless, Francis knew that he was right. Khan was amazing, but a bomb wasn't something people could defeat. Only a specialist could deal with it, and Francis was certain no one in his team belonged to that category.

Running away and warning the superiors was the only reasonable approach. The situation was too big for simple descendants and students. Convincing Andrew was the only issue.

"Andrew," Francis whispered. "Something malfunctioned, or we would still be with the others. You also saw how the bomb reacted to the teleport. That thing might go out of control, so we must leave."

"Sir, leave to where?" Andrew questioned. "Even if we escaped these caves, neither one of us knows how to pilot ships. We must reunite with Captain Khan to get off the planet."

Andrew had raised a reasonable point that Francis didn't consider, but there were other options. The fainted woman near them embodied one of them. The two could simply kidnap a pilot to leave the planet.

Nevertheless, Francis quickly realized that he was being naïve. He didn't know where to look for ships. He wasn't even sure the hideout had any. The bomb was the only certainty.

Francis instinctively went for his pockets and heaved a sigh of relief when he found his phone. A smile even appeared on his face when he saw that the scuffed teleport didn't break the device. Yet, noticing the absence of connection to the network destroyed that temporary hope.

The education received when Francis was still young kicked in. As a descendant, his Masters had taught him how to deal with crises, and his lack of options made developing a plan even easier.

"We risk getting lost if we dive any deeper," Francis warned, recalling to keep his voice down.

"Let's try to resurface first. It will be easier to decide what to do there."

"There might be an enemy base on the surface, sir," Andrew commented.

"That's unlikely," Francis shook his head. "The Harbor's system has never been so full of soldiers. Hiding a base on the surface is impossible with all the attention these criminals have attracted."

"Sir, we might not be in the Harbor's system," Andrew voiced.

"We didn't land in any specific platform," Francis pointed out. "The teleports don't have much range without a connection on the other side. I'm confident we didn't leave the system."

Andrew excelled on the battlefield, but his education was lackluster. He had specialized in a few fields after the Alstair family hired him, but nothing involving teleports. That information was for people with a higher status and the means to purchase it.

After reviewing the suggestion for a bit, Andrew nodded in approval. Francis' idea made enough sense to be worthy of a few attempts. Andrew obviously didn't abandon his priorities but accepted that making a point of the situation would improve his chances of survival and finding Khan.

"Where to, sir?" Andrew eventually stated.

Francis checked both directions, even trying to rely on his nose to find any trace of clear air. Yet, the tunnel didn't carry any enlightening detail. Only one hint existed but was so faint that Francis almost held back from mentioning it.

"The path on the left is slightly elevated," Francis exclaimed. "It's worth checking it out."

Both Andrew and Francis knew that a difference in elevation didn't mean much when technology made artificial gravity possible. However, the absence of clues forced the two men to stick to that option for now.

Francis and Andrew didn't waste time exchanging pointless words. Silence reigned while they made their way through the tunnel, and the arrival of branches made them follow their initial approach. The area didn't have striking clues, so they entered any path that seemed to go upward.

Different thoughts ran through the men's minds during the slow advance. Francis simply wanted to get out of there while Andrew thought about other issues, and his battle experience came in handy.

Andrew had taken out a criminal, so there was a high chance that the previous area had been within the hideout's domain. The lack of similar encounters during the advance seemed to confirm that. Secret organizations usually had patrols and tight security, so their absence meant that he was leaving their influence.

The continuous presence of artificial illumination worked against Andrew's hypothesis, but a change in the environment eventually brought hope. When Andrew peeked past the seventh corner, he noticed an unusual blue color in the distance, something that even the white light couldn't cover.

Clear air also reached the turn, convincing Andrew they had found their destination. He turned to perform a meaningful nod at Francis before crossing the corner and advancing toward the blue light. Francis remained a few meters behind him, but that unusual sight quickly filled him with hope too.

Francis accelerated, closing the distance with Andrew to hurry outside. Yet, Andrew abruptly stopped when he was about to cross the tunnel's edge, and Francis slammed on his back.

"What did you do that for?" Francis complained, but the lack of answers from Andrew told him that something was off. The guard also gulped, highlighting how serious the situation was.

Curiosity overtook Francis, who walked past Andrew to peek at the surface. The tunnel performed a sharp rise in that spot, but Francis was tall enough to look past the opening, and the environment that unfolded in his eyes made him freeze.

Francis saw what could best be described as a chunk of rocks surrounded by waves. The place was too small to be considered an island, and the tunnel led at its very center.

Nevertheless, the item stuck on the shores made that patch of land extremely relevant. Francis almost couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the tall bomb standing mere meters from him.

That wasn't even the end of it. The bomb wasn't simply standing on the shores. Sparks still ran over its surfaces, and the many symbols on its various faces had also started to glow with a red light. Francis wasn't an expert in Thilku technology, but that sight would make anyone think that the weapon was about to explode.

"We are dead," Francis gasped. "We are dead. We are dead!"

A heavy slap reached Francis' right cheek as soon as his loud statement ended. Andrew couldn't react in time due to how stunned he was, and his attack barely had any effect.

"We are fucking dead," Francis continued, turning and leaning on the elevated part of the tunnel to stop looking at the bomb. "Dead, dead, dead!"

Andrew was ready to deliver another slap, but glancing at the bomb told him how pointless that would be. He didn't want to spend his last moments scolding a descendant.

"Why did it have to be Thilku technology?" Francis cursed. "What is Thilku technology even doing here?"

Andrew initially ignored those words, but his eyes lit up when he realized something, and his hands promptly reached for Francis' collar to pull him up.

"What did you mean by that?!" Andrew questioned before adding a polite "sir".

"What?" Francis gasped, his expression lost in helplessness.

"What did you mean by Thilku technology?" Andrew asked. "Would human technology make any difference?"

"I-," Francis gulped. "My element allows me to deal with some weapons. My family developed special techniques for that specific purpose."

"Sir, can you apply them to this bomb?" Andrew questioned.

"How should I know?!" Francis shouted. "It's Thilku technology! I never tested any of them on something like this."

"Try anyway, sir," Andrew ordered.

"It doesn't work like that!" Francis complained. "I might very well cause the opposite reaction and kill all of us. As far as we know, this is just a safe side effect of the teleport!"

Andrew and Francis stared at each other for a few seconds before turning toward the bomb. The crackling of its sparks and its bright red symbols told a very different story. Even a child would think that the weapon was about to explode.

"Alright," Francis gulped. "I'll try."

"I'll guard this entrance, sir," Andrew declared.

Francis didn't have the strength to reply. He took a deep breath and climbed over the exit to reach the surface. His legs felt weak, but he still stood up and carefully approached the bomb.

The shore was close enough to make Francis reach his target quickly. Sparks filled his vision at that point, and his ears rang as the crackling noises invaded them. The alien symbols' brightness also made it hard for him to look at the bomb, but he didn't need his eyes to complete his task.

Francis took another deep breath, and sparks accumulated in his hands before flying toward the ground. The rocks broke while absorbing those attacks, and Francis kept going until he dispersed enough of his mana.

Then, Francis closed his eyes and forced the remaining mana inside him to move in a specific pattern. His energy generated a suction force that targeted the power running over the bomb, and the sparks on its surface soon fell prey to it.

The sparks left the bomb to fly toward Francis' waist, which absorbed them without suffering any damage. His tracksuit burned and broke, but his flesh ate that electricity and slowly drained the weapon of its dangerous energy.

The process didn't end at the bomb's surface. The energy inside the weapon took the form of sparks that leaked through the red symbols and flew toward Francis' waist. The amount of mana absorbed during the technique was immense, but Francis endured everything easily, dispersing what he couldn't handle on the ground.

Chapter 536 Restrictions

"Your girlfriend?" Wayne questioned, spitting a lump of blood that had made its way through his throat.

"Indeed," Khan confirmed without adding anything. Monica's element wasn't exactly a secret, but it was better if few people knew about it and its flaws.

The earthquake continued to rage as the dark and red cloud rose, expanding in the sky. Fuming boulders split from the massive main pillar of smoke, flying in every direction and bringing chaos into that otherwise peaceful environment.

A scorching boulder flew toward Khan's island and crashed on its shores, lifting more smoke and debris. Khan and Wayne watched everything unfolding, but neither moved. They simply couldn't in their condition.

'She won't be able to move afterward,' Khan thought, mesmerized by the huge cloud. 'I must help her.'

Khan put strength into his abdomen, steadying it to struggle to his feet. However, his balance gave in before he could stretch his legs, making him fall to the ground behind.

A grunt escaped Khan's mouth when he stopped himself from lying down. He sat on the rocks, but the world in his eyes grew even blurrier. He was losing focus, and the pain was finally making its way into his mind. That suffering kept him awake, allowing him to understand how exhausted he was.

Khan didn't give up so soon. He pushed himself forward, slamming his hand on the ground in an attempt to stand up. Yet, his broken shoulder moved oddly during the gesture, bringing more pain and depriving him of the strength he had mustered.

"Do you keep her in a bunker?" Wayne asked as the cloud shone on his eager eyes. "Don't tell me you two sleep on the same bed."

"Just die already," Khan groaned. He had fallen, and hitting the ground rekindled his injuries. Everything burned, and his face was part of that mess.

"I won't die so easily," Wayne tried to laugh, but his punctured lung got in the way, making him cough. "My body is already stabilizing."

The statement surprised Khan, distracting him from the cloud. He focused on Wayne, and his senses confirmed his version of the story. Wayne's remaining mana had already gotten to work to seal his injuries. His muscles weren't regrowing just yet, but it seemed that the process could start soon.

"Are you sure you are human?" Khan couldn't help but ask while pushing on his numb hand to sit again.

"I don't know," Wayne tried and failed to laugh again. "This is how they made me."

Khan couldn't help but sigh. He couldn't bring himself to hate Wayne after accepting how brutal his training had been. That man was simply a guinea pig that his organization had employed as a pawn.

"You should seize this chance to kill me," Wayne declared. "I'm at my weakest."

"Your element will probably make me slip and die if I try," Khan cursed. "Captain Khan, killed by a rock."

"My job is done," Wayne revealed, "And I don't feel that envy anymore. My element shouldn't be that strong."

"Do you want to die?" Khan wondered.

"I don't know!" Wayne finally managed to laugh. "But that's what you do, isn't it?"

"I'm not killing you," Khan sighed. "I don't enjoy killing."

"That's a surprise," Wayne exclaimed. "I think I don't either."

Khan began to close his eyes to slip into a meditative state, but Wayne's words kept them open. Truth be told, Khan could see a lot of himself in Wayne. They had simply happened to be on opposite extremes of the Global Army.

"Do you have restrictions, trackers, or other things?" Khan asked.

"All of the above!" Wayne announced. "I also underwent psychological training. A few words, and I'll fight even if my heart stops beating."

"Why do you sound happy about it?" Khan groaned.

"That's how I sound!" Wayne laughed.

Khan shook his head. He lifted his numb hand to scratch his hair, but his skin burned when he touched it. He couldn't find his azure strands either. The recent fight had made him bald, among other things.

"Look what I had to do to beat you," Khan cursed.

"I'm pretty strong," Wayne proudly claimed.

"Yes," Khan nodded, "Strong enough for the criminals to want you back."

"It's a possibility," Wayne laughed.

"No," Khan contradicted. "If we get out of here alive, you'll start working for me."

The ground stopped shaking, bringing peace and silence. Only the waves in the distance continued to make noise, but none of that got in the way of Khan's words. Wayne had heard him clearly, and his surprise prevented him from speaking right away.

"So, you are not killing me," Wayne guessed.

"That's right," Khan confirmed. "You'll work for the actual best third-level warrior."

"Oh," Wayne gasped. "You are petty, aren't you?"

"Who is petty?" Khan complained. "It's a joke."

"So," Wayne voiced, "You aren't the best third-level warrior."

"That part was true!" Khan cursed. "Couldn't they stuff some social training during their experiments?"

"That happened on the weekends," Wayne explained. "The other days, it was mostly needles and other machines."

"You make me want to drink," Khan sighed.

"Can we drink together once you hire me?" Wayne asked, his eyes showing nothing but pure innocence. Only a monster would have the strength to refuse him.

"Of course," Khan chuckled. "Drinks, friends, and jokes. Who knows? You might even get yourself a girlfriend."

"I have been trained in the art of pleasing men and women!" Wayne declared. "They made me go through that once a month with different-."

"I got it," Khan interrupted. "I already know you'll be a handful."

"Don't you want to hear more of my stories?" Wayne asked.

"Can you let me meditate?" Khan scolded.

"But this is so exciting!" Wayne exclaimed. "I've never been free."

"Aren't you tired or something?" Khan questioned.

"I'm always full of energy!" Wayne declared.

"You'll be a handful," Khan sighed.

Khan tried to slip into the meditative state again, but his senses suddenly warned him about the arrival of foreign auras. His cold gaze fell on the passage nearby, and figures soon appeared in its darkness.

A middle-aged woman peeked past the passage before wearing a surprised expression. She gestured at the people behind her to follow until a team of four soldiers appeared in the open. They weren't too strong, and only one was a third-level warrior, but Khan was in no condition to fight.

Khan glanced at Wayne before focusing on the team again. The criminals were a mixture of hesitation, excitement, and resolve. The third-level warrior was also quite angry, and it was clear that Khan was their target.

"Let me guess," Khan decided to speak first to feign strength, but his hoarse voice partially ruined his pretense. "You think I had something to do with the bomb."

"Shut your mouth," The third-level warrior, a burly man, ordered. "This plan has taken years to prepare, and we can't allow it to fail so badly."

'Years?' Khan thought before speaking again. "The bomb didn't explode. You can tell Mister Chares to rely on human technology next time."

"Mister Chares is a mercenary," The man snorted. "Don't mistake us for that petty criminal."

"That leaves the Hive," Khan guessed. "Unless there are more criminal organizations I'm unaware of."

"Many," The man revealed, stretching his arm forward, "But you won't be around to mess with them, Captain Khan."

Smoke came from the man's stretched fingers as mana flowed toward their tips. Even in that burned state, Khan's scar revealed his identity, making the criminal decide to take him out.

Khan could sense a powerful spell forming. He was in no condition to dodge it, but the [Blood Shield] was still by his side. He didn't know if his body could take another use of the alien technique, but giving up wasn't an option.

Nevertheless, familiar tremors that only Khan could sense spread through the area. Khan initially hesitated but eventually decided to trust that ability. After all, he had suffered more than a bit because of it.

The man's fingers shone with white light before releasing blinding beams. The spell was incredibly fast, instantly reaching Khan, but nothing hit him. The attack missed his still figure and crashed on the ground behind him.

"What?" The man gasped, and the rest of the team looked at him in confusion.

Khan's thoughts ran quickly. He was sure Honides' scanners had noticed the disappearance of his ship. He didn't know whether the teleport had made something pop out on Lauter, but the column of smoke was bound to attract attention. Even a secret location and jammers couldn't hide it.

Teams of soldiers had to be on their way to check what was happening. Khan was sure of that. He only needed to buy time, and his talking skills came in handy.

"You must work on your aim," Khan teased. "You are giving criminals a bad name."

"Shut your mouth!" The man snorted, sending mana to his fingers again, but Khan made sure to talk again before he could prepare that spell.

"That won't really work," Khan revealed, nodding in Wayne's direction. "That guy over there has bad luck as his element. You'd miss even if you placed your fingers on my face."

"Kill him," The man promptly ordered, nodding toward Wayne.

"I wouldn't do that," Khan declared as soon as the other criminals started to move. "The rocks here are pretty sharp, and his element will make you slip. You don't want to stumble and die."

"He is just buying time," The man snorted. "Hurry up!"

"Sorry," Khan uttered as his coldness returned. "It's pointless to hurry."

The man wanted to say something, but whooshing noises suddenly invaded the area. Four ships reached the island and stopped above it before he could lift his head. That sudden acceleration even sent winds toward the ground, pushing Khan to his injured side and making him groan.

The ships had cargo purposes, and their sides opened to reveal multiple teams of soldiers wearing body armor and wielding rifles. Orders also echoed from them and invaded the island, but the criminals didn't show any fear. Their face brimmed with resolve as a sudden burst of mana flared at the center of their brains and killed them on the spot.

Chapter 537 Words

The following events were confusing, to say the least. Khan had reached his limits, and the sense of safety brought by the arrival of the four ships affected his struggle to remain awake, threatening to make him faint a few times.

Khan knew that he couldn't sleep just yet. He had yet to see his companions, and Wayne's situation needed clarification. However, he had already gotten inside the cargo ship by the time he managed to awaken completely.

Shouts and noises filled Khan's ears as his vision stabilized. He found himself on the cargo area's floor, with two soldiers applying bandages to his many injuries. Wayne was also there, but the team merely pointed their rifles at him while crying questions that he didn't bother to address.

"Are we moving?" Khan groaned while peeking to his left. The side doors were still open, but the world remained still. Ropes hung from the floor's edge too, hinting at the fact that soldiers were on the island.

"Sir, stay still," The soldier on Khan's left announced. "You have suffered many injuries, and your left shoulder is broken. We need to stabilize you before flying to the nearest medical bay."

"Negative," Khan said in his hoarse voice, shaking his intact arm to dismiss those soldiers. "We must retrieve my companions and evacuate."

"Evacuate?" The soldier questioned. "Sir, this is Lauter. We can't-."

"Criminals have smuggled a bomb here," Khan explained, purposely hiding the bomb's origin and nature. "It didn't explode yet, but the area might still be unsafe."

The word "bomb" silenced the two soldiers at Khan's sides and applied the same effect to anyone who heard him. Murmurs immediately spread through the cargo area, bringing everyone's eyes to Khan.

"Did you say bomb, sir?" The soldier on Khan's left asked.

"Yes," Khan cursed, waving his arm toward the soldier on his right. "Help me on my feet."

The soldiers were still stunned by the revelation, so they complied with Khan's request and pulled him up. Some unfinished bandages fell, but Khan ignored that development to peek past the open doors.

Khan's senses had regained clarity by then. He could look past the limits of his eyes to study the symphony and gain a vague picture of the area. The dark cloud was still there but had lost its red shades. Monica's spell had ended, meaning that she had probably fainted.

"I need a ship to fly at the bottom of the eruption," Khan ordered, doing his best to retain the little strength that had returned. "Send more rescue teams in the area if you didn't already. I'm missing four companions in total."

Khan turned toward Wayne at that point. The soldiers around him were looking at Khan, but their rifles were still pointed at the floor. It was clear the team saw him as a threat.

"Put your guns away," Khan ordered, waving his numb hand toward Wayne. "He is with me."

The cabin's door opened before the soldiers could comply. A tall man who wore no defensive gear stepped into the cargo area, and his loud voice promptly followed.

"What is happening?!" The man shouted. "Why is the Captain on his feet?"

"Sir," A soldier called. "The Captain was just explaining that there is a bomb on Lauter."

"A bomb?!" The man gasped, fixing his dark eyes on Khan. "Is this true, Captain?"

"Yes," Khan confirmed without wasting time on pointless explanations.

"Send the order to evacuate!" The man promptly shouted. "And contact the Harbor. We need specialists here!"

"Don't evacuate yet," Khan ordered. "I must rescue my companions first."

"Sir, with all due respect," The man cleared his throat, doing his best to choose the right words.

"You are heavily injured. You should leave these matters to the rescue team."

"I will," Khan stated, "Once I know my companions are safe."

"But, sir," The man tried to complain, but Khan interrupted him.

"Commanding officers should know what orders are," Khan raised his voice as much as possible, "And stop pointing those fucking guns at my subordinate."

The soldiers around Wayne immediately lifted the rifles before looking at their commanding officer. The latter was as stunned at them, but refusing Khan's orders wasn't an option. He didn't only outrank him. His fame alone could make mountains move.

"You can evacuate if you are scared," Khan continued, moving toward the cabin. "I'll fly this rescue mission myself if necessary."

"No, no," The commanding officer exclaimed, stepping in front of the cabin's entrance to block Khan's path. "We'll complete the rescue mission, sir. What can you tell us about the situation?"

Khan inspected the man's face for a few seconds. The latter was a second-level warrior with nothing special to show, but Khan's opinion clearly worried him. He wouldn't be Khan's first choice for a rescue operation, but his condition made him unable to take over, and replacing the commanding officer would just waste time.

"Alright," Khan sighed, approaching the open doors again. "Monica Solodrey should be at the bottom of the eruption. Francis Alstair, George Ildoo, and Andrew Durarel should also be in the area. Send teams in the tunnels to find them and get out of there quickly."

"What about the bomb?" The commanding officer asked.

"Start the evacuation and contact Headmistress Holwen," Khan ordered. "She'll know what to do."

"As you wish, sir!" The commanding officer stated, performing a military salute before turning toward the cabin. "You heard the Captain. Contact the other ships and call Headmistress Holwen. We need help coordinating the evacuation."

Khan glanced at the man and diverted his eyes only when he isolated himself inside the cabin. At that point, he sat at the doors' edges, and a simple nod toward the closest soldier made him come closer.

"What can I do for you, sir?" The soldier questioned, half-crouching toward Khan.

"You can resume patching me up," Khan announced. "My subordinate must receive the same treatment." [Visjt_novelbin\(.\)com](mailto:Visjt_novelbin(.)com) for new updates

"Yes, sir!" The soldier exclaimed.

"Also," Khan continued, "Update me. Why are you here, and how much do you know?"

"We belong to Lauter's first response teams," The soldier explained, gesturing to his companions to take care of Wayne and Khan. "We moved as soon as the scanners showed a strange reading, and the eruption eventually led us here."

'They don't know anything,' Khan concluded. 'Maybe it's for the best.'

Khan stopped asking questions and let the soldiers patch him up. He remained on the floor's edges, but his eyes soon closed to make room for his meditative state.

The recent events ran through Khan's mind while he focused on recovering. Luckily, the Headmistress had filled the entire system with additional soldiers. The rescue team would have never arrived so quickly and in such numbers otherwise. Yet, his thoughts barely lingered on those topics due to the seriousness of the overall situation.

Mentioning the bomb wasn't ideal, but Khan couldn't keep that information a secret. The relationship with the Thilku might suffer once the news spread, but the situation didn't allow Khan to control that aspect of the crisis.

Wayne was another big problem, but Khan knew he could persuade the Headmistress. A long discussion was waiting for him, but he didn't fear it.

On the other hand, Khan knew that the Solodrey and Alstair families were bound to annoy him. He couldn't have predicted the presence of a bomb, but the situation didn't change. He had put those descendants in danger. Monica's parents wouldn't miss the chance to complain.

Those thoughts inevitably converged toward Raymond. Khan didn't mind walking into obvious traps to learn more about himself and the Nak, but the bomb made everything different. It almost seemed that Raymond wanted him to die in the mission, which didn't match his previous behavior and the idea Khan had about him.

'What is even happening?' Khan cursed during his meditation, and the situation worsened when he thought about Wayne's revelations. He had finally obtained proof of his noble heritage, but that information sounded useless for now.

Someone approached Khan before he could delve any deeper into those thoughts, and he opened his eyes to greet the soldier. The latter was surprised about that passive awareness, but she still gulped to convey the updates.

"We are about to move, sir," The woman announced.

"Did you retrieve my companions?" Khan questioned.

"We just received confirmation," The soldier stated. "Miss Solodrey is exhausted but healthy. Mister Ildoo suffered injuries, but nothing worrying. Mister Alstair and Mister Durarel are also fine. We are currently moving everyone to the closest medical bay."

"What about the bomb?" Khan asked.

"The embassy teleported specialists in the area," The soldier explained. "They isolated the weapon already. It's no longer at risk of exploding, so the evacuation has been called off."

"I understand," Khan nodded. "When do we move to the medical bay?"

"As soon as you give the order, sir," The soldier uttered.

"Let's go, then," Khan responded, glancing in Wayne's direction before closing his eyes again. The soldiers had patched him up, so Khan could focus on his meditation.

The ship began to move while Khan was busy recovering. He noticed that part of the rescue team remained in the area, but that was to be expected. The Harbor had to scour that underground hideout to find clues, even if their presence sounded unlikely.

The rescue teams had fast ships, so Khan reached his destination in minutes. The vehicle landed on a relatively big island that featured a huge outpost equipped with turrets and multiple facilities, and a squad of doctors welcomed his arrival.

More confusing moments unfolded. The team changed Khan's bandages, fixed his shoulder to a metal brace, and applied specific ointments to his burns. All of that while moving him inside the outpost, where a few beds were ready for him and his companions.

By the end of the process, Khan's upper part was nothing short of a mummy. The bandages had holes before his eyes, but recognizing him was impossible.

Meditating would usually be Khan's priority, but he couldn't stay put before seeing his companions. The doctors had put Wayne in his room, but the latter was sound asleep and full of meds. He was out of danger, so Khan didn't need to worry about him.

The medical bay was an isolated section of the outpost with little to no personnel. Few doctors and nurses roamed through its corridors, and none outranked Khan. Besides, the bomb had made everything messy, especially as the rumors started to spread, so Khan could walk out of his room without meeting any hindrance.

Lauter's outposts followed fixed arrangements that Khan had studied before Lucian's mission. He barely needed to inspect his surroundings to understand where he was and how to find rooms that probably held his companions.

A short walk proved Khan's knowledge right. He crossed a corridor and peeked into a few empty rooms before finding a familiar figure on a bed. The man had his legs, waist, and arms wrapped into tight bandages, but the funny look on his face spoke for his well-being.

"What happened to you?" George chuckled, recognizing Khan even with all his bandages.

"Are you okay?" Khan asked, glancing at the sword leaning on the bed's right side.

"Never better," George declared. "It would have been nicer if your girlfriend didn't destroy the tunnel I was in, but whatever."

"Did you see Monica?" Khan promptly questioned.

"I was on a ship when they pulled her out of the crater," George explained. "Warn me if you ever cheat on her. I want to have the time to get off the planet."

"Don't you have to reassure Anita?" Khan snorted. "Do you know where they put her?"

"Take the next right," George revealed. "I've seen the doctors with her going there."

"Thanks, George," Khan stated. He was about to leave the room's entrance, but a peculiar feeling radiated by George's mana made his curiosity flare.

"What happened?" Khan asked.

"Nothing much," George groaned, adjusting himself on the bed. "I just confirmed something."

"Was it good?" Khan wondered.

"I guess," George sighed.

Khan knew George like the back of his hand. He only needed a look to understand his issue, and a smile inevitably bloomed on his face.

"You might have to settle for real now," Khan teased.

"Oh, shut up," George cursed. "Don't tell me what I already know. Go see your girlfriend already."

"I'm happy for you, man," Khan stated, leaving the room's entrance to go on his way.

George let a few seconds pass while watching the empty entrance. He was happy for himself too, but a sad comment still left his mouth. "I can't wait to say those words to you."

Chapter 538 Rest

Khan followed George's instructions, reaching a different corridor that featured only a few rooms. One of them was closed, and the symphony told him the others were empty, so his destination became clear right away. Still, an angry shout welcomed him when he approached it.

"I said I don't want to be disturbed!" A familiar voice invaded Khan's ears as soon as the metal door slid open. Many would cower in fear due to the anger conveyed by the shout, but Khan's first reaction was to smile.

The room was relatively small, containing three beds and some medical equipment. Only the mattress on the farthest corner was occupied, and the nest of curls peeking from the blanket confirmed the person's identity.

A thick smell of smoke filled Khan's nostrils, and his attentive eyes didn't miss the ash mixed with the curls. That wasn't the hair Khan remembered. It was dirty, crunchy, and without any light, but it still belonged to the woman he loved.

"Close that door already!" Monica shouted again since she had yet to hear the entrance shutting close.

"I can't get enough of seeing you pissed," Khan sighed, and Monica gasped before turning and lifting her head.

Khan had already inspected Monica's mana, but seeing her face added important clues. The same went for Monica. She had understood something from Khan's hoarse voice, and noticing his bandages made her jump out of bed.

The two inspected each other while Monica advanced. She had worn clean clothes, but they couldn't hide her poor state. Her skin had gotten dry and cracked, evident bags stood under her red, teary eyes, and light burns filled her face. Her aura was also weak, conveying the almost absence of mana.

"What happened to you?" Monica whispered, reaching Khan and lifting her hands before holding back from touching him. She didn't want to hurt him by mistake.

"You are as beautiful as always instead," Khan teased.

"Don't," Monica cried. "Tell me what happened to you first."

"I got into a fight with Wayne," Khan explained shortly. "This is the price I had to pay to beat him."

Monica brought her hands to her mouth. Her eyes darted up and down, unclear on where to focus. She couldn't even imagine how injured Khan was under those bandages, and seeing him with metal braces again brought more sadness.

"It's no big deal," Khan reassured. "I'll be fine in a few weeks."

"I'll kill Raymond myself," Monica cursed.

"That's a truly strange detail," Khan nodded. He still couldn't explain Raymond's behavior, but something else attracted his attention.

"You," Khan called, reaching for Monica's cheek only to recall that his fingers didn't obey him.

Monica saw Khan's hesitation. His hand stopped at mere centimeters from her face, and his fingers shook when trying to bend. The battle had made him unable to hold his girlfriend, but she was happy to cover for him.

Khan's gaze flickered when Monica pulled his hand to her cheek. She even rubbed her face on his palm, uncaring that the gesture deepened the cracks on her skin. Khan felt some pain, but nothing could reach his mind when so much love was in the air.

"Did you kill someone?" Khan finished his previous question.

"Maybe," Monica lowered her gaze and voice. "I probably did."

Khan didn't need to ask anything else. He knew that was Monica's first kill. Her family had prepared her for that, but the reality was different. Khan still recalled Istrone's events so clearly for a reason, and Monica was experiencing that now.

Monica held back from tightening her grip on Khan's hand, and he slammed his foot on the entrance to close it. His attention soon returned to Monica, but she understood what was happening and tried to oppose it.

"No," Monica complained. "You are injured and-."

"Shh," Khan whispered, taking Monica into his arm and slowly pushing her toward her bed. The hug hurt due to his burns, but he felt no pain.

The two reached the bed, separated, and hugged again once their heads hit the pillow. The mattress was small, but they snuggled close to fit on it. Khan couldn't claim to be comfortable lying on his right side, but Monica was in his arm, with her face on his chest, so everything was fine.

A few minutes had to pass, but Monica eventually gave up. Traces of tears appeared in her mana, but her voice remained steady as her story began.

"There were these criminals," Monica explained. "I was in a lab or something. They had this platform to maximize the explosion's range, but I got cornered before reaching the consoles."

Khan caressed Monica's hair, and its poor state was impossible to miss. A single bath wouldn't be enough to remove all the ash and dirt from her curls.

"You made me promise," Monica continued, a sob breaking her voice, "And I thought destroying the lab could help."

"It did help," Khan confirmed. "I knew you were fine the moment I saw the eruption."

"I-," Monica added, seemingly unable to hear Khan. "I don't know what happened to the criminals. I can't see much when I-. When I-."

"I know," Khan intervened, hugging Monica closer. "You told me."

Khan and Monica had obviously talked about her element. He had initially hoped to provide alternatives to her weaknesses, but even alien arts had limits, especially with something with such a specific nature. After all, a volcano could only erupt.

"Now I'm ugly," Monica cried, "Both outside and inside."

"Does that make me ugly too?" Khan asked, knowing that his question would work better than any compliment.

"Stupid," Monica sobbed. "Can you stay here a bit longer?"

"I won't leave at all," Khan reassured. He knew the emptiness of the first kill, and his life had provided a single solution. Only love could fill that gap.

Monica didn't exactly cry. She let out sobs and sniffs every few minutes but mostly remained silent. Memories and wild thoughts assaulted her, but Khan tightened his hug whenever he felt she had it too rough.

It took a while, but Monica eventually fell asleep, and her snores made Khan join her. The nightmares arrived on time as always, but Khan found some reassurance in the faint warmth that reached his senses.

That peace didn't last long. Someone knocked on the room's door only a few hours later, awakening both Khan and Monica. She had it a bit harder, gasping and inspecting her surroundings as if she didn't recall where she was, but Khan's hug quickly brought her back to reality.

"I'll go," Khan whispered when Monica's sleepy eyes fell on him. "Be right back."

Monica limited herself to a nod, returning to the pillow as soon as Khan left the bed. She didn't want to fall asleep until he came back, but his lingering warmth and scent were too cozy to reject.

Meanwhile, Khan reached the door and opened it to show his cold face. He didn't like that soldiers were interrupting Monica's rest, but the figure that appeared in his vision dispersed that seriousness.

Andrew stood before the entrance, already performing a military salute. He was holding something in his hands, but Khan couldn't see what from his position.

"Andrew," Khan exclaimed. "I'm glad to see you are fine."

"Thank you, sir," Andrew stated with his usual seriousness. "The doctors told me to deliver this, sir."

Andrew broke the military salute to show the items in his hands. A broken sheath, a knife, and a phone stood in his palms, and Khan recognized all of them.

"Oh," Khan chuckled, glancing at his pants to notice that his pockets had disappeared. "Thank you."

Khan retrieved his belongings and checked their state. The sheath needed fixing, but his knife and phone were fine. Luckily, no calls had reached him either.

"Where is Francis?" Khan asked. "I only heard he was fine."

"He didn't suffer any injury, sir," Andrew confirmed. "The rescue team is currently briefing him, sir."

"Why would they brief him?" Khan questioned.

"Mister Alstair played a key role in defusing the bomb, sir," Andrew revealed.

"Did he?" Khan didn't hide his surprise

"I've seen it with my own eyes, sir," Andrew declared.

Khan found it hard to believe Andrew, but the latter wouldn't lie to him. Moreover, if Francis had truly taken care of the bomb, he deserved some honest praise. He had basically saved everyone's life.

'He doesn't know about Raymond's involvement,' Khan thought, 'But.'

"Join the briefing," Khan ordered. "Make sure Francis doesn't reveal any sensitive information about us."

"It will be done, sir," Andrew responded, performing another military salute. Khan merely nodded at him, and the meeting ended on that gesture.

Khan sealed the door with his foot again and threw the sheath on a nearby bed. He even placed the knife inside it, which wasn't too easy with the current state of his fingers. He was ready to get rid of the phone too, but a call ended up reaching it.

"Jenny," Khan answered, putting his phone between his ear and working shoulder while returning to Monica's bed.

"Captain, I heard you were involved in an incident on Lauter," Jenny replied. "I wholeheartedly hope you are fine."

"Did you call to check up on me?" Khan wondered, sitting on the bed's edge and caressing Monica's head.

"No, sir," Jenny went straight to the point. "It's that strange contact again. I can delay it if you are busy."

"No, let it through," Khan ordered. "I was expecting a call."

"As you wish, Captain," Jenny stated, closing the call to let another arrive.

"Captain Khan," Raymond's voice soon left the phone. "I still have to receive a complete report, but I'm confident you performed as perfectly as always."

Khan remained silent. His mana boiled, and many feelings filled his mind. He couldn't express how angry he was about the recent development, but losing his cool would be pointless.

"Raymond," Khan eventually said, awakening Monica. "I want to be as clear as possible to avoid misunderstandings. Once I gain enough power, there won't be politics, families, or weapons able to stop me from killing you."

"Calm down, Captain," Raymond chuckled. "I understand why you are angry, but let me reassure you. You have never been in danger."

"The bomb would say otherwise," Khan stated, keeping the weapon's origin a secret. He didn't know how much Raymond knew, so he didn't want to risk revealing sensitive information.

"The Thilku bomb would have never exploded," Raymond revealed as if he could read Khan's mind. "The teleport disarmed it."

Khan couldn't help but fall silent again. Raymond didn't only know the bomb's origin. He was also aware of the teleport, and something told Khan that he had something to do with it.

"Did you tamper with the teleport?" Khan questioned.

"That's a conversation for another time," Raymond declared. "For now, you should focus on reaping the benefits of your successful mission."

Khan had many questions. He didn't know what Raymond wanted, and his last words could carry various meanings. Still, he limited his reply to a simple statement.

"I will never trust you," Khan uttered.

"I don't expect you to," Raymond responded. "Though, I can assure you one thing. I'm humankind's servant. Everything I do is for its sake."

Khan wanted to say something, but the call ended before he could utter anything. He could only let the phone slide through his shoulder and fall to the bed, but Monica caught it before it hit the mattress.

"You heard him, right?" Khan asked, keeping his eyes on the metal wall before him.

"I did," Monica whispered, straightening her position to sit behind Khan. "I'm not sure I understood him."

"That's common with Raymond," Khan sighed, peeking past his intact shoulder when he felt careful kisses landing on his bandages.

"What is it?" Khan asked.

"Let's go back to sleep," Monica muttered, "But I'll hold you this time."

Monica sounded partially asleep. Her eyes weren't fully open either. After the recent events, she seemed to have lost part of her usual fire.

"Stop worrying," Monica said, seemingly able to understand the expression hidden by the bandages.

"Well, do it when it's your turn."

"Do we take turns now?" Khan chuckled.

"Please," Monica voiced. "I want to do something good."

That shy request was uncommon for the current stage of the couple's relationship, but Khan couldn't reject it. He could understand what was going through Monica's mind, so he fulfilled her wish.

Khan pushed Monica down before lying on his right side and sliding deeper into the blanket. His face ended on Monica's chest, and she held it carefully but firmly. He became her anchor in that delicate emotional phase, and being able to help him saved her a little.

"There aren't cameras or anything here, right?" Khan asked.

"They'd never put me in a room with those," Monica confirmed information that Khan already knew. "Why?"

"I must mention something," Khan exclaimed.

"If it's about my butt," Monica warned, "Wait until you heal to say it."

"It's not that," Khan announced. "Wayne kind of confirmed something after I won. Apparently, my mother was truly a noble."

"What?!" Monica shouted, distancing herself from Khan to peek at his head. That statement had been enough to make part of her fire return.

Chapter 539 Return

Needless to say, sharing Wayne's revelation caused deep shock, especially to someone with reverence toward the nobles. Monica had received special education in that field, so learning that Khan probably was one of them left her more than speechless.

Of course, the surprise wasn't Monica's sole reaction, but Khan's injuries and her own emotional state prevented her from exploring that revelation any further. The couple could only talk about it for a bit before forcing themselves to sleep.

More peaceful hours went by. Khan wasn't fond of resting, but being emotional support for Monica allowed him to sleep for a long time. That was the longest break he had taken in recent weeks, and his tired body rejoiced at it.

The couple woke up by dinnertime since soldiers knocked on their door to deliver food and new orders. The Headmistress was recalling everyone to the Harbor to get better medications and eventually provide updates. She didn't expect the team to meet her immediately, but getting them out of Lauter was a priority.

"She'll need a cape," Khan ordered as soldiers began to move Monica's bed, "Or anything that can cover her face. She can't be seen like this."

"Yes, sir!" The soldier in charge of the team appointed with the Headmistress' task stated.

"However, the doctors wish you to be in bed too."

"I have matters to attend to," Khan stated, nodding as the soldiers entered the room and hid Monica under a blanket.

"We have a ship ready outside the outpost," The soldier in charge continued. "Can you find your way on your own, sir?"

"I'll be there shortly," Khan confirmed, leaving the room and crossing the team to dive deeper into the medical bay.

Similar scenes unfolded in Khan's vision as he explored the medical bay. He saw a team moving George's bed to bring him to the ship. The latter noticed Khan and the two exchanged a simple nod before going their separate ways.

Khan continued his exploration with a precise goal in mind. Raymond's call had added doubts while creating a new problem that Khan had yet to decide how to handle.

The medical bay didn't have the person Khan wanted to meet, but that matched his orders. He had to approach the outpost's exit to find it, but that area showed problems too.

Lauter's outposts had hangars near their entrances for utility reasons, and a messy scene welcomed Khan when he stepped into it. Ships and teams filled his view, and anyone who noticed him performed tense military salutes. His bandages made looking at him in the eyes difficult, but those soldiers showed nothing but respect.

That attention didn't surprise Khan. He had long since gotten used to it. The problems stood past the vast and tall entrance. Khan saw more teams and ships, and the symphony told him the sky above them was even messier.

Khan held back a sigh and ignored the saluting soldiers on his way to reach the exit. Lauter's dark sky tried to welcome him, but it was hard to focus on it with all the ships hovering above. Khan counted at least fifteen vehicles in the air, waiting for their chance to reach the surface.

The ships' classes and shapes revealed their nature. Khan could easily differentiate between military vehicles and those with different purposes. He couldn't be sure, but the current arrangement gave him reasonable ideas.

'Reporters,' Khan concluded, seeing how the military vehicles had formed a barrier that blocked the other ships' path.

That development wasn't surprising. It only took one leak to stir many reporters. Some probably were already on Lauter, and they didn't hesitate to fly toward the area, hoping to be the first to report the news.

Khan quickly lost interest in the crowded sky after finding his target. Andrew was standing a few meters past the entrance with his arms crossed and his eyes fixed on a group farther away. Francis and multiple soldiers were there, busy interrogating him about the recent events.

'He looks happy,' Khan thought when he noticed Francis, but Andrew remained his first target.

"Andrew," Khan called when he reached the guard.

"Sir!" Andrew exclaimed, facing Khan and performing a military salute. "I've kept track of Mister Alstair, sir."

"Good job," Khan praised. "Now, you told me you saw Francis defusing the bomb."

"Yes, sir," Andrew confirmed. "We were together after the teleport, and I looked after him just like you ordered me to, sir."

"Come here for a moment," Khan requested, nodding toward a relatively private spot alongside the outpost's wall. "I want a full briefing about the mission."

Andrew complied, following Khan and telling his story once they obtained some privacy. Khan stared coldly at the many soldiers glancing in his direction while words reached his ears. He quickly became aware of everything Andrew and Francis had faced, gaining the last required details.

"You did well out there," Khan announced once the story ended. "I need to speak with Francis alone now. Summon him for me."

"Yes, sir!" Andrew stated, performing his usual military salute.

"If someone tries to complain," Khan added, "Mention my name."

"It will be done, sir," Andrew declared, leaving the isolated spot to head for the group of soldiers interrogating Francis.

Khan allowed himself to appreciate the scenery during the wait. Lauter was beautiful at night. Soft winds blew on his face, and the sound of distant waves massaged his ears. Artificial lights disturbed its perfect darkness but created an equally enchanting scenery that Khan couldn't help but love.

'I've spent too long on a space station,' Khan admitted, and Francis' arrival brought new focus to his gaze.

"Khan," Francis exclaimed, a broad smile filling his face. "I mean, Captain Khan. Did you ask for me?"

"I did," Khan nodded. "I heard what you did out there. That was good."

"Thank you!" Francis uttered. Anyone could see how happy he was, and for a good reason. He had gone from being almost discarded by his own family to accomplishing a major feat during a mission, at least in theory.

Khan didn't need his senses to confirm Francis' happiness. The man didn't even flinch before his bandages. He felt too ecstatic to address them. Still, Khan would have to destroy that emotion now.

"A reliable source told me that the bomb wouldn't have exploded in the first place," Khan directly announced.

"What?" Francis gasped, his broad smile showing traces of disbelief.

"You heard me," Khan stated. "The bomb wasn't a threat."

Those few words were enough to destroy Francis' happiness and transform it. Intense anger replaced it, filling Francis and raising his voice to a dangerous level.

"I see how it is!" Francis snorted. "Only Captain Khan can accomplish commendable feats. Everyone else has to shut up and follow."

"Lower your voice," Khan warned.

"Why would I?" Francis shouted. "I bet that wasn't even the truth. You are simply jealous someone stole your spotlight!"

"Francis," Khan called, the symphony around him gaining a cold, terrifying vibe. "Saying this gives me no pleasure."

Francis wanted to complain, but Khan's aura kept his mouth shut and forced him to think. Even if the situation felt unfair, Khan wasn't that petty. Francis wouldn't be alive otherwise.

"Differently from your family or our superiors," Khan continued, "I won't lie to you. You can always expect the truth from me."

Francis mustered a nod, but his insecurities took over, and he conveyed them. "So, I didn't do anything valuable again."

"On the contrary," Khan declared. "You tried to defuse it, didn't you?"

"Yes, but," Francis muttered.

"Trying is everything," Khan interrupted. "You saw a chance, and you took it. That's more I can say for most of the Global Army." [Visjt novelbin\(.\)com](http://Visjt.novelbin(.)com) for new updates

Francis nodded again but didn't appear convinced. Nice words didn't change the truth. He believed himself to have taken a step forward, but the reality was different.

"Do you understand why I decided to tell you this?" Khan questioned.

"Because you tell the truth?" Francis wondered, lost in his thoughts.

"To show you that you aren't the only puppet," Khan announced. "Luckily, everything went well."

Francis frowned. Khan was nothing short of a mummy but had sounded genuinely relieved. No one in his condition would say the same, but Francis quickly connected the dots. Monica was alive and well. That was enough for Khan.

"Keep at it," Khan exclaimed. "Maybe you'll really defuse a bomb next time."

"Next time?!" Francis gasped, but Khan chuckled, ignoring the question to walk past him.

"Right," Khan uttered, stopping to turn toward Francis. "Let's stick to the story that you defused the bomb. It's better for everyone."

"But," Francis tried to speak, but Khan interrupted him again.

"You will get fame," Khan explained, "Which will extend to me since you are in my care. Everybody wins."

"Even if it's a lie?" Francis questioned.

"I wish there were another way," Khan admitted. "Still, to stop being puppets, we must accept compromises."

Francis lowered his gaze to think about the matter, but Khan kept speaking. "Can you do it?"

"I-," Francis gulped, "I think I can."

"Good," Khan voiced. "Your family might want you back once the news spreads. You'll have the chance to leave at that point."

"Should I?" Francis asked. His insecurity was evident, but Khan couldn't make that decision for him.

"If you think what we did is enough," Khan stated. "If you want to keep improving, you should stay."

"I'll stay," Francis promptly responded. "I'll stay."

"Then, take care of the political side for now," Khan ordered. "We'll resume training once we recover."

Khan didn't wait for Francis' answer. He left the isolated area to approach the first soldier on his way, and the latter gave directions for the imminent departure.

The Global Army had prepared a big ship under the Headmistress' orders. The vehicle was as large as a flat, containing multiple private rooms for doctors and patients. A team tasked with escorting the injured was already on board, and Khan also had a bed reserved for him.

Khan watched as soldiers brought everyone inside and gave the okay once the process was over. He also kept track of the set-off before heading for Monica's room and resuming their cuddly rest. The ship was relatively slow, so the two had the chance to stretch their break by a lot.

Lauter was close to the Harbor, but the ship flew slowly to make the trip comfortable for everyone, so the group approached their home on the morning of the new week.

The day had lessons, but none of the soldiers mentioned them. Medical teams equipped with special vehicles picked up Khan and the others to fly them to specific hospitals, where doctors changed bandages and medications.

At that point, the group split. George remained in the hospital since he had no reason to leave. Francis returned to his flat, and Khan assigned Andrew to Monica and Wayne since they had to get back to more private areas for political reasons.

Khan would have happily followed Monica to continue their rest, but the Headmistress summoned him as soon as his new set of bandages was done. She had also prepared a private ride for him, which flew to the embassy to land on one of the roofs connected to her office.

"Ma'am," Khan announced as soon as he stepped into the Headmistress' office and saw her behind her desk.

"Captain, sit," Headmistress Holwen ordered, standing up to point at a chair before her desk.

"I'm fine like this," Khan reassured.

"I'm not going to repeat myself," Headmistress Holwen uttered, her hand still pointed at the chair.

'She is pissed,' Khan understood, complying with the Headmistress' orders, 'But not to me.'

"I want a complete update," Headmistress Holwen ordered, returning to her seat as soon as Khan sat down, "Including details about your mysterious source."

"I think it's better to keep that a secret," Khan declared.

"Captain," Headmistress Holwen called, her voice growing colder. "A criminal organization delivered a weapon capable of blowing up moons into one of the Harbor's most important locations. This is terrorism."

"I understand, ma'am," Khan spoke the truth. "However, revealing my source's identity would force you to pursue it, which wouldn't be good for the Harbor."

There wasn't a single lie in Khan's statement. That act of terrorism required thorough investigations and heavy punishments. Raymond could easily pass for an accomplice since he knew about the bomb, but the Harbor didn't have the power to incriminate him. His family alone was enough to stop the Headmistress.

"I see," Headmistress Holwen exclaimed. "It seems you finally understood our delicate position."

"I do," Khan nodded, but the Headmistress suddenly stood up, slamming her palms on the desk.

"Then, why did you spare Wayne Mauder?!" Headmistress Holwen shouted. "Do you know how many trackers they found inside him?"

"The doctor wouldn't tell me," Khan casually replied.

"You brought an unknown threat to the Harbor," The Headmistress continued, "And I heard you plan to hire him. Are you out of your mind, Captain?"

"I need him for personal reasons, ma'am," Khan stated. "I also plan to get rid of any psychological training he went through before granting him some freedom."

"What happens when someone comes to question him?" Headmistress Holwen asked. "He is a criminal. He should be handed to the Global Army."

"Technically," Khan voiced, but the Headmistress slammed her palms again. She knew the last video had blurred Wayne's face, but rumors had already spread. Anyone would label him as a criminal.

"He won't stay here for long, ma'am," Khan promised. "I only need you to cover for him until I find a better solution."

"You are asking a lot from me lately," Headmistress Holwen snorted.

"I found the bomb, didn't I?" Khan questioned. "I had to put my friends and girlfriend at risk to clean this mess. I think I deserve some help."

Headmistress Holwen fell silent. Truth be told, Khan had stayed true to his word, getting to the bottom of the matter and paying the price with his own body. The Headmistress wished to clean everything up and never talk about it again, but Khan had earned some leeway.

"I still expect a complete update," Headmistress Holwen scoffed, returning to her seat. "We both need to be ready for what's coming."

"What do you mean, ma'am?" Khan asked.

"I had to notify the specific offices when I learnt about the bomb's origin," Headmistress Holwen explained, "Which in turn notified our alien friends. The Thilku are a proud species, so they sent a team to join the investigation."

"The Thilku are coming here?" Khan gasped.

"This is a political incident even if the bomb didn't explode," Headmistress Holwen revealed. "I'd learn some Thilku. As the commanding officer of your mission, you have to be there to meet them."

Chapter 540 War

Khan briefed the Headmistress on what he knew. He mentioned that two criminal organizations had their hands on the failed attack, with Mister Chares being a mere carrier of the actual bomb. Still, after that, the Headmistress let him go to focus on the political repercussions.

The Headmistress wasn't the only one who had to deal with politics. As soon as Khan got in the cab, a call reached his phone and looking at the name on the screen made him heave a helpless sigh.

"Mother-in-law," Khan exclaimed when he answered the call. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Captain, I remember telling you to stop calling me like this," Madam Solodrey snorted. "What happened to your voice? Are you free to speak?"

"Don't tell me you are worried about me, ma'am," Khan laughed. "I truly grew on you."

"Nonsense," Madam Solodrey coldly said. "I mentioned that because of my dear daughter. Is she okay?"

"She didn't suffer any injury," Khan reassured. "She was forced to use her element, but I didn't reveal any specifics during the mandatory briefings. I also made sure to hide her appearance."

"That was commendable," Madam Solodrey stated, "For a mutt."

"I merely followed your instructions, ma'am," Khan responded. "I'll become the perfect son-in-law."

"I wish you stopped bringing that up," Madam Solodrey sighed. "Anyway, I expect an update from my daughter once she is presentable. Usually, it takes her a few days to completely recover."

"Leave this to me, ma'am," Khan declared. "I'll scrub her clean every day to accelerate the process."

"Captain, what do you mean by that?!" Madam Solodrey gasped.

"It seems I have to go," Khan casually voiced. "It's always a pleasure, mother-in-law."

Madam Solodrey didn't get to add anything since Khan closed the call and let the phone fall on the seat to his right. Another sigh escaped his mouth as he kicked a drawer in the passenger's area to reveal a bottle. All the high-end cabs offered that service, and he wouldn't refuse it right now.

Khan's fingers had partially recovered during the flight, so he wielded the bottle and took long sips that tainted his bandages while thoughts assaulted his mind. A lot had happened, and that trip back to the second district gave him a chance to review everything.

Raymond was the most striking detail. That mysterious and knowledgeable man clearly had plans for Khan, and he couldn't decide how to handle him. Khan couldn't ignore him either since he was the only figure in his life who seemed to know about the Nak.

The existence of multiple criminal organizations was another big problem. The Hive was on the terrorist spectrum, while Mister Chares seemed to work as a mediator. Khan didn't forget how the soldier on Lauter called him a mercenary, and that was the best guess he could muster.

Khan's political array had also grown more complicated. Adding Francis and Wayne to his life brought heavy responsibilities requiring constant attention. He even had to report to the Solodrey family for almost everything, further worsening his situation.

The meeting with the Headmistress was only the last of Khan's new problems. The Thilku were humankind's allies. The Global Army needed to protect its relationship with that species without appearing weak, and Khan had somehow gotten involved with it.

'Wait,' Khan considered. 'Don't tell me Raymond planned this.'

Khan's growth was happening. It had never stopped, whether in terms of personal power or political relevance. However, he had yet to clarify his direction, which could be anything due to his many options.

Any family would hire Khan, and the Solodrey family also had priority in that field. Khan had worked for the Harbor to avoid involving himself with that aspect of the political array, but it existed and remained strong.

Still, getting formally close to a family risked locking Khan out of his prospects and delaying his goal of finding the Nak. His best bet was to make his achievements as a student lead into ambassador-related jobs, and the recent mission seemed to have done just that.

'I'm just joining a meeting for now,' Khan thought. 'The final tests come before looking for a job.'

Of course, a meeting with a Thilku team sent for a political investigation was a big deal. Khan needed to prepare accordingly, which was exactly what he did in the week following the meeting. The injuries also shielded him from eventual visits, giving him more time to focus on his studies.

Since everyone was injured, tired, or bedridden, Monica and Khan got the chance to isolate themselves. Andrew was keeping track of Wayne, while George had to deal with Anita, so the couple enjoyed their privacy without forgetting about Khan's imminent duties.

The week went by quickly, and the same went for the three days that followed. Yet, on the morning of the fourth day, Khan found himself before the flat's entrance with a figure clung tightly to his waist and seemingly unwilling to let him go.

"Monica, the cab will arrive in minutes," Khan sighed.

"So, we can spend more minutes together," Monica muttered, rubbing her head on Khan's back while tightening her hug even more.

"You just adjusted my uniform," Khan chuckled, peeking at the mess Monica was making.

"I'll adjust it again," Monica pouted.

"You just did," Khan reminded, "And that was the second time already."

"You would remain messy with just one," Monica pointed out.

"That's true," Khan laughed, tapping on Monica's arms to make her relax.

Monica understood the silent gesture and relaxed the hug without breaking it. Khan turned, and the two faced each other to fall into a deep look.

Khan had mostly healed during the past days. His bandages were gone, but his shoulder was still broken, and the metal brace was there to help it recover. His hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes had yet to regrow completely, but someone had come to the flat to adjust his appearance the previous day.

As for Monica, she had regained her natural glow. Her skin was smooth, her curls shone with softness, and her eyes carried their usual fire. The many days spent alone with Khan had actually intensified that part.

"I don't want our honeymoon to end," Monica whined.

"I hope our actual honeymoon won't have so much study," Khan commented, reaching for Monica's left cheek.

Monica reached for Khan's hand, rubbing it to show her ring. The item had a small crack now due to her eruption, but she still wore it proudly.

"Don't get in any fight," Monica lovingly warned.

"It's a political event," Khan reassured.

"You always manage to get into fights," Monica stated, "And suffer injuries."

"I'll be the embodiment of peace," Khan promised.

"And don't get close to any woman," Monica continued. "Cover your eyes if you see one."

"You should just carve them out at this point," Khan suggested.

"No," Monica shook her head. "I love your eyes."

Khan smirked, sliding his thumb toward Monica's mouth to play with her lower lip and add a genuine "I love you".

"No nasty alien business either," Monica added. "You have a weak spot for them."

"You have seen the Thilku," Khan declared. "They are too tall."

"Jenna was tall," Monica pointed out.

"They are not you," Khan changed tactics, and Monica couldn't help but remain speechless. Still, that peace didn't last long.

"You should have said that they don't have my butt!" Monica cried, pulling Khan's hand to put it on her butt.

"I miss how shy you were about that," Khan chuckled, pulling Monica closer to exchange a goodbye kiss.

"I'll prepare more notes while you are away," Monica whispered once the kiss ended. "Come back soon."

"I will," Khan promised, separating to let Monica adjust his uniform. "I know that my girlfriend needs me."

"And your girlfriend needs you every hour of every day," Monica nodded. "She is showing mercy in sharing you with the rest of the world."

"But not for too long," Khan completed.

"Exactly," Monica claimed, glancing at Khan to check his appearance one last time and nodding in approval. "Go now before I make a mess again."

Khan and Monica kissed again but eventually split. It was early, so he had to wait a few minutes on the sidewalk for his cab, but his trip to the embassy began on time.

The tension of the imminent meeting reached Khan inside the solitude of the cab, but some excitement also showed its face. He couldn't wait to learn more about the Thilku. As Monica said, aliens were his weak spot.

After arriving at the embassy, the cab landed on one of the topmost roofs, and a team of soldiers welcomed Khan. He expected to see a grand hall perfectly decorated and prepared for the occasion when he reached his destination, but the reality turned out to be quite different.

The soldiers led Khan into a simple hall. The place was as big as two living rooms, but no seats or tables occupied it. Menus shone on the walls, but the area lacked any decoration or furniture. Khan had seen training facilities more furnished than that.

However, the people inside the hall confirmed that Khan was in the right place. He saw the Headmistress with four soldiers he didn't recognize, and only one of them was a fourth-level warrior. Everyone else looked stronger.

As for the clothing, everyone but one wore military uniforms. The exception was an old-looking man donning a thick red cape, dark shirt, and pants. That was the Thilku's iconic color, and Khan recognized it.

"I hope I'm not late," Khan announced, his eyes drawn by the red man. His face was wrinkled, and his white hair and short beard had lost any trace of vitality, but his burly figure radiated pure strength.

"You are perfectly on time, Captain," Headmistress Holwen exclaimed, pointing at a spot on her right. "Though I'm afraid the introductions will have to wait. I received word that the Thilku team is already on its way."

Khan didn't complain or add anything. He headed for the spot pointed by the Headmistress, and she gave further instructions in the following seconds. Soon, a formation that put the Headmistress and the caped man under the spotlight took form while Khan and the other three soldiers stood at their sides to create lines.

No one spoke. A tense wait unfolded, and the lack of glances intensified that feeling. Everyone fixed their gazes forward, wearing their most serious expressions to prepare for the meeting.

A menu eventually lit up under the Headmistress' feet, and she tapped on it to open the hall's entrance. A team of soldiers became visible, but the red color behind them soon claimed everyone's attention.

Five big figures walked behind the soldiers. They were all between two and two and a half meters tall, and their tight dark uniforms highlighted their burly shapes. They also wore thick red capes similar to the old man's, but Khan quickly moved to different details.

The aliens had flat noses, big, wrinkled foreheads, and dark-red skin. They merely had holes for ears. Their mouths were oddly big, while their eyes were small. Their rectangular heads also didn't have much hair except for that growing from their napes.

'So,' Khan thought, 'These are the Thilku.'

Khan's eyes fell on the Thilku's hands when the escort team joined the two lines. That species had six fingers with two opposable thumbs. That was their most alien feature except for their dark-red skin.

"[Welcome, friends]," The caped man announced, grabbing the right edge of his mantle and stretching his arm to perform a bow.

"Thank you for having us," The Thilku in the lead exclaimed in an almost-perfect human accent, performing the same gesture which his companions imitated.

Khan had studied that gesture. That bow was part of the Thilku customs, and his senses picked up more than that. The Thilku didn't have striking differences between men and women. Their bodies were almost identical, except for their sexual organs and hair color. Men tended to have white shades, while women had golden ones.

'Three men and two women,' Khan counted as the symphony provided more information. 'Only three are fourth-level warriors. The others are in the third level.'

That was a perfectly decent team, but the force deployed by the Global Army far outclassed it. The Headmistress alone could defeat all the aliens, and the area had three more soldiers as strong as her. A stranger would think the Harbor was trying to show off, but Khan knew that was a form of respect toward the Thilku.

"If you don't mind," The Thilku in the lead continued, "We would like to see the bomb to confirm it has Thilku origins."All *latest novels* on [novelbin/\(.\)com](http://novelbin(.)com)

"Our specialists already checked it," Headmistress Holwen joined the conversation. "It's Thilku."

"A Thilku bomb would have exploded," The alien claimed, and his big mouth broadened into a smile that showed his long canine tooth.

"Luckily," Headmistress Holwen stated, "A capable team was in the area and defused it. We explained that in our report."

"You did," The Thilku agreed, crossing his burly arms on his chest. "However, it's hard to believe it."

A Thilku behind the speaker, one of the third-level warriors, snorted when he heard those words. His scarlet eyes even peeked at Khan, but he didn't dare to utter anything without explicit approval.

"It seems your subordinate has something to say," Headmistress Holwen commented. "Why don't we hear him?"

The Thilku in charge turned toward the third-level warrior and voiced a hoarse order that sounded like a threat. "[Speak]."

"Blue hair can't defuse bomb," The third-level warrior said with the best human accent he could muster.

"Captain Khan accomplished incredible feats multiple times," Headmistress Holwen declared. "This simply is another one."

"Thilku stronger than human," The third-level warrior continued. "Blue hair can't strong enough for bomb."

Khan understood that political move even before it became complete. The Thilku wanted to challenge Khan's report by undermining his figure. They were technically telling the truth too, so calling them out would hurt their pride.

"Well," Headmistress Holwen uttered, pointing her gaze at Khan. "Captain Khan, do you have anything to say in your defense?"

Many eyes fell on Khan, including those belonging to the Thilku team. Yet, he only looked at the third-level warrior while a plan formed in his mind. The Thilku wanted to label him as weak, so he had to find something that proved the opposite and, ideally, bound him to that field.

"Blue hair can talk?" The third-level warrior asked since Khan had spent a few seconds silent.

Khan cleared his throat and summoned his best accent before speaking. "[You war me. You die]."