

Chaos' Heir 541

Chapter 541 Strong

Khan's statement had been an obvious challenge. Some might find it insulting, but his choice of words had been precise and specific for the current situation.

Passing as weak wasn't an option. Khan wouldn't only lose face if he let those statements go. The Global Army would also have a problem since the Thilku wouldn't have a reason to take the matter too seriously.

Still, words were pointless, especially if spoken by Khan. He held no political relevance in that field, so fighting was his only option, and openly challenging a Thilku was bound to lead there.

Silence spread in the hall. Many weaker soldiers widened their eyes in shock, but the more experienced ones remained calm. The Headmistress and her fellow higher-ups even held back approving nods. They knew what Khan was up to and agreed to that path.

Instead, the Thilku showed different reactions. The third-level warrior that had insulted Khan appeared livid, and a couple of his companions shared that emotion. As for the man in charge, he looked amused.

"Why don't you see Captain Khan's prowess by yourself," Headmistress Holwen suggested before the situation could degenerate. "We could arrange a fight."

The Thilku in charge had to stop looking at Khan. He could ignore a comment from a simple soldier, but the Headmistress held too much authority. Besides, a response was necessary now that the offer was in the open.

Refusing wasn't an option for the Thilku. After all, they were famously proud, and the alien group made that clear with their reaction. Soon, all the Thilku glanced at their leader, eager for him to accept the offer.

The alien leader turned toward Khan. His dark-red eyes inspected him from head to toe before lingering on his metal brace. Clearly, Khan was still injured, but his expression conveyed pure confidence.

"[Beat him]," The alien leader eventually uttered, and the third-level warrior exploded into a laugh before pointing his eager gaze at Khan. He appeared ready to kill him, but Khan didn't flinch.

"Clear the room," Headmistress Holwen ordered. "The fight will happen here."

"Yes, ma'am!" Many soldiers shouted, performing military salutes before heading for the exit. The hall regained its partial emptiness, leaving only the original teams behind.

"This way, please," The Headmistress eventually ordered, pointing at one of the walls. "The two contestants can go to the center and await further orders."

The Thilku and the Headmistress' companions complied, approaching the wall to give Khan and the third-level warrior some room. Meanwhile, the latter stared at each other for a few seconds, one conveying pure coldness while the other as burning as possible.

Khan shot a bored look at his opponent before heading for the hall's center. The Thilku didn't like that, but one glance at his leader told him he had to hold back for now. The alien eventually followed Khan, and the two faced each other once they reached their destination.

"There will be no killing on Harbor ground," Headmistress Holwen warned. "Is that clear?"

"Yes, ma'am," Khan exclaimed while the alien limited himself to a loud scoff.

Silence fell. Khan pretended to inspect the alien while various thoughts filled his mind. He had a precise plan which required his lying skills to implement. Yet, first, he had to make the Thilku understand the difference between their strength.

"You can start!" Headmistress Holwen shouted, and the third-level warrior exploded into another laugh while spreading his muscular arms.

"Come, blue hair," The Thilku announced, clearly wanting Khan to make the first move. "Attack Thilku!"

Khan decided to remain silent for a few more seconds, conveying disregard for the threat posed by the alien. That made the Thilku angrier, but Khan spoke before he could break that stalemate.

"Remove your cape," Khan said, nodding at the alien's thick mantle.

"Thilku don't need to," The third-level warrior laughed. "Thilku strong!"

"As you wish," Khan sighed. "Help my legs."

"Wha-?" The Thilku began to ask, but his voice transformed into a grunt before he could finish his line. His red eyes even widened in surprise. He had lost track of Khan, and something heavy had landed at the center of his torso.

The Thilku lowered his gaze only to find Khan under him. He had delivered a precise kick to his belly, and his leg was still in the air. The alien wanted to grab it, but his body opposed that gesture and tried to crouch forward.

Khan didn't know much about Thilku's anatomy, but the mana told him that his attack had dealt enough damage. He could probably finish the fight with his next move, but a simple victory wouldn't be enough. He had to destroy his opponent to claim respect.

The leg in the air surged upward, hitting the descending alien's chin and straightening his position. However, Khan didn't stop there. He immediately lowered his limb and crouched forward before delivering another kick.

Khan focused on pushing rather than destroying. His kick landed on the alien's abdomen, lifting him from the ground. Another attack followed, sending him upward. The Thilku escaped Khan's range at that point, but he jumped and continued his offensive.

A series of kicks unfolded. Khan focused on the Thilku's abdomen and chest to push him higher and higher. The alien's back eventually hit the ceiling, but Khan kept going.

Needless to say, that overwhelming performance left the Thilku on the floor speechless. They were a proud species, but no one could blame them for that performance. Khan was simply too strong, especially in the eyes of the fourth-level warriors who had kept up with his speed.

The human side had opposite reactions. Those higher-ups couldn't help but feel proud before such an overwhelming display of skills. Khan's performance surprised them too, but they preferred to focus on the political benefits that would arrive.

Khan kicked and kicked until the metal behind the Thilku bent. He had damaged the ceiling, which was enough to prove his strength.

'The ending now,' Khan thought, tapping on the air to spin on himself and deliver a kick that sent the Thilku toward the floor.

That round kick wasn't random. Khan didn't only plan it. He had also aimed it with a precise purpose in mind. The Thilku flew directly toward his alien companions, who moved away and made him crash into the wall.

No one helped the third-level warrior. The aliens stood still since the battle had yet to end, and the fourth-level warriors among them soon found something else to watch. Khan had immediately landed among them to stand before his opponent.

Khan didn't deign the other aliens with a single look. His attention remained on his opponent. The third-level warrior had slid on the floor, unable to stand in time for his arrival. One of his arms was also on his abdomen, hinting at his pain. Yet, his eyes were still clear and ready for battle.

'I went easy on him,' Khan thought without showing any reaction, 'But he is tougher than I expected.'

Khan wanted the Thilku to look a bit more roughed up, but that part of the plan didn't work his way. His offensive had hurt the alien but didn't break his resolve. It had actually intensified it.

'Time for the finale,' Khan thought, and the coldness on his face vanished, replaced by a genuine smile and a tinge of excitement. He had learnt how to deal with the Ef'i long ago, so he hoped similar behavior could work with the Thilku.

"Wow," Khan exclaimed, stretching his hand forward and clearing his throat. "[Thilku strong]!"

The sudden switch in behavior left the Thilku surprised but slightly pleased. Khan had every right to make the third-level warrior pay for his previous insults but had opted for respect. The praise didn't fit the battle's outcome but had great value in that political environment.

The third-level warrior seemed inclined to take Khan's hand right away, but his broadening smile froze when he recalled something. He glanced at his leader and resumed that gesture only when he nodded in approval.

"Blue hair strong too," The third-level warrior eventually announced, taking Khan's hand and letting him help with the standing process. The alien even followed with a formal bow to show respect.

"I trust this demonstration proves Captain Khan's worth," Headmistress Holwen exclaimed, reaching the Thilku group with her companions.

"He is an exceptional soldier," The alien leader praised, facing the Headmistress to perform a customary bow. "The Global Army is lucky to have him."

"It is," Headmistress Holwen nodded. "I believe we can put the previous topic aside."

"Indeed," The alien leader confirmed. "However, checking the bomb will become necessary at some point. A Thilku opinion can only help."

The conversation's vibe had completely changed. The alien leader was basically making the same request as before, but his words had gotten far politer, and he didn't add any veiled insult or praise to them.

"Of course," Headmistress Holwen agreed. "Cooperation is mandatory in this investigation. That's the foundation of our alliance."

"And friendship," The alien leader continued. "With our forces combined, this investigation will be short and easy."

Smiles broadened on both sides, but facial expressions couldn't blind Khan. He saw beyond those political gestures to look directly at the mana, and the auras from both aliens and humans told him that no one believed in that statement.

Chapter 542 Path

The politeness and mutual respect remained strong for the rest of the meeting. Headmistress Holwen, her companions, and the alien leader exchanged basic pleasantries typical to that political environment without going too deep into the investigation's details or specifics.

Khan didn't expect anything different. The Thilku and the Global Army were testing the waters to see where they stood. Actual political actions would require further authorizations, preparations, and deals which the people in the meeting didn't have the authority to grant.

Khan could only remain silent while those pleasantries flew. His role in that meeting was over, so he focused on the mana and other details to better understand the situation.

The possibility of a cross-species investigation scared both sides for obvious reasons. Any criminal presence would make a party lose face in front of its allies. None of that could hit the public eye. Heavy repercussions could unfold otherwise.

Nevertheless, the existence of that bomb had to lead somewhere. The investigation had to happen. Only the how had yet to become clear.

Khan could easily understand the Thilku's perspective when he compared it to the human situation. The Global Army had much to learn from the alien criminals since they would be aware of political secrets and hidden routes. The same went for the Thilku, but the fact that humankind had the bomb put them at a disadvantage.

If an investigation were to happen, the Global Army would probably push for it to stretch into the Thilku's domain. That was a natural consequence of the current situation, and the Thilku could only delay the inevitable.

'They'll probably try to give us scapegoats,' Khan understood when the meeting seemed about to end. 'That will make everyone happy and give them a chance to perform private investigations.'

Of course, nothing similar ever escaped the teams' mouths, but Khan had studied enough to understand those details. Monica had also walked him through those topics, so he knew his hypothesis was reasonable. Khan actually didn't mind that development. He only wanted to benefit from it.

"I think it's time for you to see the bomb," Headmistress Holwen eventually announced, distracting Khan from his thoughts. "Don't you agree?"

"It would move this meeting forward," The alien leader agreed.

"Please, then," Headmistress Holwen stated, pointing at the hall's exit. "We already have a ship ready, and the team is in position. Why don't you make yourselves comfortable for now?"

"We can't allow comfort during a mission," The alien leader declared. "However, we'll do our best to enjoy your hospitality."

"That's enough," Headmistress Holwen uttered. "We'll see you in a few minutes."

The only fourth-level warrior among the human team led the aliens outside the hall, leaving the Headmistress, her three companions, and Khan inside. Those higher-ups' composure slightly relaxed when the exit closed, but Khan saw their eyes converging on him right afterward.

"To think you'd challenge a Thilku to a fight," The old man wearing the Thilku's clothing exclaimed. "I heard about you, Captain Khan, but it looks like the rumors don't do you justice."

"This is Mister Cirvags," Headmistress Holwen intervened. "He commands all the Harbor's offices connected to the Thilku. The Thilku themselves consider him as a friend as stated by his clothes."

"I have been in this field for over fifty years," Mister Cirvags revealed. "I must say, this is the first time someone has made such a good impression on the Thilku."

"Thank you, sir," Khan uttered, performing a military salute with one arm. "I have a way with aliens."

"I heard that too," Mister Cirvags responded, scratching his short beard. "Though, your actions have been reckless. Were you to lose, the meeting would have gone far differently."

"I knew I could take him, sir," Khan declared, "And so did you."

Khan's confidence didn't trigger any scolding. The Headmistress scoffed, Mister Cirvags kept scratching his beard, and one of the other men smiled. The mana also confirmed that reaction. The group liked Khan's answer.

"The confidence is on point," Mister Cirvags stated, "But your accent is way off. I don't allow slackers into my offices."

"He still has more than a month," The smiling man announced. "By the way, I'm Cecil Usten, Captain. I oversee any interspecies operation in the Harbor."

"And I'm Clark Onsai," The last man declared. "I'm Professor Parver's boss. Well, I oversee most of the Harbor's scientific department, and many specialists are willing to vouch for you."

Khan could vaguely understand where that conversation was going but still asked a question to clarify that point. "What are you offering me?"

"That's a talk for another time," Headmistress Holwen intervened again. "You should focus on studying now. We can talk once your last tests' results are out."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, ma'am," Khan voiced, "But it seems it would be better if I studied the Thilku language and politics too."

"If you can handle it," Headmistress Holwen remained vague. "Many doors will open for you after your graduation. You'd only have to choose one."

"I understand, ma'am," Khan nodded.

"Now, your presence isn't necessary for the rest of the meeting," Headmistress Holwen revealed. "A ship will be ready for you in a few minutes. If I were you, I'd go home and put my business in order."

Khan didn't say anything but understood what the Headmistress meant. He would have to make important decisions about his future in the next months, and his home still had responsibilities that could affect them.

"It was a pleasure, Captain Khan," Mister Onsai stated, slightly lowering his head in respect. "If the situation were any different, my offices wouldn't have hesitated to send a few offers of their own."

"I concur," Mister Usten added. "Still, hopefully, you'll become free soon enough. I'm sure we'll have another conversation at that point."

"Let's not make our guests wait," Headmistress Holwen reminded. "Captain, it's better if you wait for the appointed team to summon you. You don't have clearance for most of these areas anyway."

"It was a pleasure, Headmistress," Khan politely exclaimed. "Sirs."

The group nodded and exchanged pleased expressions before heading for the exit. Khan kept his head lowered the whole time, but the closing of the metal doors made him lift it. Still, his eyes never looked at the metal. He had too much to think about to care about the hall.

'A job with the Thilku,' Khan immediately realized. 'That's my ticket into the ambassador's field.'

The Headmistress and her companions had kept everything vague, but their words had sounded more than obvious to Khan. He also knew his unique position. He had played a key role in discovering the bomb, so it made sense for the Global Army to want him as part of the investigation.

'A political job,' Khan thought, unable to stop the excitement rising in him. 'A real political job.'

That was the first real step toward Khan's main goal. The Thilku were only one of the alien species the Global Army had relationships with, but that didn't change the truth. Joining that world would give Khan political power and knowledge over interspecies politics. He could really start investigating the Nak from there.

Of course, everything had a price, and the Headmistress' companions had vaguely mentioned them. Mister Onsai and Mister Usten were leaders of different areas willing to offer Khan more positions. By opting for the political field, he would close those doors for an unknown amount of time.

Khan didn't forget how everything had started with Raymond either. The latter could have very well predicted that outcome and prepared accordingly. There was a chance Mister Cirvags' offices had spies or proper criminals. It would actually be reasonable since a Thilku bomb had managed to reach the Harbor's system.

'Though I can't refuse it, can I?' Khan considered. 'It's too good for my career.'

An ordinary soldier wouldn't have the chance to refuse direct orders, but Khan didn't belong to that group. He had many families on his side which could offer valuable alternatives. Nothing forced him to continue working for the Global Army, but that probably was his best option. He risked losing his freedom otherwise.

Khan carefully adjusted his brace. His shoulder had hurt a bit during the battle, but nothing serious had happened. Yet, that pain reminded him about Monica's warning and the problems connected with that situation.

'They might send me out of the Harbor,' Khan thought, 'And I can't leave Francis and Wayne alone. It would reflect poorly on my image.'

The Headmistress had been clear on that point, but Khan didn't need her warning. He had already considered multiple options for his companions. Francis was relatively easy to handle, but Wayne was a big problem, and Khan needed help with him.

'I have to call another political meeting, don't I?' Khan cursed.

The sole thought of having so many descendants in the flat again tried to trigger a headache, but Khan couldn't find better options. Wayne needed specialists to undo Mister Chares' psychological training, and only the families could offer that service without asking too many questions.

'More meetings,' Khan sighed, 'More study, more politics.'

Khan couldn't look forward to the next period, but a new determination appeared in that mess. If he played his cards well, he would get on the path that could finally bring answers to his greatest curse. He might finally find the Nak.

Chapter 543 Future

Khan followed the Headmistress' instructions, leaving the hangar only when a team of soldiers summoned him. A cab was also waiting for him, so his trip back to the second district began immediately.

Quelling the excitement wasn't easy, and Khan even failed to put it down for good. It was simply impossible for him to suppress that feeling. After all, he had spent more than three years getting where he was, and his efforts were finally about to pay off.

Still, the excitement didn't stop troublesome thoughts from filling Khan's mind. He couldn't ignore his problems when he was so close to stepping onto his sought path, and those ideas afflicted his thoughts even when the elevator brought him to his flat.

"Khan?" Monica excitedly called as soon as the flat notified her, and Khan didn't hesitate to hurry into the main hall to meet her. She came out of a corridor to greet him, but her broad smile vanished when she saw him.

Monica squinted her eyes and approached Khan to smell his uniform. She even inspected his brace and shoes before glaring at his face.

"You fought," Monica stated.

"How did you-?" Khan questioned.

"I knew it!" Monica exclaimed, reaching for Khan's uniform to unbutton it. She even lowered his pants to check whether he had suffered any injury.

"I'm fine," Khan reassured, crouching to grab Monica's side and pull her up with him. "Monica, I'm fine."

"How can you always get into fights?!" Monica scolded, stomping her feet.

"The Thilku didn't believe I defused the bomb," Khan explained shortly. "I had to show them what I can do."

"I'll call the doctor," Monica declared, pulling up her phone.

"I'm fine," Khan repeated. "Well, not as fine as him."

Monica frowned, but Khan eventually nodded toward a spot behind her. She turned only to see a smiling Wayne standing at the corridor's edges. The latter was the embodiment of excitement, and his eyes often fell on Khan's lowered pants.

"Wayne, remember what we said about privacy?" Monica snorted, quickly pulling up Khan's pants to cover him.

"So," Wayne announced, "The woman pulls down the man's pants as soon as he gets home. I get it. I get it."

"Wayne!" Monica shouted.

"Don't take anything we do as normal," Khan chuckled, pulling Monica onto his chest. "She is just on the lewd end of the spectrum."

"Khan!" Monica cried.

"I see!" Wayne's eyes lit up. "I have to adjust my idea of Miss Solodrey."

"Stop using Wayne to tease me," Monica complained, hiding her face in Khan's chest. "It's fine only when we are alone."

"This is what I call a low blow," Khan explained to Wayne. "Now I can't find the strength to tease her anymore."

"Taking notes!" Wayne nodded, and Khan laughed when Monica let out a suppressed scream.

"Okay, okay," Khan uttered, rubbing Monica's hair. "Let's sit for a while. I have to talk to you two."

Wayne smiled, sprinting through the hall to perform a precise leap that ended right at the center of a couch. He even put his hands on his knees, seemingly excited about the incoming talk.

Khan and Monica didn't miss that gesture, and similar thoughts invaded their minds. Wayne had been far worse off than any of them but had recovered completely in half the time.

"I wish you could heal that quickly," Monica commented.

"He just needs to go through the same experiments!" Wayne responded. "The needles aren't too bad, but-."

"I changed my mind," Monica interrupted, taking Khan's face in her hands to deliver a short kiss. "I'll get you a drink, dear."

Khan couldn't help but wear a dumb smile as he watched Monica leave his chest to head for one of the hall's drawers. She even peeked at him during her slow walk, and her expression revealed how pleased she was that he was looking at her.

A helpless sigh escaped Khan's mouth as he headed for a couch before Wayne's. The latter waited patiently, but his face was the image of a hyperactive kid ready to start a game.

"Where is Andrew?" Khan asked.

"He is sparring with Francis," Wayne revealed. "They should be back soon."

Khan nodded before lifting his gaze when Monica approached the array of couches. She delivered a full glass to Wayne before sitting on Khan's right to make sure he could hug her. Of course, the couple also got their respective drinks.

"So," Khan announced, clearing his throat. "Nothing is official yet, but I'm pretty sure I'll get to work with the Thilku once I graduate."

"Is it because of the bomb?" Monica asked.

"Precisely," Khan confirmed. "I don't know the details, but it makes sense for the Harbor to want me on the field. I'm the most informed about the human side in the end."

"Which isn't much," Monica sighed, glancing at Wayne. "Are you sure you can't tell us more about the criminals? You might know useful details."

"Even if I knew," Wayne laughed, "I might be unable to reveal them. I lost count of how many restrictions they put on me."

Monica and Khan couldn't help but show sad smiles. No matter how many times they heard Wayne's story, his life remained terrible.

"That's one of the things I wanted to talk about," Khan said. "Holing myself in the flat while I'm a student is fine, but an actual job will probably require my presence. They might very well send me out of the Harbor."

"I'll come with you!" Wayne exclaimed.

"The Headmistress made it very clear that you are still a criminal in the Global Army's eyes," Khan explained, "And I don't have the authority to clear your name. Once I'm out of the picture, many families will probably ask for your head."

"My neck can survive all sorts of cutting!" Wayne proudly claimed.

"It's not about that," Monica intervened. "You'd only slow Khan down right now. You need to get your head fixed so we can finally learn more about his heritage."

"He is a noble," Wayne stated, "Just like me."

"Yes," Monica sighed, "But his situation doesn't make much sense. You claim they had accepted his parents. How can a single incident make them cut ties?"

"Maybe there is more to the Second Impact," Khan guessed.

"I understand the Global Army having more connections to the Nak than it lets out," Monica voiced, "But you are talking about conspiracies. There are cleaner ways to kill important figures."

"Even nobles?" Khan wondered.

"Only the nobles know that," Monica shook her head. "Though, I think sending a Nak ship with a living Nak inside is too much. It simply draws too much attention."

"That's true," Khan agreed. That wasn't the first time they had that conversation, and the clues always pointed in the same direction. The Second Impact couldn't have been part of a larger ploy.

"How is the Nak in your nightmares?" Wayne asked. "Tall? Strong? Stronger than us?"

"Scared," Khan revealed. "I can feel its fear but can't explain it."

Monica placed a hand on Khan's leg to make him feel her presence. Her words were useless in that situation, but her warmth could help.

"I heard my mother was a troublemaker," Khan recalled, kissing Monica's head to thank her for that gesture. "Maybe her family couldn't wait to cut her away."

"Maybe," Monica uttered. "I don't think you can learn anything concrete right now."

"You are right," Khan heaved a helpless sigh, lying his head on the couch's back. "I need to focus on studying anyway. Your mother wants me to do well."

"You also need to focus on me," Monica whined. "We won't be able to see each other too often once the semester is over."

"And me too!" Wayne exclaimed. "Let's spend every day together!"

"You are not sleeping in our room," Monica scolded.

"But the bed is big enough for the three of us!" Wayne stated.

"I'm not doing this again!" Monica cried.

"Again?" Wayne asked.

"It's nothing," Monica promptly voiced, glaring at Khan since he had worn a teasing smile. "Right?"

"Right, right," Khan laughed, but a notification lit up on the hall's walls and distracted the trio.

Khan, Monica, and Wayne glanced toward the elevator room, and George soon walked out of it. He had also recovered, but a complaint escaped his mouth as soon as he reached the hall.

"You started without me," George snorted.

"You aren't exactly easy to track these days," Khan teased. "Something tells me you are too busy with Anita as your nurse."

"Never tell her that," George warned, heading for an empty couch and grabbing the bottle Monica had left on the floor.

"So," Monica giggled, unable to hide how happy she was that things were working out for her friend. "Anita isn't telling me much, but I heard she skipped a few lessons."

"She must have been busy studying," George vaguely said.

"Busy?" Wayne repeated. "Khan, he meant sex, right?"

"He did," Khan confirmed.

"Come on, man," George scolded. "It's me she gets angry at when you tease her like this."

"We are teasing you," Khan pointed out.

"Enjoy it while it lasts," George snorted, seeing the three happy gazes pointed at him.

"Are you going somewhere?" Khan questioned.

"Well," George cleared his throat. "The semester is almost over. As boring as it sounds, I might have to return to my family and deal with some jobs."

"When did you get so responsible?" Monica joked. "I thought you would have used any loophole to laze around a bit longer."

"Wait," Khan noticed something. "Is Anita coming with you?"

"Maybe," George lowered his voice and hid his mouth behind the bottle. "She wants to meet my mother. You know, politics."

Khan and Monica didn't believe for a single second that the event was limited to politics. It had far deeper importance, especially when considering George's character.

"Stop looking at me like this," George cursed. "I bet you also made plans to keep being a married couple."

"I wish," Khan stated, beating Monica. "We'll see. Wayne is my biggest problem for now."

"I'm the greatest problem!" Wayne proudly echoed.

"I'm thinking about doing another meeting with the other descendants," Khan explained. "I can't use the Solodrey family's resources for his treatment. They'd just chain me tighter to them."

"But the big families have a higher chance of having connections with the criminals," George pointed out. "Why don't you send him to mine? It would be easier to control the process."

Chapter 544 Shy

"Are you sure?" Khan couldn't help but ask. "I'd rather not cause problems for your family."

"I don't see other trustworthy options," George pointed out. "As far as we know, any family might have criminals."

"Even yours," Khan added.

"Yes," George nodded, "But my father would offer genuine support without cost or ploys."

"That's one of the reasons why I'd avoid it," Khan explained. "It's impossible to transfer Wayne secretly, and accepting him can create many enemies, not only among criminals."

"I've been on many missions!" Wayne laughed. "If they leak information about me, many families would request my presence."

"We can't be sure they'll expose themselves so much," Monica exclaimed.

"I should have died on Lauter," Wayne laughed again. "Exposing my activities might lead to the same result."

Wayne had a point. He had already infiltrated an environment filled with descendants. The criminals only had to release sensitive information about him to force the families' hand. That ploy would also make sense since Wayne probably knew too much for his own good.

"It's too dangerous," Khan shook his head. He preferred to make a bad deal with the Solodrey family rather than involve George.

"Oh, stop being so stubborn," George snorted. "You are not alone in this, and I have tons of debts to repay."

"Having you here solved all of that," Khan announced.

"Please," George snickered. "I came here to laze around and relax."

"Let's not do this now," Khan cursed before that blatant lie.

"Khan," Monica called, tightening her grip on Khan's leg. "Let him help. Let us help."

Khan's eyes darted between Monica's pleading expression and George's firm face. He didn't care about the Solodrey family, but George was his friend. Ideally, Khan would keep his problems away from him, but that was his selfless side speaking.

"I'll entrust him to you," Khan eventually gave up, "But notify me if something happens. I'll step in right away."

"We'll see about that," George teased.

"George," Khan called in a scolding tone.

"What?" George smirked. "I thought you trusted me."

Khan opened his mouth, but George's statement didn't allow replies. The latter was aware of that, and his smirk broadened when he noticed that Khan remained silent.

"You should be wary, Mister Ildoo," Wayne announced, breaking the silence. "Things go bad around me."

"Khan told me everything about your element," George stated, waving his hand dismissively. "I'm bringing a woman back home. Things have already gone bad."

"I thought that was a good thing," Wayne exclaimed. "Miss Wildon's family outclasses yours. Isn't that called a nice catch?"

"It is," Khan confirmed. "George is just shy."

"I see!" Wayne declared. "I have to adjust my idea of Mister Ildoo too!"

"Don't put strange ideas in his mind," George cursed.

"And you make sure to treat Anita properly," Monica warned. "You'll hear from me otherwise."

"She is just meeting my mother," George casually said. "It's nothing serious."

Khan and Monica pointed their smirks at George, and Wayne joined them. He wasn't trying to tease George, but his face revealed that he was aware of that lie.

"My father has already annoyed me to no end about this," George snorted, standing up. "I'm not staying here to hear the same things all over again."

"Come on, George," Khan laughed. "Don't be shy."

"A responsible man has a superior charm," Monica praised. "Maybe you are ready for my teachings."

"I have also been trained in these arts!" Wayne joined the conversation. "I can help, Mister Ildoo."

"Fuck all of you," George cried, hurrying toward the elevator room before peeking at his friends and speaking in a far calmer tone. "Is the meeting with the descendants still happening?"

"We have to reappear in public sooner or later," Khan explained. "It's better if we deal with that first."

"Alright," George exclaimed. "Just let me know when."

"Can we trust you to pass the news to Anita?" Monica teased.

"You'll marry before me anyway," George cursed, hurrying toward the elevator to leave the flat.

Khan and Monica exploded into a laugh once George left, and Wayne echoed it out of habit. The couple felt forced to turn toward him, and some sadness returned as they thought about his situation.

As much as Khan wanted to help, he lacked the expertise, knowledge, and tools to help Wayne. The latter needed professionals to deal with his traumatic training before slowly pushing him back into society. Khan could only make the period before that as pleasant as possible.

Yet, Khan couldn't drop everything for Wayne. His days had just gotten busier now that he had to add the Thilku's subjects to his studies. He couldn't abandon Francis either, and his political life remained a big problem.

"Wayne," Khan eventually called, "You know you can drop the Mister and Miss with us, right? I told you that."

"I'm sure I'll drop it in a few days!" Wayne laughed.

"Is it part of your training?" Monica questioned.

"Social studies say that acquaintances turn into friends after ninety hours spent together," Wayne explained. "It's safer to assume double of that with descendants and political figures."

"But we gave you explicit permission," Monica pointed out.

"It's fine," Khan intervened, letting Monica go to stand up. "Wayne, come with me a little."

Wayne's eyes lit up as he shot to his feet. He eagerly followed Khan to the edges of a corridor as if expecting something incredible to happen.

"Look," Khan voiced, stopping at the corridor's edges and facing Wayne. "I wish I could spend more time with you, but my studies are calling me, and Monica has priority over you."

"I understand!" Wayne exclaimed. "Fiancées come before friends in the political array."

"Yes, well," Khan sighed. "It's not that strict, but that rule works in his case."

"The Harbor's flats offer a great deal of privacy," Wayne revealed. "You can lock me up too."

"I'm not locking you up," Khan scolded. "You are not my prisoner."

"I told you," Wayne chuckled. "You should have killed me when you had the chance."

"Shut up," Khan scoffed. "Don't think about that anymore. Actually, I want you to focus on yourself."

Wayne kept smiling but remained silent. He didn't know what Khan meant by that but understood that he was about to explain himself.

"I know you can feel envy toward me," Khan stated. "You don't have to hold it back."

"If I let myself experience that," Wayne announced.

"Yes, bad things will happen," Khan interrupted, "But I've defeated you anyway, didn't I?"

"You keep reminding me," Wayne laughed. "Brother, you are petty."

"Just trust me on this," Khan uttered. "We won't be able to be together for too long. I don't want you to hold back in this period."

"I can do that," Wayne nodded, "But now you want me to leave, right?"

"I have to talk with Monica in private," Khan confirmed.

"Is that code for sex too?" Wayne exclaimed.

"Most likely," Khan stated.

"I can hear you!" Monica shouted from the couches, making Khan laugh.

"Go now," Khan ordered. "I'll call you for dinner."

"Sure!" Wayne exclaimed, diving into the corridor to enter his bedroom. Still, when the entrance tried to close, it remained stuck mid-way.

"Khan!" Wayne called, peeking past the half-closed entrance.

"It's fine," Khan reassured, waving his hand. "Leave it like that."

"Alright!" Wayne shouted, disappearing into his room again.

Khan heaved a helpless sigh as he returned to the array of couches. Monica wanted to wear a pout, but seeing his tired expression made her give up on that playful anger.

"Hey," Monica called, welcoming Khan on her lap. He laid his head on her thighs and closed his eyes to sort out his thoughts, but the caresses that reached his hair made him reopen them.

"You are not abandoning him," Monica reassured when that tired gaze fell on her. "He needs to do this to live a normal life."

"What kind of normal can he even experience?" Khan sighed. "I wish I could do more for him after dragging him all the way here."

"He is among people working for his well-being," Monica stated. "That's more he has ever gotten in his whole life."

"I don't know," Khan uttered. "It doesn't feel like much."

"You just can't settle when it comes to others," Monica giggled. "You even promised an entire planet to Jenna. I hope you won't get moody about that too."

"I'm surprised you can mention her without getting jealous," Khan teased.

"I've more than made up for that," Monica replied, "And I still have time."

"We do," Khan nodded, reaching for his head to take one of Monica's hands. "So, what are your plans after the Harbor?"

"I could stay here and be the good housewife," Monica joked, blushing a little since the idea formed in her mind.

"Monica," Khan lovingly scolded.

"I don't know," Monica sighed, playing with Khan's fingers. "My parents will want me to appear in some social gatherings. I might also have to close a few deals for them."

"Will there be suitors there?" Khan questioned.

"Of course," Monica stated. "Are you jealous?"

"Immensely," Khan groaned.

"Don't be," Monica reassured, letting go of Khan's hand to show her ring. "You put this on me for a reason."

"I should buy you another before your mother complains," Khan suggested.

"No!" Monica snapped, bringing her left hand to her chest. "This is my treasure. You can replace it only once we get engaged."

"Would you let me replace it at all?" Khan asked.

"Probably not," Monica pouted.

"I knew it," Khan chuckled. "Still, I'll miss you."

"Don't be so unfair," Monica complained.

"Alright," Khan feigned ignorance, pulling his phone to place it before his gaze. "I guess I'll start studying then."

Only a few seconds had to pass before familiar fingers wrapped themselves around the screen and pushed it aside. Monica looked at Khan wearing an expression he knew far too well, and he didn't hesitate to let go of the phone altogether.

"Should I still plan the meeting?" Monica whispered.

"Yes," Khan confirmed, "But make them come late."

Chapter 545 Last Stretch

The meeting could happen any day, but Khan preferred to have it that very night to accelerate his return to the lessons. He risked falling behind in his studies otherwise.

The commotion caused by Lauter's crisis didn't wane in the previous weeks, so a single message from Monica made the descendants clear their schedules and gather in Khan's flat. Lucian, Lucy, Marcia, Zoe, John, Mark, Anita, George, and even Francis took their seats in the main hall, and Monica delivered drinks to everyone before officially starting that meeting.

"Well," Lucian announced, leaving his armchair and lifting his full glass. "I think I speak for everyone when I say congratulations are in order. You accomplished a major service for the Global Army and all of us, Captain."

Approving statements resounded in the main hall as the other descendants stood up and lifted their glasses. Only Khan remained on his couch and respectfully lowered his head to accept that praise.

"Please, sit," Khan chuckled, lifting his glass to join that toast. "Any soldier would have done the same in that situation."

"But few would have succeeded," Mark stated. "All our families wanted us to convey their gratitude. We were waiting for this opportunity."

"I'm flattered," Khan exclaimed. "Still, I'm tired of congratulations. I'd rather move to the friendly part of the meeting."

"And he decided to brag," George commented, returning to his seat. "You know, it's happening more often."

"It's not my problem I continue to be awesome," Khan joked.

"Can he be any cooler?" John whined, also falling back to his seat. The other descendants soon imitated him, putting an end to that toast.

"You are about to fall for him, John," Lucy teased.

"My heart is already his," John dramatically said, lifting his glass and cigarette toward the ceiling. "Mark, can't we kidnap him or something?"

"You can try," Monica hid her threat behind an elegant smile.

"I knew Monica would have jumped in his defense," Zoe giggled.

"She doesn't need to hide it anymore," Anita pointed out.

"You don't either," Marcia added. "You must be excited about your next trip."

"Hey, we don't talk about that today," George declared, keeping his gaze on the wall while Anita slid a finger into his palm. He took it but still pretended to be annoyed.

"We'll have time to tease George," Khan exclaimed, pointing his drink at Francis. "For now, I think the mission's true hero also deserves praise."

"I didn't do much," Francis politely smiled as everyone looked at him. "It's lucky that my family's training worked in that situation. I wasn't certain it would have with-."

Francis interrupted his line, but inspecting the descendants told him everyone knew the mission's details. Even something involving classified interspecies relationships couldn't escape those families' reach.

Of course, Khan knew about that general awareness. The Headmistress didn't make much public, but the news had already leaked. The Harbor had hidden some details, but the political world's upper echelon had learnt everything. Madam Solodrey and Francis' family would have spread everything themselves otherwise.

"You did a lot," Lucian praised. "Dealing with alien technology is no small feat, especially when it saves countless lives and one of the Harbor's main businesses."

"I kind of hated you after your stunt with Monica," John added, "But I guess you had your redemption arc."

"John, show some respect," Mark scolded.

"That's exactly what I did," John spread his arms to convey innocence.

"Lucian is right," Zoe announced. "My family asked me to extend their praise and an invitation."

"Count me in on that," Lucian added. "A dinner should be enough for a few conversations."

More compliments and invitations resounded, and Khan let everyone have their moment with Francis to solidify his position. Francis didn't have it too easy selling the lie, but his performance was good enough in those minutes.

"Okay, okay," Khan eventually intervened. "No one is taking Francis out without my supervision. His family put him in my care in the end."

"Do you have something to hide, Khan?" Lucy wondered.

"You have no idea," Khan laughed.

"We have all learnt enough," Lucian announced. "It's rare for a Captain to meet a Thilku delegation. Actually, it's almost unheard of."

Khan wasn't surprised, but traces of that feeling still appeared inside him. Only half a day had passed since the meeting, but the symphony told him those descendants were already aware of his presence there.

"He's not just a Captain," Monica stepped in, casually showing her ring. "Our union proves that."

"My presence was necessary due to the recent events," Khan explained shortly. "I'm sure you would have guessed that even without receiving specific information."

"We guessed far more than that," Lucian voiced.

"Rumors have already spread," Mark continued, bending forward and placing his drink on the table to join his hands. "I heard the embassy is building a political team, and you are part of it."

"I have nothing official to say," Khan remained vague. "I bet you all will learn about it before me."

"Goodbye to my hopes of spending the holidays together," John cursed.

"Didn't your family assign you to that luxury moon already?" Lucy wondered.

"I could have arrived late," John sighed. "There is no point now."

Laughs resounded in the hall, but some of the most interested players remained focused. Lucian, Mark, and Lucy often glanced at Khan since they knew they had more to discuss.

"Khan," Lucian called once the laughs waned. "The Thilku territory is not as secretive as you may think. Branches of my family are even doing business there."

"You beat me to it," Lucy revealed. "My family was waiting for the chance to expand there."

"If it's business," Mark announced, "You can consider me interested."

Khan knew what those descendants wanted, and the symphony told him that most of the hall shared those feelings. Information was a valuable currency that he would obtain first-hand if the investigation included him. Theoretically, he would be able to provide vital data to the families in the future.

The idea of leaking information for the right price was tempting, but Khan couldn't immediately agree. The hall had too many ears, and he wasn't sure he wanted to betray the Global Army's trust so soon.

However, those descendants had helped Khan in the past. Using Rick had forced their hands, but they had still played a key role in salvaging his relationship with Monica. Lucian had also sold the items retrieved in the missions, further deepening Khan's debt.

The debt and Mister Solodrey's financial request left Khan unable to refuse right away. He had chosen to link his life to that political environment, and the bill had arrived. That was the price he had to pay to get where he was, and going back on it would ruin his image among his best potential allies.

"There is nothing official yet," Khan played it safe. "Besides, it's better to discuss these topics in different locations."

"It will be hard to get a hold of you once the semester ends," Lucian pressed on.

"I'm not refusing," Khan stated. "However, even your esteemed families can't predict where I'll go. It's pointless to strike deals until then."

"On the contrary," Lucy declared.

"Your fame never stops rising," Mark continued. "There might come a time when we'd have to involve our parents to talk to you."

That vague statement had a hidden but clear meaning. The descendants wanted to strike deals before Khan escaped their reach. It was a simple business move aimed at securing a source of information before it became too expensive.

"That will never be necessary," Khan opted for a political approach, placing a hand on Monica's folded legs to clarify his statement. "You helped me when I needed it. Even if your parents were to call, I'd still request for you."

Khan was only offering his word without adding heavy promises or agreements. Yet, that was enough in the political environment as long as he could deal with the consequences or stick to it.

Lucian and the others had the vague idea of adding something, but Monica's calm smile made them drop it. They knew she was ready to respond accordingly to show her support to Khan, and everyone wanted to avoid that predictable reaction.

"There is something else," Marcia timidly stated, changing the topic.

"Right," Zoe added, glancing toward the sealed corridor. "If it weren't for you and Monica, I'm not sure I would have accepted this invitation."

"Isn't this the same as Francis?" John groaned before looking at Francis' armchair. "No offense, buddy."

"It's not," Mark corrected. "Housing a criminal is a serious matter. You are putting everyone in the Harbor at risk."

"Wayne is not a threat," Khan declared.

"How can we be sure?" Lucy asked. "A criminal of that caliber should have better security."

"There is no better security than me," Khan responded, a stern expression replacing his polite smile. "Unless someone disagrees with that."

"No one is trying to insult your prowess," Lucian reassured.

"It does sound like that," Monica pointed out.

"Monica, he is a criminal," Mark clarified. "He belongs in a cell with specialists scouring his brain."

"Wayne will soon end up in my care," George intervened. "My family will handle that process."

"Khan, on what authority are you moving him?" Lucian questioned.

"Mine," Khan calmly claimed. "He is my subordinate. I don't need anyone else's authority."

The descendants knew that there was more to the matter. The Headmistress and their own families could oppose the process and pull strings to force Khan's hand. However, that would sour their relationship with him since he had labeled Wayne his subordinate.

"Of course," Khan continued to throw a bone at the descendants, "Any discovery will be made public once you deem it worth it."

"Are you implying our families will be the first to receive information?" Mark asked.

"I'm implying you will be the first," Khan corrected.

Mark and the other descendants couldn't refrain from exchanging meaningful glances. Khan was giving them priority over their parents. That was a valuable advantage they coveted.

However, everything had a price in the political environment. Khan didn't need to add anything, but those descendants knew their role. They would have to reassure their families and let Khan do as he wished to retain that priority.

Khan was showing uncanny wisdom for a man who had spent less than a year deep in the political environment. Still, he wasn't the only reason behind that surprising quality. The descendants knew the woman sitting at his side had added more than her simple presence.

"I guess Khan earned the Global Army's trust multiple times already," Lucian was the first to break the tense silence. "If he says the Ildoo's family is up for the task, we can only accept it."

"The situation is not ideal," Mark added, "But I don't see any problem with that."

"Unless problems arise," Lucy commented, wearing a smile that conveyed her agreement, "Of course."

That implicit and tense agreement finally ended the political part of the meeting. Khan and the others could move on to far lighter topics, exchanging jokes and discussing their respective plans after the semester.

Khan did his best to memorize everything, but far different thoughts arrived once the meeting ended. The departure of the last descendants marked the beginning of a long period packed with relatively easy tasks.

Days basically disappeared as Khan split his life among his various tasks. The advanced classes stole many hours from him, and Professor Parver's lesson seized another piece of the pie. His studies worsened that, and many nights went by in the isolation of Miss Bevet's greenhouse.

The general effort spent on the final tests was Khan's only saving grace. With the end of the semester in sight, the invitations to political dinners vanished, and the same went for the Headmistress' missions. A few actual study groups still happened, but Khan could fit them into his schedule since they matched his needs.

That busy period made time flow so quickly that Khan almost didn't notice the six weeks that went by. His efforts didn't diminish even after the final tests, and his first break arrived only once the results hit the network.

Chapter 546 Confirmation

When the weekend after the tests began, Khan, Monica, George, and Anita gathered in the main hall to wait for the results. Wayne and Francis were also there due to the event's relevance, and no one dared to mention the early hour when glancing at the bottles on the tables and floor.

The morning was mostly silent, but the notification that reached the students' phones broke it, intensifying the overall tension. Everyone immediately dived into their screens, unlocking their devices to see whether their efforts had paid off.

Khan skimmed past the individual scores to reach his average. Differently from his companions, he had a specific goal to achieve. Yet, seeing the advanced classes' overall scoreboard brought disappointment.

'Sixth,' Khan read on the screen. 'Dammit.'

Having gotten so close to Madam Solodrey's goalpost didn't reassure Khan. He knew Monica's mother. In her mind, sixth place was the same as last. Any achievement was pointless without being in the top five.

Monica had also skimmed past the overview to reach the overall scoreboard, and reading Khan's place made her want to reassure him. However, he ignored his surroundings and closed his eyes while bringing the phone to his forehead.

The previous failures were insignificant in the grand scheme of things, but the latest was final. The semester had ended. Khan wouldn't have more opportunities to improve his score. He had simply failed.

Khan's reaction told even those who didn't reach the overall scores that he had failed to enter the top five. Still, no one spoke. It was simply pointless to throw empty words at him.

As if to add fuel to the fire, a call reached Khan's phone and forced him to open his eyes. Lowering the screen showed a predictable name, and Monica opened her mouth to speak when she peeked at it.

"I got this," Khan said, beating Monica to it. "I'll be right back."

As much as Monica wanted to say something, she remained silent and watched Khan leave the couch. He quickly dived into a corridor and isolated himself inside a bedroom to get some privacy, and a helpless sigh escaped his mouth when he brought the phone to his ear.

"Madam Solodrey," Khan exclaimed. "I didn't expect you to call so soon."

"Madam Solodrey?" Madam Solodrey scoffed. "Are you worried about something, Captain?"

Khan didn't reply and let his thoughts run freely. A carefree and teasing approach wouldn't work in that situation. He needed something else to avoid being completely passive in the conversation, but his options were limited.

"To think it takes so little to make you show respect," Madam Solodrey pressed on. "I'm almost disappointed."

Khan went over his allies and position. He could opt for threats if Madam Solodrey attempted to do something, but that was far from ideal. Monica's family had barely begun to accept him. He couldn't act as an enemy in such a delicate moment.

"Headmistress Holwen called to ask for permission to hire you," Madam Solodrey continued, her tone growing politer. "I've taken the liberty to accept and set up an appropriate salary."

"What?" Khan broke his silence, frowning in confusion.

"Of course," Madam Solodrey added, "Having authority over those agreements was our prerogative, to begin with. I'm only showing basic respect by giving it to you like this."

"I'm," Khan muttered, "I'm not sure I'm following, ma'am."

"What are you not following, Captain?" Madam Solodrey complained. "My time is limited, and you are wasting it."

"I didn't make it into the top five," Khan bluntly said. He didn't add anything, but his hidden meaning was clear. He expected insults, admonishments, or some form of punishment from the woman who set that goalpost.

"It would have been an insult to the Harbor and most families if you truly entered the top five," Madam Solodrey snorted. "I never expected you to get there. We would have had to rethink how we educate our descendants otherwise."

"But," Khan voiced, but Madam Solodrey didn't give him a chance to argue.

"Captain, how long did you spend studying?" Madam Solodrey questioned. "I'm not talking about your time in the Harbor. Since your enlistment, how many lessons did you even attend?"

Khan opened his mouth but remained silent. His year in Ylaco's training camp had been relatively full of lessons, but things had started to go south afterward. He had studied on Nitis for a while, but his superiors' orders had eventually forced him to abandon a regular education in favor of the relationships with the Niqols.

The following period never gave Khan a chance to study either. He didn't even need to since his jobs stood outside the purely academic field. At most, he could count a grand total of two years of lessons, and that number was rounded up.

"Exactly," Madam Solodrey stated, almost knowing the calculation that had happened inside Khan's mind. "Did you really think you could match descendants who have begun their studies as soon as they could read?"

Khan could argue that he had surpassed most of those descendants, but that wasn't the place for arrogance. Madam Solodrey had made her point clear, and something told Khan that she didn't want to linger on that topic any longer.

"About the job," Khan mentioned, clearing his throat. "What does it involve?"

"I'm sure you can guess that," Madam Solodrey uttered. "The network overflowed with rumors about the Thilku in the past month."

"Ma'am, I need details to prepare accordingly," Khan said, sighing and rolling his eyes when he found the right words to add, "And to avoid bringing shame to the Solodrey family."

"Is that how you tricked my daughter?" Madam Solodrey scoffed.

"I like to think she would have fallen for me anyway," Khan responded.

"Children," Madam Solodrey sighed. "Headmistress Holwen hired you as a scout for her new political team. You'll be on the frontlines during the investigation about the Thilku bomb."

"Do you know my tasks?" Khan wondered.

"I thought you learnt the scout's duties in your lessons," Madam Solodrey replied. "Am I mistaken?"

'She is enjoying this,' Khan cursed before continuing his polite approach. "Not at all, ma'am. I was only wondering if you knew the job details already."

"I don't," Madam Solodrey revealed. "Passing information to the family is your job. I expect monthly updates. Weekly if the situation allows it."

'So much for deals with the other descendants,' Khan thought without feeling surprised. He had already predicted that the Solodrey family would have claimed priority on that information. It only made sense considering his public allegiance with them.

"Is that a problem?" Madam Solodrey questioned.

"It's not," Khan declared. "You can count on me, ma'am."

"Good," Madam Solodrey exclaimed. "The Thilku territory has profitable business opportunities. Many factions inside the family are eager to exploit them."

"I'll look out for them," Khan promised.

"I don't expect you to recognize them," Madam Solodrey explained. "Focus on giving complete and extensive reports. Our specialists will handle the rest."

"It will be done, ma'am," Khan stated.

"Now," Madam Solodrey continued. "About my dear daughter."

Khan fell silent again. He knew the Solodrey family had plans for Monica, and she had even gone over them in the past months. The possibilities were almost endless with her position and education, so it was up to her mother to decide where to send her.

"Ideally," Madam Solodrey announced, "I would send her far away from you and keep her there for a long time, hoping that a prolonged separation would put an end to this childish behavior."

Khan remained calm. He had dealt with Madam Solodrey enough times to know she wasn't done. That statement was only a veiled threat she was ready to implement if things took a bad turn.

"However," Madam Solodrey continued, "The public eye wouldn't like that, and we don't want dangerous rumors to spread. As much as it pains me to admit it, we must show unity in our approval of your relationship."

"So?" Khan couldn't refrain from asking.

"My daughter will leave the Harbor," Madam Solodrey stated, "But I'll plan reunions when the situation and your job allow it. Of course, these events will require a very specific behavior."

"We'll make sure to appear in public," Khan promised, understanding what Madam Solodrey meant. "The entire Global Army will know that the Solodrey family is facilitating our reunions."

"Perfect," Madam Solodrey exclaimed. "Headmistress Holwen will send details about the missions later during the day and probably summon you next week. I'll hear from you soon, Captain."

"I can't wait, Madam Solodrey," Khan lied, and the call ended.

The urge to cry in excitement invaded Khan. He didn't only obtain confirmation about the political job. Madam Solodrey had also conveyed her continued support for his relationship. That was the best-case scenario, and the desire to celebrate filled his mind.

Khan threw the phone on the bed and hurried toward the main hall. A series of worried gazes fell on him, but he didn't give them the time to inspect his excited face as he headed for Monica's couch.

Monica had leaned past the couch's back to inspect Khan, but he went directly for her armpits, lifting her to place her on his shoulder. A series of questions and complaints reached his ears, but Monica understood everything when she got a decent look at his face.

"We'll be back in a few minutes!" Monica hurriedly said, lifting her back to look at her companions still on the couches.

"Try a few hours," Khan voiced without looking back, carrying Monica until they disappeared inside a bedroom.

Chapter 547 Ambassador

Khan wasn't the only one to receive good news. The results showed a change in the top five, finally rewarding Anita for her efforts. She had claimed the fifth spot, making Marcia lose two positions due to Khan's equally incredible achievements.

The other positions didn't change. Monica was always first, with Lucian, Mark, and Lucy following behind in that precise order. As for George, he got tenth, breaking his previous record, but his interest in the topic vanished as soon as he read it.

Needless to say, the following days featured celebrations that included Lucian and the other descendants in a few instances. The Harbor also issued official certificates, which didn't hesitate to appear on the network. Still, the parties were short-lived since the imminent departures required preparations.

On a lazy morning in the middle of the week, Khan rested on a messy bed with his right hand supporting his slightly lifted head. His elbow dug into one of the pillows, the comfortable mattress massaged his naked side, and his attentive eyes never left the enchanting figure rummaging through the furniture.

"When did I even buy all this stuff?" Monica cried since every drawer she opened showed more clothes. Even the wardrobe was packed, and she still had another room to inspect.

Khan had long since lost himself in the scene. When Monica left the bed, she had worn underwear and a bra, but her figure remained too captivating. That disorder also annoyed her, and Khan could only like her more when she was in that state.

"A single ship will never be enough," Monica cursed, stomping her feet and placing her hands on her waist to inspect all the clothes still stuck inside the open drawers and wardrobe.

"Don't you have guards for this?" Khan wondered.

"I can't let the guards see these," Monica snorted, diving a hand into a drawer to take out a pair of fancy lace underwear.

"I remember those," Khan chuckled.

"I'd be angry if you didn't," Monica giggled, peeking behind her shoulder to look at Khan. The latter was under a blanket that had almost abandoned him, but Monica only focused on his intense gaze. She couldn't get enough of his undivided attention.

"You could always help," Monica suggested, throwing the lace underwear into the open luggage near the bedroom's entrance. "Unless looking at me stuns you."

Monica turned toward Khan to show herself, and his expression conveyed all the compliments he could think of. He couldn't describe how beautiful she was, and the idea of losing that routine soured the happiness of the interaction.

"You'll be ready sooner if I help you," Khan sighed, lying on his back and crossing his arms behind his head to stare at the ceiling. "You won't if I don't."

Both Khan and Monica knew that wasn't relevant. Her departure was set in stone, so it didn't matter how ready she was. Still, Monica liked the sound of those lines and felt drawn to the lying figure on the mattress.

The rustling of sheets reached Khan's ears and made him lower his gaze. Monica sat at his side, placing a hand on his uncovered abdomen. Her fingers traced the spaces among his defined muscles, but her eyes looked into his.

"No suitor will dare to approach me," Monica reassured. "I'm not sure I can call them suitors anymore since my family supports us."

"I thought you'd be the one to need reassurance," Khan admitted. "I expected you to make more of a fuss."

"I did," Monica stated, blushing a little when she spotted traces of their passion still lingering on the bed, "And I'm not leaving just yet, not until I cry, complain, and cry some more."

"Which is my responsibility," Khan added.

"You know it," Monica whispered, sliding closer to Khan's head as her fingers reached his chest. "You chose this noisy mess and even made her happy. Nothing can save you now."

"I remember the noisy mess assaulting me," Khan teased. "Twice."

"You deserved it for all your fooling around," Monica scoffed.

"I didn't even know you," Khan laughed.

"You should have predicted the arrival of the best girlfriend in the world and prepared accordingly," Monica claimed.

"Is that so?" Khan wondered.

"Yes," Monica nodded. "You should have loved me even before knowing me."

"Well," Khan voiced, grabbing the hand on his chest. "I love you now."

Monica melted and dived forward to kiss Khan. The two cuddled for a few seconds, and another whisper left Monica's mouth when her lips became free. "I forgive you."

Khan snickered and welcomed Monica on his left shoulder. She lay on his torso, and Khan reached for her waist to secure her position.

"When do you have to go to the embassy?" Monica asked, closing her eyes to immerse herself in Khan's scent and warmth.

"After lunch," Khan revealed. "A cab will come in a couple of hours."

"Did you put the alarm?" Monica questioned.

"I did," Khan confirmed. "The clean uniform is also somewhere in the main hall."

Monica softly moaned in approval, rubbing her cheek on Khan's shoulder. He began to caress her side, and his eyes closed as Monica's scent and presence invaded his senses. The two seemed about to fall asleep, but Monica had more to say.

"I considered giving you a ring," Monica revealed, "But you'd destroy it or worse."

"What's worse?" Khan wondered.

"You'd hurt yourself to protect it," Monica replied. "I don't want you to have that burden during a fight."

"I'm sure the Thilku won't let us have a say in those parts," Khan reassured.

"You always end up in fights," Monica sighed. "A tattoo would have the same problems. It's a pity humans can't do something as lasting as the one on your shoulder."

"I'll learn the next time I fly to Nitis," Khan uttered.

Silence unfolded. The couple had talked about the mission and had revealed their last thoughts. Khan had told Monica everything, including the parts that might hurt her.

"Do you miss her?" Monica asked.

"I don't think I can stop missing her," Khan admitted, "But she would be happy for me."

"What about your happiness?" Monica timidly asked, the hand in Khan's grip shaking lightly.

"That's why she would be happy," Khan explained. "She loved me, so she would approve of how happy you are making me."

"Scoundrel," Monica softly complained while relaxing. She knew she was different from Liiza. That was the whole point behind Khan's refusal of Jenna. Yet, her insecurities flared at times and required reassurance.

"Better?" Khan asked, even if Monica's mana had already answered.

"For now," Monica unleashed her needy tone. "Also, since you'd destroy anything I give you, I'll settle for a call every hour, and I'm being merciful."

"That's impossible," Khan laughed. "They'd fire me in no time."

"Fine," Monica sighed. "Only a call a day, but it must last at least twelve hours."

"How is that any better?" Khan wondered.

"It is because I say so," Monica stated.

"Of course," Khan snickered, turning his caresses into a tight hug. "What do you think about calling you whenever I'm free?"

"I hate it!" Monica declared before lowering her voice. "But, it might be enough if you make those calls really worthwhile."

"Any call with me is worthwhile," Khan joked.

"Screw you," Monica snorted, opening her eyes and pushing herself away to sit on Khan's abdomen.

"Is there something you want to ask?" Khan feigned innocence, also opening his eyes to stare at the beautiful face hanging closely above him.

"Not ask," Monica shook her head, her tone growing affectionate. "I just want to say how much I love my noble Captain."

"Are you worried I might forget that while you are away?" Khan wondered, his hands sliding over Monica's legs to return to her waist.

"I'm unforgettable," Monica pouted. "Still, if I can't mark your body, I'll be sure to imprint myself in your mind forever."

Messy hours went by as Khan and Monica kept themselves busy with what they did best. A cuddly and romantic lunch also happened in the privacy of the bedroom, but Khan eventually left to attend to his duties.

A cab flew Khan directly to the embassy, and a team of soldiers led him inside, guiding him into areas he had never seen. He could guess he was in one of the building's upper sections, but that information did little to help his sense of direction.

Nevertheless, Khan didn't need to know where he was. That probably was still classified for him, but the long march among vast corridors, multiple staircases, and a few elevators granted some clues. The labels on the many offices he crossed told him he was in a section focused on interspecies politics, and his destination matched his conclusions.

The soldiers stopped when they reached the end of an oddly narrow corridor. The place was bustling with people going in and out of a large room featuring interactive desks, cubicles, and more Khan couldn't see from his position. That clearly was an office, and the Headmistress' barely visible figure from the entrance vouched for the place's relevance.

"Headmistress, ma'am," Khan announced, entering the office as soon as the soldiers opened a path.

The place revealed more of the furniture Khan had spotted from outside. The room had twenty interactive desks equipped with simple chairs, headphones, and other tools useful for concentrating. Two rows of cubicles stood on opposite sides of the area, and a door in the back led to a spacious private office meant for the commanding officer.

"Captain, you are here," Headmistress Holwen welcomed, barely paying attention to Khan's military salute. "This will be your base of operations. You'll handle all the bureaucratic side of the investigation from here and according to your superior's directives."

"Is the superior here?" Khan questioned, even if he could guess the answer from the symphony. He only sensed first and second-level warriors in the area. None of them could have authority over him.

"He is coming," Headmistress Holwen revealed. "You'll know the entire team in the following days, but your position forced this initial meeting. I expect exemplary behavior."

"Of course, ma'am," Khan promised. "Might I know more of my superior in the meantime?"

Khan barely had the time to finish his question. A powerful presence suddenly attracted his attention, making him turn toward the entrance. The Headmistress noticed that gesture and held back her reply. She had learned enough about Khan to know what was happening.

The area was loud due to all the working soldiers. Thudding noises also filled it since the personnel was moving heavy furniture inside and outside the office. Yet, Khan managed to isolate a specific sound from that mess. He could hear firm and confident steps getting closer to the entrance.

Khan performed a military salute that matched the arrival of those steps to the entrance. A slightly slender and tall figure appeared at the center of the spacious door and stopped at its edges to inspect the area. His green eyes darted left and right to catch every detail, but seeing the Headmistress and Khan made them flicker in surprise.

"Headmistress Holwen," The man announced, crossing the entrance to perform a military salute before the Headmistress. "I'm glad we could meet again. Sadly, the circumstances aren't the happiest."

"Ambassador Abores," Headmistress Holwen exclaimed. "You have done well in these past years. Even Mister Cirvags praised you."

Khan used that chance to inspect the relatively young man more in detail. Ambassador Abores had short blonde hair arranged in a perfect haircut, and his military uniform didn't feature a single crease. His appearance was spotless, which matched his role. After all, he had to be humankind's face.

"I doubt it, ma'am," Ambassador Abores said, lowering his head in respect. "Mister Cirvags' compliments are rarer than promotions."

"They indeed are," Headmistress Holwen stated, pointing at Khan. "This is Captain Khan. He is the appointed scout for the team."

"I heard a lot about you, Captain," Ambassador Abores exclaimed, wearing a sterner tone. "I hope you understand interspecies politics aren't the place for reckless behavior or solitary actions."

'Is he scolding me already?' Khan wondered, forcing himself to keep his eyes on the Ambassador. He didn't even look at the four stars on his shoulders before mustering a polite reply. "I do, but I probably lack experience. I hope I can rely on your guidance in the future."

"Our roles are very different," Ambassador Abores declared.

An awkward silence spread. Ambassador Abores seemed to have something against Khan, and he couldn't understand what. Even reading the man's mana only showed a tinge of arrogance and a sense of superiority.

"I must leave now," The Headmistress quickly broke the silence. "Other matters require my presence. I'm confident you can take it from here, Ambassador."

"Of course, ma'am," Ambassador Abores confirmed. "Have a safe trip."

The Headmistress nodded at Khan and the Ambassador before leaving the office. The latter followed her departure with his eyes but eventually faced Khan again, rekindling the previous awkwardness.

"Don't misunderstand my hesitation, Captain," Ambassador Abores exclaimed. "I respect your services for the Global Army and find your rise to fame inspiring. I simply wouldn't have chosen an inexperienced scout for such an important investigation."

That surprising politeness didn't feel too honest, but Khan forced himself to appreciate it. Truth be told, Ambassador Abores was right. Khan had experience with multiple alien species, but none of his jobs had ever featured something so official.

"I'll do my best to match your expectations, sir," Khan promised.

"You will get no preferential treatment from me," Ambassador Abores continued. "Do your job and do it well. I'll ask for a replacement otherwise."

"I understand, sir," Khan stated. "If I may, what is my first task?"

"My secretary will update you," Ambassador Abores declared, turning toward the entrance.

"Clarissa, bring the files."

A woman who looked to be in her twenties crossed the entrance, carrying a series of screens in her crossed arms. Khan had sensed her arrival but had disregarded it since she was a second-level warrior. Still, her stern icy-blue eyes and shining, long golden hair made her stand out from the other soldiers, granting her a serious but magnetic figure.

"Update Captain Khan on his duties," Ambassador Abores ordered. "I'll be in my office in the meantime."

The Ambassador didn't deign Khan with a single glance as he headed for the separate office in the back. Meanwhile, Clarissa approached Khan and handed him one of the screens.

"The mission's details are listed here," Clarissa stated, her calm voice embodying professionalism. "Every information is classified, so spreading it will lead to punishments described at the end of the contract."

Khan seized the device and unlocked it with his genetic signature. He had already read the terms of his contract, so that explanation didn't add anything new.

"Where should I start?" Khan wondered, skimming past the initial menus shown by the device.

"The Global Army has already isolated seventeen potential destinations for our first meeting with the Thilku delegation," Clarissa explained. "The device contains any information you might need, so memorizing it is mandatory."

"Should I prioritize any of these destinations?" Khan questioned, hiding his surprise at that huge number.

"All of them," Clarissa responded. "Your position also allows you to have a secretary. If you have yet to choose one, I can name a few suggestions."

"Francis Alstair will be my secretary," Khan casually said, immersing himself in the device's information. The screen seemed to have a lot, and the Ambassador probably wanted him to memorize everything by the next week.

"I'll handle the paperwork," Clarissa uttered, performing a polite bow. "Until our next meeting, Captain Khan."

Clarissa headed for the Ambassador's office before Khan could lift his gaze. The two had left him in the middle of that busy office without adding any directive. He was on his own there, which matched his role. His preparation was the only problem.

'I better start studying,' Khan cursed, approaching one of the interactive desks to connect the device. 'Again.'

Chapter 548 Goodbyes

The weekend arrived quickly, and a series of departures unfolded with it. Out of politeness, Khan attended the set-offs and teleports of his closest classmates, exchanging simple promises that prepared the ground for future cooperation. More of those events happened by lunchtime, but Khan didn't take those lightly.

George, Anita, Wayne, Khan, and Monica had gathered in a simple hangar. A few teams roamed through the area, but most of the soldiers appointed to the location were outside to keep the crowds of curious onlookers away from the ships.

A relatively big ship stood before the group, and a few soldiers walked up and down its metal staircase to arrange the luggage. They were almost done with the task, so the time for goodbyes inevitably arrived.

"Son of a forgettable woman," George scoffed, his voice turning into a sigh when he saw the soldiers loading the last luggage. "Try to call more than once a year."

"I wonder if the new you will have time for friends," Khan teased. "They grow so fast."

"Shut it," George cursed, "And get someone to watch your back. We both know how dumb you get around aliens."

"I have a similar warning," Khan chuckled, glancing at the two women on his left.

"Ignore them," Monica giggled, taking Anita's hands. "Call me when you get to Aegis station. I know many good shops that you must visit."

"I will," Anita replied. "I can't believe we are actually leaving after being here for so long."

"The Harbor almost felt like home, didn't it?" Monica agreed.

"It was home," Anita corrected. "I'll miss being able to see you every day."

"Me too," Monica uttered. "I'm a bit jealous of your break. I wish Khan and I could do the same."

"My mother couldn't refuse me after getting into the top five," Anita explained, "And you two have to work."

"I know," Monica sighed, leaning toward Anita to whisper. "Don't hold back on the gossip. I want to know how it goes with his family."

"I'm a bit tense about that," Anita admitted. "Do you think they'll like me?"

"They'll love you," Monica reassured. "Isn't that right, George?"

"My mother still can't believe it," George revealed. "She'd probably adopt you on the spot."

"Don't say it like this," Anita complained before looking at Khan. "Be safe out there. I know you can hold your ground in any situation, but Monica will worry if you get hurt."

"I'll be careful," Khan promised, "But don't worry about me. Focus on enjoying the break."

"I will," Anita nodded, letting go of Monica's hands to reach for George. "You'll take care of me, won't you?"

George ignored the teasing smiles that broadened in his vision and nodded at Anita, taking her hand to convey his feelings. She liked that gesture and reached for his elbow to stand proudly at his side. She was still a bit shy, but only Khan noticed that.

"As for you," Khan exclaimed, facing Wayne, "Try not to make the ship crash."

"I'll do my best!" Wayne laughed, his eyes lighting up when Khan stretched a hand toward him. Wayne immediately shook it, and his smile broadened at that interaction.

"I'm sorry I couldn't do more for you," Khan announced. "Still, this isn't a goodbye. I'll see you as soon as you get better."

"Don't worry, brother," Wayne declared, slamming his free hand on his chest. "I'm an expert at experiments. I'll complete the psychological training in no time."

"I know you will," Khan uttered. "After all, you are the second-best third-level warrior in the Global Army."

"Petty as always," Wayne laughed again.

"Wayne," Monica called, also stretching her hand toward the man. "I wish you good luck."

"That sounds funny," Wayne exclaimed, letting go of Khan to shake Monica's hand. That interaction didn't last long since Monica decided to address George right afterward.

"Thank you for everything," Monica stated, performing an elegant bow.

"What is this?" George snickered. "I thought we were friends."

"You helped both of us greatly," Monica replied. "I just wanted to express my gratitude."

"Khan, what is this?" George groaned.

"A threat is coming," Khan explained.

"Yes," Monica claimed, straightening her position to point her finger at George. "If you mistreat my friend, I'll know it and make you pay."

"Shouldn't you defend me?" George whispered to Anita.

"A few threats can only help," Anita giggled.

"Alright, alright," George sighed, pulling Anita toward the metal staircase. "Time to go."

A general laugh unfolded as George dived into the ship. Anita never left his side, and Wayne followed closely behind. Soon, the three entered the vehicle and turned to face the couple on the hangar's floor.

"You owe me a semester," George joked as the ship's doors began to close.

"I owe you more than that," Khan responded, and the two exchanged a meaningful glance that conveyed all their thoughts. George and Khan didn't need anything else to understand each other.

"Have a safe trip," Monica exclaimed, waving her hand until the doors closed. The engines also activated in the following seconds, and soldiers cleared the area to secure the set-off.

Khan was used to goodbyes, but it was impossible not to feel sad. Anita and Wayne's departures were easy to accept, but losing George marked a stark change in the Harbor's environment. He was his best friend, and drinking together was one of the things he enjoyed the most. Yet, their separation was necessary.

Monica was worse off but didn't show it. She was in the open, which required specific behavior. She could only take Khan's arm and walk with him toward the place that would feature another inevitable separation.

Khan and Monica walked slowly on purpose and refused any escort as they made their way through the corridors stretching out from the hangar. They didn't talk either since they had already said everything that needed to be said. Still, as much as they tried to delay it, their destination eventually unfolded in their view.

"Miss Solodrey!" A scientist exclaimed as soon as Khan and Monica entered an oval room. The area had multiple soldiers busy with their respective consoles, but that shout made them lift their eyes to inspect the couple.

"Everything is ready," The scientist explained when he reached the couple. "We can teleport you as soon as you step onto the platform."

"Give me a moment to say goodbye to my boyfriend," Monica requested.

"Of course, Miss Solodrey," The scientist immediately agreed before nodding at Khan. "Captain."

Khan also nodded, but Monica soon claimed the entirety of his attention. She let go of his arm to take his hands, and her gaze went to the floor as she leaned forward.

Khan didn't let Monica be alone in that gesture. He lowered his head until his forehead touched Monica's, and his eyes closed to immerse himself in that gesture. Monica's presence invaded him, and he burnt that sensation into his mind.

"I'll call you tonight," Monica whispered.

"I'll wait for you," Khan promised.

"I already miss you," Monica revealed.

"We'll meet again soon enough," Khan stated. "I'll make sure of that."

"Do you promise?" Monica asked.

"I'll fly a ship directly to you if anyone tries to get between us," Khan claimed.

"I like that," Monica smiled, but the threat of tears made her change the topic. "I have to go."

"I know," Khan sighed. "I love you."

"I love you too," Monica promptly said, lifting her head. The soldiers in the room were doing their best to focus on their tasks, but she knew they were keeping track of her. Yet, nothing could stop her from having a proper goodbye.

Khan opened his eyes in time to receive Monica's lips. The two kissed before the soldiers, but the outside world disappeared. The couple's love isolated them, but their gesture ended quickly.

Monica was ready to jump on the platform as soon as the kiss ended, but Khan reached for her cheek and stopped her. His thumb wiped the single tear that had fallen from her eyes, and she couldn't refrain from kissing his palm.

Monica was ready to spend an entire lifetime in that loving gesture, but her resolve won, making her escape Khan's hand and jump on the platform. She even nodded at the scientist before fixing her gaze on Khan.

Khan didn't blink at all. His eyes remained on Monica while synthetic mana gathered on the platform. He knew she was ready to cry, but nothing appeared on her beautiful face. She was as stoic as possible until the moment she disappeared.

The sight of the empty platform dealt a massive blow to Khan's mindset. All the love and peace experienced in the recent period were gone. His happiness had just left the Harbor, and his aura changed due to that realization.

The soldiers almost froze in fear when Khan glanced at them. He wasn't doing anything specific. He wasn't even trying to scare them. Yet, the symphony reflected his mental state and those innocent bystanders couldn't help but shake under its weight.

Khan realized what was happening and opted to leave in a hurry. He knew he shouldn't be among people now, but his job required his presence. A cab was also waiting for him outside the hangars, and he didn't hesitate to get inside to fly toward the embassy.

A drink quickly fell into Khan's hands once the privacy of the cab arrived, but a call disturbed that peace. Still, a smile broadened on his face when he read the name on the screen.

"Didn't we say tonight?" Khan teased when he brought the phone to his ear.

"I miss you so much!" Monica cried, sniffing loudly.

"There, there," Khan reassured. "I'm in a cab right now. Why don't you keep me company until I get to the embassy?"

Monica didn't even try to refuse, and a long call unfolded. The couple talked about anything just to hear their respective voices, and Khan's mental state benefitted from that. He remained quite stern and cold, but his intensity waned as he calmed down.

The arrival at the embassy put an end to the call. Soldiers were also already waiting for Khan, so he quickly made his way through the many corridors and staircases to reach his office. It was the weekend, so the area was relatively empty, but the interactive desks featured a few figures.

"Did they leave?" Francis asked when he noticed Khan entering the office. He was behind a desk, rearranging the data Khan had given him, and his job was almost done from the look of it.

"They left," Khan sighed, glancing at the separate office in the back. He could see the Ambassador and his secretary from the transparent walls, but neither looked in his direction.

"I'm almost done with the reports you gave me," Francis continued, following Khan with his eyes as he headed for an empty interactive desk.

"Send everything to me once you finish," Khan ordered, using his genetic signature to unlock the desk and gain access to his profile. "What about Andrew?"

"He is in the shopping district," Francis replied. "He is going over the list you gave him."

Khan nodded as the many labels that appeared in his vision claimed his attention. With Francis handling the paperwork and Andrew purchasing the items required by the [Blood Vortex], he could focus on his job, which still needed more study.

Truth be told, anyone in Khan's position would be ecstatic. The job wasn't only important. The pay was also great, especially in Khan's case.

Khan was receiving three different salaries. His rank came with a monthly allowance, and he was the team's scout and official pilot. Madam Solodrey's involvement had also worked in his favor, granting him far more Credits than he deserved. The fact that she took half of them was the only drawback.

Of course, Khan didn't care about money. He was willing to separate himself from all his savings to protect his relationship, and his current situation was far better than that. Even with the Solodrey family taking half his Credits, his income had greatly increased.

'Thilku history,' Khan read one of the labels on the interactive desk before pressing it. He had already finished that book, but the Guko's reading technique wasn't perfect, so reviewing it again was necessary for good memorization.

The Thilku were similar to the humans in many ways. They had a scientific but balanced approach to mana. They weren't like the Fuveall but took pride in their achievements. Their empire was a simple consequence of that characteristic.

Many experts even believed that humankind would follow the Thilku's evolutionary path. That species had also started with external mana cores until their bodies naturally developed toward a shape that didn't need them anymore.

That development had obviously taken thousands of years but remained an excellent example of how quickly things could change with mana. According to the experts, a few centuries might be enough to give birth to the first human with mana. That mutation could be far from stable, but the event would be monumental nonetheless.

Khan didn't let his thoughts wander too much and focused on learning as much as possible during those hours. Still, his senses eventually warned him about a change in the office's peace, and his eyes abandoned the interactive desk to look at the door in the back.

"Captain," Ambassador Abores exclaimed when he left his personal office and noticed Khan. "It's good that you are here."

"Did something happen, sir?" Khan questioned.

"Are you aware of the Thilku's [Hunt]?" Ambassador Abores asked.

"It's a game," Khan explained. "Two teams set loose a Tainted animal and fight each other to capture it."

"It's also used as a formal greeting when dealing with other species," Ambassador Abores added. "I hope your Thilku is good because their delegation invited us to play."

Chapter 549 Career

'So soon?' Khan couldn't help but wonder at that revelation. The political team was barely one week old, but the Thilku had already sent a formal invitation.

"Is something the matter, Captain?" Ambassador Abores questioned, even if nothing had appeared on Khan's face.

"It sounds hasty, sir," Khan admitted. "Did the Thilku predict a joint investigation?"

"Worrying about that isn't part of your duties," Ambassador Abores scolded, "Especially with the incoming [Hunt]. Can you tell me why?"

'Is he testing me?' Khan wondered but still proceeded with a simple reply. "The Thilku Empire features all kinds of environments. Predicting which one they will choose is virtually impossible."

Khan didn't need to add the most important detail in that conversation since his role was clear. As a scout, Khan would have to prepare for every possible environment. He would be too swamped with reports to think about the Thilku's intentions.

"It is impossible," Ambassador Abores nodded. "However, I'd still like to hear your professional opinion."

Khan opened his mouth but quickly closed it. He couldn't get away with a simple answer. His explanation needed to stretch past mere alien environments and include the Thilku's innate behavior and their history with humankind.

"The Thilku can easily choose a favorable environment," Khan eventually stated. "Their resilience will greatly benefit them in hazardous locations, especially those with cold temperatures."

"I didn't ask you to show off," Ambassador Abores sternly commented.

"I believe they will choose a neutral environment, sir," Khan responded.

"Why?" Ambassador Abores asked.

"Belittling us would make the investigation start on the wrong foot," Khan explained. "Our relationships with the Thilku are good, and they are in the wrong here. Refusing to use their home advantage would be their way of doing us a favor while showing that they can win on even ground."

Ambassador Abores didn't falter nor nod, but his mana was enough for Khan. He knew his answer had been well-received. The Ambassador was actually surprised Khan could understand the Thilku so well.

"Then, what's your next move?" Ambassador Abores questioned.

"Isolating the possible destinations according to this information," Khan responded, "Preparing for their biomes and fauna, and summarize everything in a form ordinary soldiers can understand."

"I expect similar summaries even on unlikely destinations," Ambassador Abores said. "I want my team to be prepared for everything."

"It will be done, sir," Khan promptly exclaimed as his eyes fell on the interactive desk. The Ambassador didn't give him a deadline, but the [Hunt] had sounded close, and the amount of work was by no means small.

"Another thing, Captain," Ambassador Abores called.

"Yes, sir," Khan stated, looking at the Ambassador again.

"As the team's scout," Ambassador Abores announced, "It will be your duty to join the game. You'd have to set up the ground for the capture of the Tainted animal."

"I'm aware of that, sir," Khan declared. The Thilku's [Hunt] could come in many versions, and Khan didn't know every rule, but the past studies had given him a general understanding of that game.

"The Thilku are very proud," Ambassador Abores continued. "Your stunt in the past meeting might have bought you their respect, but we aren't aiming for that now."

Khan fell silent. He understood what the Ambassador wanted him to do, but clarifications were needed. After all, his political image was at stake there.

"Are you asking me to lose, sir?" Khan questioned.

"I'm asking you to do what's best for the investigation," Ambassador Abores stated. "Can you understand what it implies, Captain?"

"I do, sir," Khan confirmed.

"Will you do it?" Ambassador Abores added.

"Won't the Thilku be suspicious, sir?" Khan wondered.

"They will," Ambassador Abores said, "If your performance isn't convincing enough."

Khan held back a gulp. He didn't fear the Ambassador's prowess, but the consequences of that pretense could stretch far past the investigation. Yet, that request had put him in a pickle.

"Can I trust you, Captain?" Ambassador Abores asked. "Can I trust you to put humankind before your goals?"

"You can, sir," Khan immediately replied.

"I expect your lies to be more convincing during the [Hunt]," Ambassador Abores snorted. "Get everything ready by the end of the week. The game is set for the next weekend."

Ambassador Abores didn't wait for Khan's reply. He didn't even turn when Khan stood up for a military salute. Clarissa also hurried outside the separate office to follow after her boss and the two left the area to disappear inside the corridor.

Khan kept his gaze on the exit and ignored the eyes that had fallen on him. Francis and the few soldiers on the interactive desks didn't miss that talk, and misunderstanding it wasn't really an option. Everyone had guessed what was happening, but Khan didn't bother to address those onlookers.

A sigh tried to escape Khan's mouth, but he held it back as he fell on his chair. A few taps on the interactive desk generated holograms that hid his face, and he pretended to look at them while his mind wandered.

'It's not like they didn't warn me,' Khan thought.

Commanding officers often hindered the careers of promising soldiers to make room for specialists from Earth or wealthy families. That was even more true in the political field. Ambassadors held unique positions in the Global Army, and scouts rarely succeeded in making the jump toward that different role.

Khan didn't believe Ambassador Abores was trying to hinder his career. He didn't feel any spite in his mana, and that approach made sense. Losing against the Thilku would put them in a good mood and create valuable opportunities. The human team could learn a lot if the aliens underestimated them. Still, the issue remained, at least for Khan.

'Losing would taint my fame,' Khan considered, 'But winning would put me on the Ambassador's bad side.'

Ideally, the Global Army would contain the news or directly understand the political team's plan. However, the network didn't work like that, especially when it came to public opinion. Khan could already imagine Madam Solodrey using that crack in his fame against him.

'This is so fucked,' Khan sighed. 'Shut up already.'

Khan wasn't talking to anyone, but his mind had a second speaker. His mana wanted to give its opinion on the matter, which was as predictable as possible.

'If the Thilku spread rumors about me,' Khan realized, 'I might have a chance. Ambassador Abores is the only problem. I can't see him giving up his position without a fight.'

Khan was planning ahead. His past experiences with aliens had taught him that he was good at the job, and his relevance was bound to improve if he did as he wished. Still, problems would arrive if the Thilku started to value him more than Ambassador Abores.

'What am I even thinking?' Khan cursed. 'I just have to lose on purpose. How hard can it be? I'm the best liar in the entire Global Army!'

That might have been true in the past, but Khan knew he had changed. He was still good at lying, but it didn't come as easy anymore. His being simply opposed that behavior.

Things got worse when Khan added his situation to the equation. An ordinary soldier had the chance to lay low, but he had to keep succeeding. That was his greatest quality from the Global Army's perspective. His presence was synonymous with victory.

'It's pointless,' Khan admitted. 'I can't find the best path now. I can only adapt to what the Thilku throw at me.'

That was another lie, but Khan pretended not to notice it. Instead, he immersed himself in his work, which was far from little. The Ambassador didn't specify it but probably expected Khan to list all the possible Tainted animals for the game alongside the various environments.

Francis couldn't help with those tasks. Khan was on his own, but Professor Parver's lessons came in handy. The latter had prepared him for a similar job. It was almost his specialization by now.

Reports after reports crossed Khan's eyes as he reread and isolated any vital information connected to each possible destination. Initially, he compiled all of that into messy groups that only he could understand, but that simply was the first phase of his approach.

After dividing into messy groups, Khan began to rearrange everything according to the patterns learned from Professor Parver. The summaries that came out were still unreadable for most soldiers, but that was inevitable. A translation was necessary, and Khan handled it during the third phase of his approach.

The process was far from fast. Each possible destination required hours of work, writing, and reviews, but Khan's resilience was inhuman. He didn't take breaks even when Monica called him. He only made sure to have those conversations when the office was empty or during his trips back and forth to the embassy.

After two days of incessant work, Khan made Francis review everything and apply the necessary corrections before finally delivering his results to the Ambassador. The latter pointed out more mistakes, but Khan fixed them in the following hours and repeated the process until his superior gave the okay. Only the [Hunt] waited for him at that point.

Chapter 550 Acarro

Khan couldn't claim to love a desk job, but its benefits arrived as the weekend approached.

The Thilku revealed the place that would host the [Hunt], and Ambassador Abores developed a series of tactics founded on Khan's work before picking up his team members. More study happened during the week, but the appointed soldiers eventually made their way toward one of the Harbor's teleports to fulfill their political duties.

Khan kept his gaze fixed ahead while standing on the oval platform. Ambassador Abores and seven third-level warriors were at his sides and shared his stern vibe. Yet, none could match his intensity, no matter how much he tried to suppress it.

That development was inevitable for Khan. The separation from his loved ones had changed his mindset, and the imminent game had worsened it. He knew he risked making a mess and going against the Ambassador's direct orders, and his mana reflected that awareness.

Luckily for Khan, humans didn't have the best senses, and the team was tense enough to mistake the tension around them for their own. The accumulation of synthetic mana on the platform also helped hide Khan's intensity, and the change in the scenery eventually distracted everyone.

It was early morning, but Khan didn't expect to see its effects so soon. The cold light that landed on his face surprised him. His body cheered at that natural presence, and his senses worked overtime to study his surroundings.

Khan had memorized every possible destination and even inspected them through holograms and reports. However, experiencing it with his senses was a completely different story, and his mouth almost curved into a smile at the touch of natural mana.

The destination featured another oval platform with big mechanical horns growing past its vertices. Consoles also stretched all around it, but no metal walls separated the area from the outside. The teleport had brought the team into an open space filled with green and enjoyable cold.

The teleport stood at the center of a plain filled with short green grass. Hills that carried a similar color grew in the distance, and the symphony warned Khan about the presence of a river nearby. He could also spot a few human buildings from his position, and the same went for a small number of soldiers roaming among them.

'So, this is Acarro,' Khan thought, slightly stretching his legs to experience the planet's gravity. It was pleasantly lighter than Earth or the Harbor, which was in line with its relatively small size.

Ambassador Abores didn't hesitate to jump to the ground, and his team followed him. He also ignored the military salutes of the scientists on the consoles to head for the two soldiers running

toward him. The latter were wearing dark uniforms that reminded Khan of the Thilku but lacked their thick capes.

"Ambassador, sir!" The soldiers announced when they reached Ambassador Abores and performed military salutes. "We are bringing the ship into the area at this very moment."

"It should have been here already," Ambassador Abores scolded.

"I'm sorry, sir," One of the soldiers exclaimed. "We noticed a malfunction that took all night to fix."

"You are lucky we are early," Ambassador Abores scoffed. "Let's start the other procedures since we have to wait."

"Yes, sir!" Both soldiers shouted, before exchanging a look and splitting, leaving the team in the middle of that grassland. The Ambassador scoffed again but eventually turned to face his underlings.

The seven soldiers snapped up, straightening their backs to prepare for imminent orders. Only Khan continued to let his gaze linger on the environment. He was aware of his surroundings, but studying the area was literally his job.

"How are we doing, Captain?" Ambassador Abores questioned.

"It's smaller than I thought, sir," Khan admitted. "Permission to inspect the area from above."

"Permission granted," Ambassador Abores responded, and Khan immediately kicked the ground to send himself into the air. He flew upward in a straight line and continued to move his legs until he reached a satisfying height.

Acarro was a planet inside the Thilku Empire's domain. Those aliens had allowed the Global Army to build an outpost there but had placed heavy limitations on the soldiers and equipment they could bring. It was a concession meant to tighten the relationships between the two species, but Khan barely saw any military value in those buildings.

More details entered Khan's view and senses from that height. He spotted the river he had felt before and noticed a woody valley between two hills. The clear blue sky also made the system's soft star shine on his figure, creating a beautiful scenery both in terms of sight and symphony.

'It's a natural paradise,' Khan thought before focusing on the outpost.

The Global Army's territory on Acarro was minuscule. According to what Khan had studied, the hills in the distance already belonged to the Thilku Empire, like the rest of the planet. Humankind was confined in that grassland and a few areas past it, but the political limitations prevented it from filling them.

A small cargo ship eventually appeared in the distance, and Khan watched it as it flew toward him. The vehicle had no weapons, just like the buildings under him. The few soldiers looked strong, but their main task was to protect scientists and political figures. If a crisis were to happen, running would be their only option.

Khan dismissed his worries and let himself descend back to the ground. The soldiers with foreign uniforms had returned by then but kept their gazes lifted to follow Khan. The team and the Ambassador were no exception. Even if they knew about Khan's skills, a flying human remained a surprising sight.

"Well?" Ambassador Abores asked when Khan landed among the team, clearing his throat to make everyone snap back to reality.

"I don't see anything unusual, sir," Khan firmly explained. "We can proceed as planned."

Ambassador Abores looked deep into Khan's eyes to search for any trace of dishonesty but couldn't find anything. Khan's stern expression hid his thoughts too well. He was the embodiment of a perfect soldier, eventually forcing the Ambassador to give up on the matter.

"Let's proceed, then," Ambassador Abores ordered, nodding at the two soldiers stationed on Acarro. They had brought a metal box and a scanner, and the team created a line to make their task easier.

The Ambassador had already briefed his underlings. Khan and the others let the first soldier run the scanner over them to check for illegal technology or forbidden equipment while the second collected everyone's phones. The Ambassador was also part of that inspection, but no problems arose.

Khan didn't give much thought to the separation with his phone. He had already warned Monica, and the knife was at his side. He could wholeheartedly focus on the [Hunt], and the ship's arrival drew it closer.

The team knew their orders. As soon as the ship landed, the Ambassador led his underlings toward it and waited for the pilot to leave the canopy to load everyone inside.

The cargo area felt cramped with seven soldiers, but Khan avoided that in the cabin. He took his place behind the control desk and ran the necessary programs to check that everything was okay before conveying his findings to the Ambassador.

"We are ready to set off, sir," Khan called, and the Ambassador crossed the cabin's entrance to approach the control desk.

"Did you open a channel?" Ambassador Abores asked.

"They are ready for you, sir," Khan stated, pointing at a beeping label on the right side of the desk.

Ambassador Abores went straight for the label and pressed it before stating his intentions. "This is Ambassador Abores from the Harbor, Global Army. Requesting coordinates to fulfill agreement XR345."

The channel went silent, but a notification soon reached the control desk, and Khan made it appear in the form of holograms. The Thilku delegation had sent coordinates for the game's location, and Khan looked at the Ambassador to wait for his orders.

"Bring us there, Captain," Ambassador Abores ordered.

"Yes, sir," Khan stated, pressing on a key to talk with the cargo area. "Set-off will start in five, four, three...."

The engines whooshed, and the ship left the ground. Khan made it rise until its height matched the safety regulations before accelerating. The communication had precise directives, so he made his route and speed stick to them.

The flight was silent. Ambassador Abores didn't take a seat and remained at Khan's side while he led the ship to the appointed location. The vehicle crossed more of Acarro's enchanting and peaceful environments, and traces of life appeared after half an hour.

The scanners and transparent canopy gathered a stream of information that Khan sent to the cargo area to update the team. The destination consisted of a vast plain standing at some distance from thick woods. A short hill grew at its center, and a vast gazebo occupied its peak. Khan also spotted various terrestrial vehicles at its base, and Thilku were already near them.

The instructions were precise, so Khan landed the ship on an empty spot near the hill's base. Ambassador Abores led the team outside, and a curious symphony reached Khan's senses.

Natural mana was predominant in the area, but traces of synthetic energy still existed. It had been the same with the human outpost, but Khan noticed a slight abundance of that in the plain.

Those traces were mostly on the ground due to the vehicles, but the sky also had some, and Khan couldn't refrain from looking in that direction. Small circular drones were hovering in the air, acting like birds.

'Cameras,' Khan thought. The ship had already noticed those machines, and seeing them confirmed their purpose. The Thilku were recording the game.

'How am I supposed to hold back with those things?' Khan cursed. 'And they aren't the only problem.'

The team turned toward the hill's peak since a hovering square platform descended from it. A tall Thilku stood on it, illuminated by the red symbol shining under her feet, and her firm stance broke into a traditional bow when she reached the plain.

"Welcome, dear guests," The Thilku announced in a hoarse accent.

"[Thank you for having us]," Ambassador Abores stated in a perfect Thilku accent, performing a similar bow.

"We are ready to receive you," The Thilku continued, straightening her back. "Your team can take place near the vehicles."

The Ambassador only had to glance at his underlings to make them move. Khan and the others performed military salutes before heading toward the terrestrial vehicles spotted before. Meanwhile, the Ambassador jumped on the platform, which flew toward the hill's peak to bring him under the gazebo.

Khan did his best to keep his gaze straight, but his senses didn't shut up. He knew how many Thilku were in the area and was also aware of their attention. Even after Ambassador Abores' reached the hill's peak, all the aliens continued to look at him, conveying their competitive spirit.

That didn't change even after the human team reached the terrestrial vehicles. Khan and the soldiers found each other before an equal number of tall Thilku who didn't hide their interest in his blue hair. It was so obvious that Khan felt pity growing inside his companions.

