

Chaos' Heir 561

Chapter 561 Reinforcements

The inspection of the other houses didn't go any better. In many ways, Khan actually felt worse about the situations he was forced to face.

The solitary, old, or recluse ex-soldiers and criminals were fine. Amox could always handle those who opposed human presence in those political activities. The scene with the first Thilku also deterred resistance, allowing Khan to go on with his job without feeling too bad.

However, the situation was entirely different whenever families were involved. Simple couples were still okay, but the presence of children made Khan's heart plummet.

One house, in particular, had a young Thilku who couldn't have been older than ten. The long golden strands from the nape marked her as a girl who was quite well-behaved and calm. Still, her eyes never left Khan during the inspection, and the feelings hidden behind her emotionless face left a mark on his already moody thoughts.

The fear, faint curiosity, and confusion created by a youthful mind hit Khan deeply, and those emotions accompanied him throughout the inspections. The sadness of being a simple gear in a big and heartless machine didn't match his mindset, but his desperation was stronger, so he was ready to compromise himself for his goals.

Mindset aside, the inspections didn't reveal anything incriminating. That wasn't ideal for the Global Army, but Khan couldn't help but rejoice at that outcome. The lack of punishments preserved the tense peace in the block, which he preferred over battling simple workers.

That trend almost gave Khan hope since only a few houses were left. He was a few minutes away from calling it a day, but one of those habitations ended up featuring problems.

A middle-aged male Thilku welcomed Amox and Khan without making any fuss. He didn't even launch the usual comments about the human presence. Yet, that didn't save him from Khan's senses.

Khan's sensed that something was off as soon as he entered the small living room. His eyes snapped on the metal floor, and Amox noticed that reaction.

"[What is it, sirs]?" The middle-aged Thilku asked, seeing that both inspectors were eyeing the floor.

"[There is something down there]," Khan explained shortly, trying to find more clues on the floor.

"[Ah]!" Amox exclaimed, lifting his huge arm to prepare a descending blow.

"[Amox]," Khan called, and Amox interrupted his attack to look at him. The symphony guided Khan's steps, making him reach a carpet he uncovered with his feet.

A trapdoor became visible after the gesture, and Amox immediately approached it. However, loud steps resounded in the room, making Amox turn toward the entrance. The middle-aged Thilku had disappeared, and, to Amox's surprise, Khan had also left the living room.

Khan had moved as soon as the Thilku showed the urge to escape. The alien crossed the door, but something landed on his back, disrupting his balance and pushing him forward.

The middle-aged Thilku fell on the street and slid due to how slippery the rain had made it. He tried to stand up, slamming his palms on the ground to push himself, but something landed on his nape, flinging him back down.

Khan stood on the Thilku with his right foot glued to his nape. He was ready to apply pressure at the slightest movement, but the alien was only a first-level warrior, and the previous struggle taught him the difference in power.

Amox peeked past the entrance only to nod in approval. Khan wasn't giving the Thilku any chance to escape, and reinforcements were also arriving.

"[You good]?" Amox shouted.

"[I'm good]," Khan confirmed, and Amox returned to the house to explore the trapdoor.

Soldiers reached Khan and grabbed his prisoner's arms, allowing him to step on the wet street. Those troops applied metal handcuffs to the middle-aged Thilku, which the latter didn't like. His face morphed into a cold expression, showing his long canines when Khan fell into his view.

Khan took his time to inspect the Thilku. Two soldiers were pressing on his shoulders, keeping him on his knees, but his eyes never fell. The alien matched Khan's gaze, even if his inspection happened on a completely different level.

The Thilku's mana told Khan a story only he could hear. Khan tried to use that energy to assess the type of criminal before him, and the inspection disappointed him. The Global Army was looking for aliens with the guts to smuggle bombs into the Harbor's system, but the Thilku didn't fit that profile.

'A small-time criminal,' Khan concluded. 'This guy can't be part of an organization with connections to the Harbor's system.'

Khan could be wrong, but that eventuality wouldn't lead anywhere. The Thilku couldn't know much, even if he belonged to the targeted organization.

'What are we even doing here?' Khan couldn't help but wonder, diverting his gaze from the Thilku to inspect the district. 'How can someone at that level get caught by a simple inspection?'

Smuggling a bomb was no small feat. The criminal organization in question probably was as resourceful as the Hive. Its members would have fled as soon as Lord Exr restricted access to vehicles.

An explanation for that odd situation existed. On the surface, the Thilku were cooperating with the Global Army, but catching the actual criminals wasn't necessarily what the aliens had in mind.

The Empire probably wanted to handle the serious issues internally, and the Global Army would be fine with a scapegoat and reparations. Meanwhile, Lord Exr could use Ambassador Abores' team to fix problems in his domain before orders from above changed his approach.

Khan knew all of that, but his knowledge didn't make him feel any better. He basically was doing the Thilku's dirty work for political credits.

Amox left the house carrying a metal box in his arms while Khan was deep in his thoughts. The alien approached the prisoner and slammed the case on the street, uncaring of the rain falling inside it.

The box contained a few guns, food, and what looked like a grenade. All in all, that wasn't the worst, but Amox had a different opinion about that.

"[Where did you get all of this]?" Amox questioned, grabbing a piece of meat sealed in a transparent bag from the box. "[This is contraband]."

Khan didn't know Neuria's social structure, but Amox's words told him that the districts had different food. The city could have precise rationing, making that meat illegal in those houses.

The prisoner pretended not to hear the question. He wore a smug grin and lowered his head to express his silence. Yet, Amox threw the meat back in the box and delivered a rising slap that made the Thilku lift his chin again.

"[Where did you get this]?" Amox pressed on, reaching for the prisoner's white hair to keep his head lifted.

The prisoner had felt the slap. A few drops of blood had started to fall from his lower lip, blending with the rain. A first-level warrior was powerless in that situation, but he still didn't speak.

"[Answer me]!" Amox shouted, delivering a second slap with the back of his hand. The prisoner groaned, but the attack did little to break his silence.

Amox growled in anger. He was ready to deliver a public beating, but the Thilku's pride went both ways. There was a good chance hurting the prisoner still wouldn't give him answers.

So, Amox opted for a different approach. He let go of the prisoner's hair and spread his arms, turning toward the rows of houses to shout an announcement. "[Since you have been found guilty of housing a criminal, the entire district will receive a pay cut for a month]!"

The prisoner gasped but quickly lowered his head again. He hoped the rain would cover his reaction, but Khan noticed it and conveyed it to his companion. "[He seems to care about the district]."

Khan hoped to bring the focus back to the prisoner, but his words had the opposite effect. Amox shouted again, and his threats involved something else at that time. "[And since you know how to get food by yourselves, the district will receive fewer rations for the same amount of time]!"

"[You can't do that]!" The prisoner finally broke his silence. "[There are families here]!"

"[I know]," Amox stated, turning toward the prisoner, "[And they have decided to stay silent about the contraband. They are as guilty as you]."

Khan couldn't feel any happiness inside Amox. His companion didn't enjoy saying those words, but they felt natural when they escaped his mouth.

'I underestimated them,' Khan understood. Notions of good and evil were similar between humans and Thilku, but the latter were used to tougher methods. In their minds, it was right to rule with an iron fist as long as it benefited the Empire.

"[Why don't you start talking]?" Amox asked. "[We'll see what happens to the district afterward]."

Khan could only stay still and let his companion handle the conversation while he adjusted his mindset. He knew the Thilku were strict, but that bordered cruelty, which he hated.

The opening of a few doors distracted Khan from his mental process and made him inspect his surroundings. Thilku started to come out of their houses, shouting complaints that spread the news throughout the district.

Amox also noticed the event and promptly pulled up his sleeve to send orders through his device. "[Gather in the fourth block. We might have a riot]."

The shouts grew louder as more Thilku dived into the street. Their complaints fused with the rain, but the soldiers and Amox didn't hear them. They only focused on the number of people that had appeared, which was troubling.

'That's almost fifty Thilku,' Khan counted. 'This doesn't look good.'

"[Why do we have to pay for someone else's crime]?" One Thilku shouted.

"[Do you know how many hours we spend in the factories]?" Another Thilku added. "[How would I notice criminal behavior]?"

"[I served the Empire for forty years]!" A third Thilku said. "[I'm still serving it here]!"

Some complaints involved the children, while others addressed the factories' conditions and salaries. The situation looked far from happy, and Khan memorized anything that reached his ears.

The crowd was slowly getting closer, approaching the political group from both sides. Only four soldiers were with Amox and Khan, and two were keeping the criminal down, making it impossible for them to handle the situation.

Tension spread as the soldiers wore their most serious stances. They were ready to give their everything to quell that riot, and Amox was with them. Khan was on the same page, but something flared in the symphony, making his hand shoot toward Amox's back.

A whooshing noise pierced through the heavy rain, turning the soldiers' heads. Amox also peeked past his shoulder and saw Khan's stretched arm. The alien didn't initially understand what was happening, but the smoke lingering on Khan's hand gave him a clue.

Thinking turned out to be unnecessary since a blue light flashed among the crowd and flew toward the soldiers. The latter could recognize the bullet now, and Amox raised his right arm to intercept it. Still, Khan's leg ended up being faster.

Khan delivered a rising kick, perfectly matching the bullet's speed and trajectory. His foot slammed on the mass of mana, dispersing its power and overall threat.

"[Incoming fire]!" Amox shouted, speaking to the device on his forearm. "[We need riot control forces now]!"

"[Watch the criminal]," Khan ordered, waving his right hand to disperse the smoke. The [Blood Shied] had protected it from the bullet, so he could immediately shoot ahead.

Khan sprinted, basically teleporting above the bullet's source. Part of the crowd had screamed in fear and had run toward the houses, making Khan's job far easier.

The assailant was an old male Thilku who conveyed nothing but bitterness. He had fired through the crowd, uncaring of who he could hurt, and that resolve remained even after his second shot.

The alien was about to fire again, but a foot landed on his lifted gun, shattering it. The Thilku was a second-level warrior, so he lacked the reflexes to react to the event. He didn't even notice the kick moving toward his face.

Khan kicked the alien, holding back enough to avoid killing him on the spot. His foot hit the center of the Thilku's face, sending blood in every direction and flinging him away.

The Thilku flew backward before slamming his back on the street. He fainted, but no one in the area had Khan's senses, and his bloody face hinted at something very different.

Khan knew what was coming even before the crowd. The symphony kept him informed on the changes in the general vibe, and it didn't take long before a predictable shout pierced the rain.

"[The human killed him]!" A random Thilku among the crowd cried, triggering an unstoppable chain reaction.

"[He's dead]!" Another Thilku cried.

"[The Empire sent a human to kill us]!" A third Thilku shouted, and more echoed that feeling.

Khan was ready to escape into the sky to minimize the damage, but more flares appeared in the symphony, forcing him to sprint to his left. Three bullets pierced his previous position, spreading more chaos among the crowd.

Many Thilku hurried toward their homes. Some jumped on the ground, hoping to avoid the shots. Yet, the district had several weapons, and a few aliens didn't hesitate to draw them in their anger.

Khan sensed the guns even before they fired. Mana moved toward his legs, generating a sprint that brought him to the other side of the street. Bullets shot forward at that point, but Khan had long since disappeared.

As the bullets pierced the rain, Khan dived into the crying crowd, moving too fast for anyone to notice him. He had already spotted the three shooters, and his speed increased as he ran toward them.

The three shooters were in different spots on the street, but their guns exploded simultaneously. Khan also reappeared near the last one, stunning him. The Thilku's legs lost strength when he noticed Khan, making him end butt-first on the street.

Khan didn't dare to attack anyone else in that general panic, but another flare appeared in the symphony. He recognized it since it belonged to a weapon he had already cleared, and turning to his left confirmed that guess.

A big mass of azure mana was flying in Khan's direction. That bullet belonged to a shoulder-fired missile Amox and Khan had found before. The Thilku was authorized to own it, but Khan had never thought he would fire it at him.

Khan didn't have problems dodging the bullet. He jumped backward, and the missile flew past him. Its trajectory didn't even endanger his companions, so Khan was ready to disregard it. However, his eyes widened in worry when he realized where it would land.

The panic had made many Thilku fall on the ground, leaving more people than intended outside. A family of three was among them, with the young child doing her best to help her parents on their feet.

The child's father lifted his face only to see the incoming missile. The azure light it radiated threatened to blind him, but that worry didn't exist in his mind since his child stood between him and the bullet.

The father tried to pull his child away, but the street was wet, and he had only managed to plant one knee on the ground. His panic made him slip, failing to grab his daughter properly and pull her away.

The missile landed a mere meter from the father, exploding and sending scorching mana in every direction. The Thilku could only jump toward his right to cover his partner with his body, but his eyes quickly opened to check the area.

Tears left the father's eyes when he noticed the empty spot before him. The scorching mana had burnt his baggy clothes, setting them on fire, but he felt no pain. He couldn't experience any emotion looking at the fuming and empty metal.

"[Papa]!" A familiar cry suddenly resounded, and the father gasped. He inspected his surroundings but only saw emptiness or fellow panicked Thilku. He realized what was happening only when his crying partner pulled his sleeve and pointed at the sky.

Khan had used his top speed to grab the child before the explosion could engulf her. The place didn't have safe areas, so he flew her into the sky with him. He had risen for many meters due to the accumulated momentum, but the young Thilku didn't mind it.

The missile's explosion had brought nervous peace to the street. The crowd put the panic aside to inspect the situation, noticing Khan's descending figure. He had wrapped an arm around the child's torso while his graceful steps slowly brought them down. He was flying, and that feat filled everyone with shock.

Khan landed on a safe spot beside the two parents and let the child go. The young Thilku wanted to jump at them right away, but Khan grabbed her right shoulder before whispering a single word. "Disperse."

The flames flickering on the father's clothes released a whooshing noise, disappearing on the spot. That fire was surviving the heavy rain, but a single word from Khan dispersed them.

The father noticed his injuries after the event. His mind made room for pain, which didn't hesitate to arrive due to the burns on his left arm and back. Still, before he could react, Khan put a knee on the ground before him and grabbed his wounded limb.

"Help him," Khan said, his eyes wandering among the injuries before rising to inspect the rain.

The father couldn't understand what was happening, but his eyes suddenly shot on his arm. The burns were still there, but the pain had waned. He only felt an annoying itch now.

The Thilku couldn't help but focus on Khan again. Yet, Khan was busy admiring the mana with his bare eyes. He had seen what that energy had done to help the alien, and the sight had been mesmerizing.

"[You need a doctor]," Khan eventually said, straightening his position and patting the child's back. The latter had frozen when Khan had restrained her, but that gesture made her jump toward her parents.

The family was happy about their child's well-being, but the father only looked at her briefly before focusing on Khan. He had already shown his back to the group, but the Thilku couldn't stop studying him.

Part of the crowd shared the father's shock. Many couldn't see much due to the rain, but those who did were enthralled. Khan had flown, saved a child, and helped an injured Thilku. His gestures also carried grace, almost forcing the aliens to feel awe.

A loud cough broke the silence. The fainted Thilku woke up and turned to his side to throw up. Only a few aliens noticed that, but rumors quickly spread, even reaching Khan's side of the street.

Soon, everyone realized that Khan didn't kill anyone, which added value to his graceful moves. The crowd began to see Khan in a different light, but he didn't hesitate to ruin that image.

Khan performed slow steps toward the Thilku with the shoulder-fired missile. A few aliens who had used their weapons on Khan were nearby, and none dared to move during that steady walk. Khan's performance had left them stunned, but fear replaced that feeling.

The rain began to echo Khan's mindset, growing heavier and colder. His eyes remained on the Thilku with the heavy weapon while he drew his knife. The blade was already glowing with purple-red light, and needles with a similar color appeared in his right hand, joining that glow.

Khan spread his arms, showing his knife and spell while approaching the criminals. He even crossed his fellow soldiers, who didn't dare to utter a word. Anyone could see how bad his mood was. It seemed that the faintest noise could make him explode.

The rain, the purple-red glows, and Khan's cold face created a terrifying picture. No one in the crowd wanted to deal with him, and even the Thilku with the shoulder-fired missile dropped his weapon, throwing it away to plant his knees on the street.

Many imitated that gesture, expressing their desire to surrender, and that reaction spread throughout the crowd. Soon, everyone was on their knees, ready to face the consequences of that riot.

Khan felt the urge to vent, but the symphony warned him once again, making him put away his spells and weapon. A loud, whooshing noise followed in the next few seconds, and red lights fell from above, bringing more artificial illumination to the street.

One look at the sky revealed the presence of a big, circular ship. Reinforcements had arrived, formally putting an end to the riot.

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Riot control forces descended into the district, filling it with soldiers that sent everyone back home. Amox updated those reinforcements, isolating the problematic individuals who ended up in handcuffs.

After a short briefing, Khan and Amox resumed their inspection. The few remaining houses didn't oppose any resistance due to the lingering awe toward Khan, allowing the two scouts to finish their task quickly.

All in all, the inspection led to a handful of arrests aggravated by the riot. Khan and Amox found a few illegal items but nothing that could connect that district to the bomb.

Khan didn't know what the Thilku would do with the prisoners, and part of him wanted to remain ignorant. His mind wasn't exactly stable after the recent events. He yearned for a break. Still, Amox had to deal with more briefings once the inspection was over, and Khan waited for him in the street, relying on the rain to cool down his thoughts.

Amox exchanged words with the soldiers and riot control forces, giving a more detailed report. Meanwhile, a few Thilku connected their armguards to the street lamps, obtaining the images recorded by those machines.

Awestruck gazes fell on Khan as the troops watched the recordings, but the matter ended there. The riot control forces eventually returned to their ship with the prisoners while the other soldiers started patrolling the district.

Only Amox and Khan remained on the street, but the former wasn't alone. The riot control forces had left a strange ride beside the Thilku, and he didn't hesitate to hop on it to move toward Khan.

More details became visible as the ride grew closer. The vehicle was a motorbike without wheels or engines. A big, spinning tire encircled its two seats and interactive controls, acting as a cover from the rain and a driving force.

The tire was big enough to leave enough room for Amox. His head wouldn't touch the ceiling even if he stretched his back completely. The same went for the seats. That vehicle had the Thilku's size in mind, looking quite spacious from Khan's perspective.

"[Hop in]," Amox called when he stopped beside Khan. "[Let's eat something]."

"[Shouldn't we report back]?" Khan questioned, inspecting the ride's insides. The seat behind Amox was empty, and his hands were on handles dug into the interactive controls.

"[Lord Exr has already cleared us for the rest of the day]," Amox explained. "[I'll drive you to the human building once we are done]."

Khan couldn't find any reason to refuse. He wanted to blow off some steam and talk to Amox privately, so he hopped on the back seat, sealing his hands on its side handles.

Amox waited a few seconds before accelerating. A circular metal surface separated the seats from the actual tire, and its spinning motion generated whooshing noises. Splashes also resounded due to the wet street, but the rain couldn't touch Khan inside that vehicle.

The bike was quite fast, and Amox made it run around the district before diving into the previous main street. The two scouts crossed the factories in a few minutes, but Amox didn't stop at the landing area and rode deeper into the city.

The inspection from the ship couldn't compare to a ride among Neuria's districts. The bike went fast, but Khan still gained insights into the city's true face, and his senses added details.

The Thilku seemed to love open, big spaces. Many shops along the way had vast entrances without doors or windows that could hinder the view of their insides.

That didn't only apply to cheap-looking stands where Thilku focused on drinking. Restaurants and shops selling various items preferred those open entrances and didn't care about the weather or cold that could seep in.

That stylish choice repeated itself and became the norm as Amox drove into better parts of the city. It seemed that the Thilku would always opt for the open spaces when they had the chance, and that wasn't limited to the first floors. Khan saw many short balconies offering similar services, even if they could probably seal themselves when needed.

The ride through the city had a calming effect on Khan's mana. His mood improved as he became more aware of the new environment. That truly was an alien city, and he was in the middle of it.

Amox eventually stopped the bike and parked it in a specific space beside the sidewalk. The two scouts were in the corner of a block featuring a big shop with red and yellow signs, and a similar illumination filled its insides.

Similar signs occupied the building's upper floors and stretched on both sides of the corner. The shop was multiple stories tall, and its insides had a few rows of stalls attended by a couple of waiters each.

The place was quite crowded. Thilku filled the stools before the stalls, drinking, eating, and chatting. The insides were loud, and Khan couldn't see a single empty seat. Yet, that didn't stop Amox.

"[Come]," Amox called, leaving the bike to approach the shop.

Khan complied, jumping out of the bike to follow Amox. The rain had never stopped falling, so the scouts' shoes left wet marks on the shop's clean floor, but circular cleaning robots immediately came out of the walls to attend to them.

The robots captured Khan's attention only for a second since something more interesting happened. The loud chatter began to wane as the customers noticed Amox and went completely silent when Khan entered their view.

Khan had expected a similar reaction for him, but the fact that Amox was part of it triggered his curiosity. Amox wasn't any different from the other Thilku. His clothes were his only peculiarity, and the many looks at his drenched cape gave Khan explicit clues.

The customers didn't have the baggy and poor-looking clothes Khan had seen in the targeted district. They were rather well dressed, or, at least, that was what Khan could guess from that short inspection. After all, he wasn't an expert in Thilku's style.

However, the absence of red capes said enough. Khan was almost certain the shop didn't have soldiers. The customers' reactions also told him how respected that job was since Amox's mere presence could make an entire floor go silent.

Amox didn't mind those reactions and continued to advance, and Khan imitated him. No waiter arrived, so the two reached the end of the shop uninterrupted and began to climb the metal staircase they found.

The second floor was almost identical to the first, except for the shorter and fewer stalls. They were the equivalent of smaller tables that tried to offer some privacy, but the open space slightly defeated that purpose.

The new area had far fewer customers. Khan only spotted three groups on different stalls, with two being couples seemingly out on a date and one having three old Thilku. The latter looked drunk but still lifted their heads and nodded when Amox appeared.

The two couples imitated that reaction, and Amox didn't refrain from giving a general nod. The groups also inspected Khan and experienced some surprise, but that study only lasted a few seconds. It didn't take long before everyone focused on their businesses.

Khan couldn't find red capes on the second floor either but put the matter aside when Amox approached a relatively isolated stall in the room's corner. The spot was between two open balconies pointed at the street below, and the rain's noise filled Khan's ears as he sat with his companion.

The stalls on the second floor didn't have waiters but featured heaters and other cooking equipment on one side. They also had a red rune on their metal surface, which Amox touched to order a few meals.

The surface took life once Amox finished the order. Drawers opened, and mechanical arms came out to prepare the meal. Cups also appeared alongside a metal jug reeking of a harsh and strong scent Khan recognized.

"[Are you sure we can drink on duty]?" Khan asked as the mechanical arms captured his attention.

"[We are clear for the rest of the day]," Amox reminded, grabbing the jug and cups to pour the booze, "[And we deserve a feast]."

"[I'll be in your care]," Khan laughed, seizing the cup and lifting it with Amox to join that toast.

"[To a job well done]!" Amox shouted, disregarding whether his loud voice disturbed the other customers.

Khan chuckled before letting the booze deal with his remaining lousy mood. That situation was leagues above the previous task, but he had just gotten to Neuria. The following days would probably feature similar jobs.

"[Ah, finally]!" Amox exclaimed when the mechanical arms pushed two fuming bowls toward the other end of the table. The plates had meat and other meals Khan didn't recognize, but that didn't stop him from eating.

The Thilku ate with their bare hands, and Khan and Amox followed those traditions. They wolfed down the meal, accompanying it with the strong booze, and relaxed only when the bowls were empty.

"[Khan, you sure are surprising]," Amox laughed, patting Khan's left shoulder before half-turning toward him. "[I didn't know humans had shamans]."

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The feast went on for longer than both Khan and Amox had predicted. They ate, drank, and chatted some more until dinnertime drew near and forced them to leave the shop.

The Empire probably had regulations about drunk driving, but Amox didn't mention them, and Khan didn't ask. The two simply hopped on the bike and dived back into the city, uncaring of the laws they might break.

Of course, third-level warriors didn't get drunk so easily. Amox even had insane tolerance due to his Thilku body, and Khan was by no means inferior. The two were tipsy, but that didn't affect their awareness and abilities.

Khan let his thoughts wander during the ride. He didn't ponder about anything specific. He only used his tipsy state to appreciate Neuria without involving politics or other problems.

The rain still fell, and Khan welcomed it. At times, he even let go of the handles and spread his arms to dig his hands in the cold wind. In those moments, he was free from everything, but the bike eventually stopped, forcing him to return to the real world.

"[Your stop]," Amox announced, waving a hand to his right. "[One of Neuria's finest buildings]."

Khan inspected his surroundings. He was in one of Neuria's nice districts, but the building pointed by Amox felt out of place. The structure was large, tall, and rectangular, featuring only a few red runes on its smooth, dark metal surface. The absence of windows and balconies was striking, and Khan understood the reason behind that.

"[It's very human]," Khan commented.

"[Don't let the symbols outside fool you]," Amox explained. "[Your Lords implemented the Global Army's technology inside. It basically is a political building]."

"[I see]," Khan voiced, slamming his hands on Amox's back. "[Thank you for the ride and feast. I'll see you on the next job]."

"[Which can't come too soon]," Amox laughed, watching Khan leave the bike.

"[Don't forget to call your wife]," Khan joked, strolling through the sidewalk while waving his hand.

Amox's snickers reached Khan's ears as he advanced through the sidewalk. The space before the building was vast, but he crossed it in a few seconds. The bike had left by the time Khan reached the entrance, and he lifted his face to wash it under the rain before pressing his hand on the metal surface.

"Vocal recognition," A robotic voice came out of the entrance.

"Captain Khan," Khan stated, and the two halves of the metal door slid open to reveal its insides.

The entrance led to a simple hall featuring couches slightly too big for humans. An interactive desk also stood at its bottom, with two elevators stretching at its sides.

The hall was empty, so Khan quickly crossed it to reach the interactive desk. Pressing his hand on its surface opened a drawer that contained his phone. He had left it on the ship after the landing, but the Thilku had moved it there.

A message appeared on the interactive desk when Khan retrieved his phone, and a sigh escaped his mouth. The menus informed him about Ambassador Abores' summon, even describing the floor and room he had to reach.

Ignoring direct orders wasn't an option, so Khan rubbed the corners of his eyes and headed for one elevator. He drew his phone out of habit, but the empty screen and lack of connection with the network made him sigh again. He was truly alone there, and his tipsy state pushed his thoughts toward obvious destinations.

Khan's fingers moved on their own, opening a folder in his phone containing a collection of pictures he couldn't show to anybody. Monica didn't leave him dry before his departure. She had actually spoiled him a bit, and her captivating poses worked like a charm.

The opening of the elevator brought Khan back to reality, making him immediately throw his phone into his pocket. The sudden gesture turned out to be pointless since the corridor before the lift was empty, and Khan inspected it to get on with his duties.

The corridor was vast. It almost resembled a hall of its own due to its size, and only a few rooms stretched from its sides. All those spaces were quite large, and human numbers and letters stood above their entrances to mark them.

Khan followed the desk's instructions and arrived before a room at one end of the corridor. He showed his phone to the menus there, and a waiting message appeared since the person inside had to authorize that entrance.

Only a few seconds had to pass before the room's entrance opened, showing a slightly barren environment. The place had the iconic furniture of an office, with a desk, a few chairs, and a series of drawers, but they were as simple as possible from an aesthetic standpoint.

Ambassador Abores was behind the desk, with his head lowered on the many reports on its menus. Khan approached the table's opposite side, wrapping his arms behind his back to perform a military salute.

"Sir," Khan exclaimed.

"One moment, Captain," Ambassador Abores voiced, tinkering with the menus to rearrange the reports. "I expected you to return hours ago. When you didn't, I decided to get some work done."

"I'm sorry I caused problems, sir," Khan stated.

"It's nothing major," Ambassador Abores said, lifting his head. "I was with Lord Exr when he gave you the rest of the day off. In a way, you were following my orders."

Khan didn't reply. An outsider would find Ambassador Abores' words slightly bitter, but Khan saw the truth. The man was simply tired, and work was still waiting for him.

"We were still together when the reports from your district arrived," Ambassador Abores revealed. "A video came too. You handled yourself well out there."

"Thank you, sir," Khan responded.

"It's a pity you decided to waste half a day drinking afterward," Ambassador Abores exclaimed.

"The whole team would have benefitted from hearing your findings."

The rebuke was almost inevitable and didn't surprise Khan. He took that scolding like a pro and also had a reply ready. "I was deepening the relationships with the Thilku, sir."

"I can smell that," Ambassador Abores scoffed. "It's beyond me how you can drink that stuff."

Khan wore a fake smile. He could throw a joke or try to explain himself further, but the Ambassador didn't seem to care.

"So," Ambassador Abores continued. "Did you learn something from your teammate? His name was Amox, am I right?"

"You are right, sir," Khan confirmed, avoiding any form of hesitation before continuing with a lie.

"Sadly, he wouldn't answer my questions about classified information. Amox is very loyal to the Empire."

Ambassador Abores tried to find the truth in Khan's face, but his façade was impeccable. Even his mana agreed with the lie since he put friends above politics.

"I expected as much," Ambassador Abores sighed. "I would have written a recommendation for you on the spot otherwise."

Khan didn't fall for that trap. His expression didn't twitch nor move, forcing Ambassador Abores to give up on the matter.

"At least Lord Exr liked how you saved that kid," Ambassador Abores sighed. "Maybe he'll stop wasting our time soon."

"Sir, do you know something?" Khan asked, his eyes lighting up.

"It's my job to know more than you," Ambassador Abores declared. "Instead, yours also involves leading the human team, which you haven't been doing so much."

"I prepared reports according to their preparation, sir," Khan explained.

"You could train them directly instead of spending your days drinking with the enemy," Ambassador Abores voiced.

Khan began to frown, and Ambassador Abores let that reaction completely unfold before continuing. "You heard me correctly. I hope you didn't forget that the Thilku planted a bomb in our territory."

That description was inaccurate, but Khan could understand the general vibe. The Ambassador didn't want to hear complaints.

"I'll go to my companions immediately, sir," Khan promised.

"Not like this," Ambassador Abores replied. "Go to your room, clean yourself up, and change clothes. Your accommodations suit your rank, so I'm sure they'll satisfy you."

Khan nodded and prepared himself to leave, but the Ambassador spoke again. "The team is in a hall on the fifth floor."

"Aren't you joining them, sir?" Khan asked.

"I have work to do," Ambassador Abores replied, pointing his face back at the desk. "Leave now, Captain. I'll see you at the morning gathering."

"Goodnight, sir," Khan said, leaving the office and waiting for the door to close to abandon his façade.

A cold expression inevitably arrived. The Ambassador had reminded Khan of how unique his perspective was. Khan didn't see differences among species, but the rest of humanity didn't agree.

The current political issue added value to the Ambassador's words, but Khan couldn't agree. He couldn't blame an entire species for the sins of a few criminals. He couldn't treat Amox as an enemy simply because he was a Thilku.

'This will never end,' Khan cursed before searching for the closest opening in the corridors' walls. He connected his phone to it, and a stream of information arrived.

Khan learned about his room's floor and number and retrieved his phone to head toward it. As much as he resented the Ambassador's words, the part about the human team was correct. Khan could do more for his companions, starting with getting to know them.

A trip through an elevator brought Khan to the seventh floor, and following the directions on his phone led him to the end of its corridor. He unlocked the door before him with his genetic signature, revealing a big hall that had multiple rooms connected to it.

Khan spent a few minutes inspecting the flat before throwing himself in the shower. The habitation shared the office's simplicity and was smaller than his house on the Harbor, so he quickly lost interest in it.

The flat already had a set of new uniforms and casual clothes, and Khan opted for the latter once he was clean. His knife was useless inside the building, but he kept it at his side as he left the flat and headed for the fifth floor.

Finding the hall mentioned by the Ambassador wasn't a problem. The symphony guided Khan toward an open door that leaked shouts and various comments. Some involved Khan, which didn't stop since no one could hear his steps.

"I'm telling you, they were scared shitless!" A man shouted while others laughed. "Look at him! Who wouldn't be scared in that situation?"

"He didn't get his fame out of luck," Another man said. "Though, is he really nineteen? I swear. He speaks Thilku better than me."

"That's because you fall asleep whenever you start studying," A woman responded. "Besides, the Captain graduated from the Harbor's advanced classes. Don't compare him to the likes of us."

"And he is almost twenty," Another woman added. "Soldiers with his status are already married by that age."

"Isn't he basically married?" A third man asked. "I thought the Solodrey family had sealed the deal."

"He isn't engaged yet," The previous woman stated. "Not yet."

"Pictures of Miss Solodrey's ring are all over the network," The second man said, "And the Solodrey family didn't do anything about that. That's a silent approval."

"I know," The second woman sighed. "It's too late already."

"Did you have your eyes on him or something?" The first man joked.

"I wouldn't dare," The second woman denied. "Though, if he ever felt alone here, I guess I wouldn't mind comforting him."

"It's good that my girlfriend isn't here," Khan announced, leaning on the entrance. "She is the jealous type."

The temperature in the hall instantly dropped as seven heads turned toward the entrance. Recognizing Khan deepened the soldiers' shock, who shot on their feet to perform military salutes.

The people involved with the gossiping did their best to wear straight faces, especially the woman who had spoken the bold remark. Still, it seemed that a single glare from Khan could make their façade crumble.

Luckily for the soldiers, Khan had no intention of scolding them. He merely ran his eyes over them before speaking reassuring words. "At ease."

A few suppressed sighs resounded, but no one dared to return to their seats. Some glanced at the wall behind them in panic, but moving wasn't an option. Khan didn't only hear them. He had also seen the images depicted by the hall's menus.

The hall was as simplistic as the other rooms. It had a few couches and tables, but nothing special. It was big, but the soldiers had gathered on its left side with drinks, empty plates, and food.

As for the wall in question, the menus had played a video Khan could recognize. The recording had stopped on an image depicting him wielding his knife and needles. That picture came directly from his targeted district, meaning that the soldiers had gained access to the street lamps' footage.

"I hope you had it easier than me," Khan exclaimed, reaching for an empty desk nearby. The table was connected to the floor, and he linked his phone to it to gain access to the building's services.

"Yes, sir, Captain, sir," One of the soldiers said before the others mumbled similarly confused words. They were still tense about Khan's presence, which was inevitable after the recent events.

"Why don't you brief me on your day?" Khan suggested. "Maybe I can give some useful advice after hearing you all."

Khan's casual approach partially reassured the soldiers, who grabbed chairs and gathered around him. Yet, he added something that reminded them about his rank. "Right, turn off that thing."

The woman who had voiced the bold remark gasped, snapping on her feet to reach the wall. She deactivated the menus and returned to her seat quickly, fearing what Khan could say about her previous comment.

"Don't be so tense," Khan said, leaning on the seat's back to be more comfortable. "I don't mind if you smoke here and keep drinking too. Actually, give me a glass of something since you are at it."

The woman from before snapped on her feet again, causing a few chuckles in the hall. The soldiers tried to cover their mouths and hide them, but that effort was futile.

Soon, the woman brought a few bottles to the new gathering spot without forgetting the glasses. She had even prepared one for Khan, which she handed personally.

"Thank you, Adele," Khan said, smiling and seizing the glass, "And don't worry about what you said. Just avoid saying it from now on."

"Of course, Captain, sir," Adele almost shouted, hurrying back to her seat.

"And, you, Elvis," Khan continued, looking at one of the men who had spoken before. "If you have problems with the Thilku language, I can write you some notes."

"Thank you, sir," Elvis stuttered. "However, it's not necessary for-."

"It is," Khan interrupted. "This is a political mission, and it's my job to make sure you are prepared."

In theory, Khan's job as a scout had ended when he finished his reports about Neuria. Yet, the Ambassador wanted more from him, and he couldn't disappoint.

"You know how this goes," Khan stated. "The Ambassador scolds me, and I have to scold you. Let's pretend I already did that, shall we?"

The new statement dispersed most of the tension, especially since Khan had worn a genuine smile. He was leading without abandoning his carefree personality, which the soldiers preferred over stern and cold superiors.

Nevertheless, before the soldiers could begin their briefing, Khan played with the desk to gain access to a specific subject. Soon, a simple Thilku rune appeared under him, and he skimmed through its explanation while his companions told their stories.

Chapter 564 Runes

The soldiers didn't have it as hard as Khan. They still met their fair share of resistance but no riots or violence. Some were only tasked with patrols even, which prevented them from facing Neuria's citizens in the first place.

Khan noted down everything, heard eventual comments, and gave advice when possible. Slowly, the meeting grew more relaxed and cheerful, but the late hour forced it to an end before it could progress any further.

The outcome was still favorable for Khan. Showing a more active presence in the political team was almost necessary for his goals. He had reservations about leading, but his career needed him to shoulder responsibilities to reach positions of power.

As for getting to know the soldiers, Khan opted for a professional approach. After hearing the problematic comments, a single meeting couldn't be enough, and other issues held Khan back too.

The soldiers in the political team were elites in the Global Army. They almost represented the best humanity had to offer when background and wealth were out of the equation. They were also third-level warriors, which was an excellent achievement for ordinary troops. Still, all of that had come at a price.

Khan was an exception who had benefitted from his tragedies, at least politically. Ordinary soldiers needed far longer to reach similar achievements, making his companions far older than him.

Adele was the youngest of the seven, but Khan was still twelve years below her. The mana had kept her appearance youthful, her fair skin smooth, and her long dark hair bright, but that didn't change the reality of the situation.

'I'll tell Monica about her only when I'm sure she won't kill her,' Khan thought, smirking as he headed back to his flat.

The booze's effects had yet to wane, especially since Khan had kept drinking, but the night was still young, and the morning briefing didn't worry him. He would be up no matter what, so he planned to study some more now that he had found something interesting.

The flat offered the same services as the hall, so Khan settled in a room that tried to resemble an office before connecting his phone. He was on an armchair too big for him, behind an interactive desk capable of releasing holograms, and red runes soon came out of it.

Khan had gone over the topic in the past months but had hastily labeled it as technology. His knowledge in the field was so shallow that attempting to understand its alien version would require years of study, which he didn't have.

However, after getting into contact with the red runes and studying them a bit more, Khan felt intrigued. Those symbols did belong to the technological field, but there was far more to it.

As Amox had explained, each rune carried multiple meanings which could activate various functions. They were like numerous words fused into a single symbol which could produce completely different sentences depending on their iterations.

Of course, the field was far more complicated than that. The runes required specific materials and precise amounts of synthetic mana to represent each word. They also needed constant energy to remain active, effectively marking them as technology.

Still, reading about meaning, purpose, and strands of mana tickled Khan's curiosity. His guts told him he could achieve something similar to the runes with his level of control.

Khan obviously couldn't base that on technology. He would have to invent a version of the Thilku runes founded on mana. Also, he would have to find a purpose for that experiment. Following his curiosity was fine, but his time was limited and prevented him from having useless hobbies.

'Realistically,' Khan thought, moving to the next holograms, 'These runes can do anything I program them to do. The question is, what would I make them do?'

Thinking about the use of a technique that still didn't exist was pointless in many ways. Khan wasn't even sure his idea would succeed, let alone lead to results he could apply. His knowledge of the Thilku runes was also superficial, but he felt the need to consider his options before giving in to his curiosity.

'What now?' Khan cursed. 'I'm intrigued already.'

Khan stared at the holograms a bit longer before removing his phone from the desk. That didn't lock him out of his studies since he had already authorized them. It only allowed him to use his device more freely, and his purpose turned out to be predictable once again.

Sexy lingerie and a captivating expression filled Khan's view, but no lust appeared on his face. The Harbor had gotten him used to having consultants all the time. He couldn't even describe how much Monica had helped him, and being unable to talk with her created a void in his life.

'You'd tell me to sleep after the day I had,' Khan thought, his eyes glued on the screen. 'You'd even bribe me.'

Khan couldn't help but snicker before heaving a deep sigh. He recalled Ambassador Abores' words about setting a high standard with the Thilku. In a way, that already forced him to be better.

'Or maybe my brain is trying to push me toward this,' Khan considered, his eyes leaving the phone to return to the holograms. 'Why am I even pretending to have a choice?'

Khan sighed again, kissing his screen before linking it to the desk again. He ruffled his hair and crossed his legs on the big armchair as his entire focus went on the holograms. Learning those runes could be useful as long as he worked with the Thilku, and that was enough for now.

The night transformed into the morning, which held a mandatory briefing with the team. The Ambassador hosted it and reviewed the previous day's events, using them to congratulate the troops.

The briefing ended there due to the absence of additional orders from Lord Exr. The Thilku needed to deal with the consequences of their last tasks, reorganizing districts, troops, and workers to keep Neuria's construction plan on track. The human team had nothing to do with that, so they remained in their appointed building.

Khan wasn't exactly stuck in the building. He could make an excuse and leave to explore the city, but Ambassador Abores had already scolded him about that. Moreover, he had found a new hobby that kept him more than busy, especially since he paired it with familiarizing himself with his companions.

Days went by in the isolation of the building. Life wasn't bad there. The soldiers had food, drinks, and privacy which kept them entertained. Yet, boredom eventually arrived, even if no one dared to complain.

Ambassador Abores and Khan were the only exceptions. The former was always busy with something connected to the mission or the Harbor. He received calls every hour, sometimes even during mandatory briefings.

As for Khan, he didn't have proper tasks, but finding ways to occupy his days had never been a problem. He couldn't use the [Blood Vortex], and the buildings' training halls weren't chaos resistant, but that didn't stop him from filling his schedule.

Drops of sweat fell from Khan's forehead as he sat cross-legged on the cold metal floor. His bare torso was in a similar state, and his muscles bulged and relaxed from time to time. Even his fingers twitched while grunts and coughs left his mouth.

Khan's eyes were closed, but no darkness filled his view. His mind was immersed in a battle of his creation, and he fought it with every tool at his disposal.

Sweating so profusely wasn't the norm for Khan, but the simulated mental battle allowed him to push his limits without heavy repercussions. He could stay immersed inside his mind for hours as long as his body and mind held strong, which they did.

Nevertheless, a ringing noise eventually resounded inside the hall, forcing Khan's eyes to open. He gasped, and his breath grew ragged due to the abrupt awakening from his mental technique, but his gaze quickly focused on the notification on the wall, calming him down.

The Ambassador had sent someone to summon Khan for a meeting. Still, when he checked the time on the floor, he frowned due to the late hour. It was the middle of the night, which didn't bode well.

Khan jumped on his feet and picked up the upper part of his tracksuit from the floor. He even retrieved his phone before heading toward the entrance, only to realize to have committed a mistake when the door opened.

Adele's eyes widened when Khan appeared before her. He had yet to close the upper part of his tracksuit, leaving his torso exposed, and Adele didn't hesitate to study it. She had already seen him bare-chested, but having him so close and with sweat still running down his skin had a completely different effect.

"Stop this," Khan scolded, closing his tracksuit to cover himself.

"I'm sorry, sir," Adele gasped, lowering her head in shame and wrapping her arms behind her back to perform a military salute.

"I let it go the first time," Khan continued, "But I'll request a replacement if this becomes a problem."

"I understand, sir," Adele promised, keeping her head lowered.

"No, you don't," Khan said, leaning forward to whisper. "I played all sorts of games with all sorts of powers to get where I am. I'm not risking it because you like my abs."

"I'm sorry, sir," Adele repeated, shaking a bit under Khan's serious tone.

Khan inspected Adele from head to toe. Truth be told, he was slightly mad. He was okay with jokes, but his position was still frail in multiple areas, and he had to make his companions understand that.

"I'll write a report at the next misconduct," Khan stated. "Make sure it doesn't happen."

"Yes, sir," Adele exclaimed, lifting her head to show her resolve.

Khan looked at Adele briefly before turning to his left. The elevator was in that direction, and he guessed the meeting would be on the Ambassador's floor.

"Do you know why the Ambassador summoned us?" Khan asked as the two headed toward the elevator.

"I was only told to get you," Adele revealed. "Sir."

"It's fine," Khan said dismissively. "The scolding is over."

"If I may then," Adele announced, accelerating to reach Khan's side. "Miss Solodrey is lucky to have you."

"I'm the lucky one," Khan replied. "That's why I can't mess it up."

"Did you plan your reunion already?" Adele probed.

"You'll read on the network when it happens," Khan cut the probing short.

Adele was disappointed but respected Khan's privacy. She also avoided looking at him during the trip in the elevator, and the same polite behavior remained when the two made their way toward the hall usually employed for the briefings.

The place was big, like every other room in the building, and two rows of interactive desks stood before a larger table, leaving the space between them empty. Ambassador Abores was already there, on the main seat, and the other soldiers had also occupied their assigned spots.

"Sir," Khan and Adele announced as soon as they entered the hall, separating to head to their assigned spots. Khan's desk was right before the Ambassador's larger table, and he reached it to perform a military salute.

"At ease, Captain," Ambassador Abores exclaimed. "Adele."

Khan and Adele took their seat and exchanged nods with the other soldiers before gazing at the Ambassador. The latter began to tinker with his desk, and holograms soon came out between the two rows.

"I apologize for summoning you at such a late hour," Ambassador Abores announced. "I got the okay from the Thilku Lord just one hour ago, and it couldn't wait."

"Good news is welcome at any hour after a week stuck here, sir," Khan commented, gaining the approval of his companions. The rows had sleepy faces but nothing that could disrupt their interest in the meeting.

"Indeed, Captain," Ambassador Abores said, pointing at the holograms. His gestures made many heads turn toward the images, but everyone struggled to understand them.

"This," Ambassador Abores continued, pressing on the desk to alter the holograms, "Is the building we'll visit tomorrow morning. Well, in a few hours. It's out of the city, in a military area."

The holograms transformed into a vast building that resembled a warehouse. It was hard to grasp its actual size without comparisons, and its outsides didn't reveal much anyway.

"What's the matter with this building?" Khan asked, making sure to speak the question everyone had in mind.

"It's a factory," Ambassador Abores explained, "A weapon factory that recently lost a bomb."

Gasps resounded in the hall. The news was incredible. It sounded like the Thilku were opening the real crime scene. However, Khan couldn't share his companions' excitement. He knew too much to be misled by that little info.

'Do the Thilku even build such weapons here?' Khan wondered. 'Aren't they focusing on colonizing the planet?'

Of course, the Thilku's harsh methods could explain their focus on the war industry. Still, doubts remained in Khan's mind. He couldn't believe Lord Exr was ready to cooperate so openly after a mere week on Neuria.

"I'll send the details to your devices," Ambassador Abores declared. "I suggest you memorize them thoroughly before this morning's departure. The meeting is adjourned."

The seven soldiers snapped on their feet, performing military salutes before leaving the hall. Khan remained in his seat, and some glances fell on his figure, but none of his companions dared to question his behavior.

The hall closed after the troops' departure, leaving only Khan and the Ambassador at their respective interactive desks. Ambassador Abores ignored Khan's presence and focused on the reports before him, but a question soon arrived.

"Do you ever sleep, sir?" Khan questioned.

"I could ask you the same question, Captain," Ambassador Abores casually replied without lifting his head from the desk.

"What are the chances this is the factory that produced our bomb?" Khan changed the topic.

"What did I say about thinking?" Ambassador Abores asked.

"I don't know what this inspection can bring," Khan admitted, ignoring the comment. "What do we have to gain from seeing the factory?"

"Probably nothing," Ambassador Abores said, lifting his head to look at Khan. "Unless those senses of yours are as miraculous as everyone says."

A flicker ran through Khan's eyes, but not because of the comment. Something else in Ambassador Abores' words caught his attention, and he mentioned it. "Is this the actual factory?"

"It's very likely," Ambassador Abores sighed, rubbing his eyes. "Lord Exr gave us a significant number of reports that confirm that claim."

"I didn't expect he'd move to serious business so soon," Khan muttered.

"Our specialists didn't just stare at the bomb," Ambassador Abores explained. "We gained enough data to apply some pressure. Everything else was a matter of goodwill from our alien neighbors."

"Is that a compliment?" Khan frowned.

"Yes, your heroic actions helped," Ambassador Abores scoffed. "Now, leave me. We both have work to do."

"Yes, sir," Khan stated, leaving his seat before adding something. "I must warn you. I'm not sure I can find anything. Too long has passed."

"It was a joke, Captain," Ambassador Abores cursed. "I don't expect to find anything."

"I didn't know you could make jokes, sir," Khan gasped.

"Leave before I dishonorably discharge you," Ambassador Abores threatened.

"I'll go get ready for the inspection, sir," Khan exclaimed, heading for the exit.

"Right, Captain," Ambassador Abores called, making Khan stop and turn. "I've seen from your logs that you are spending many nights studying the Thilku symbols."

"It won't get in the way of my duties, sir," Khan promised, "And I can take skipping a few nights of sleep."

"How is it going?" Ambassador Abores questioned. "Can you use that on the field?"

"I just started," Khan shook his head. "I can barely recognize a hundred symbols, and only the easy ones."

"One hundred?" Ambassador Abores asked, partially hiding his surprise. "How many do you plan to learn?"

"Amox said three thousand," Khan revealed, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm not sure I can get there during the stay on Neuria."

Ambassador Abores didn't know what to say. Learning that Khan had memorized one hundred runes in a week was surprising. Still, his plans went far beyond that. He actually wanted to master that field during his stay in Neuria.

"Just make sure to take breaks," Ambassador Abores cleared his throat. "I told you already. The Thilku will demand perfection from you. You don't want to fail them due to lack of sleep."

"It will be done, sir," Khan promised. "With your permission, I'll study the reports now."

"Granted," Ambassador Abores exclaimed and watched Khan performing a military salute before leaving the hall. Still, another comment left his mouth after he stared at the closed door for a while. "He is something alright."

Chapter 565 Perspective

There wasn't much to study about the factory. The Thilku had shared the building's basic planimetry and production output without diving too deeply into the types of weapons it made. It was useful information for the Global Army, but Khan's team didn't know what to do with it.

Still, everyone studied and prepared before the morning arrived, forcing them to gather outside the building. A Thilku flew the human ship there to pick them up, bringing them in the air.

The ship left the city and headed to the countryside. Khan and the others couldn't activate the vehicle's scanners, but their reports contained the factory's location, giving them details about their destination.

Minutes went by as the team sat in the passengers' area. No one was tense about the imminent mission. It was quite understood that the visit to the factory was just a political formality, so worrying about it was impossible.

Only Ambassador Abores appeared a bit lost in his thoughts. He wasn't distracted, but something had captured his attention and kept him locked on that topic.

'He probably has directives from the specialists to keep in mind,' Khan understood with a single glance but didn't say anything about it. Letting the Ambassador concentrate was the best he could do.

The ship eventually landed, and its side doors opened to show familiar faces. The Thilku political team had come to greet Khan and the others and welcome them to that new area.

Ambassador Abores was the first to jump out of the ship, and his team followed to create an orderly line and greet the Thilku properly. Amox and his companions performed their bows before opening the way to the building in the distance.

Khan didn't hesitate to breathe in the new environment as soon as the greeting ended. He was in a vast, open space, with the factory seen in the reports before him. Metal streets covered the ground and didn't leave a single spot exposed, but everything felt quite empty.

Adele and the others also noticed that last part. Except for the factory, the area was empty. They couldn't see vehicles, soldiers, or other buildings. The ship seemed to have landed in the middle of nowhere, but the truth was far different.

The area before the factory had many street lamps that radiated the Thilku's iconic red color. However, Khan looked past them, inspecting shades only he could see. The symphony stank of artificial mana and the lights were only a small part of that.

'The factory alone can't create this,' Khan thought, his gaze diving deeper into Neuria's eternal night. 'There must be jammers and holograms all around this area.'

That realization wasn't surprising. The place was a military area, and the Thilku had only authorized the human team to see the factory. Everything else was probably classified and needed to remain hidden from that alien force.

Ambassador Abores cut the inspection short, heading toward the Thilku team and forcing his companions to follow. Amox and the others promptly acted as escorts, leading the humans toward the factory. The group had to walk for a few minutes to reach the building, but its immense door eventually filled their view.

The door slid open, slowly revealing the factory's insides. The group could see heavy machinery, containers, staircases, upper floors, and more, but their attention focused on the two Thilku waiting for them before the entrance.

"We welcome you to the factory," One of the Thilku announced in an oddly good human accent before performing a bow with his cape.

"The tour can begin immediately if that's what you wish," The second Thilku added, imitating her companion.

Ambassador Abores performed a similar bow before lifting his head and speaking polite words. "If you'd be so kind, we can begin immediately."

The two Thilku smiled before turning to lead the way and throwing a series of expositions. The entrance closed while they pointed at the machines in their surroundings and explained their purpose in great detail.

Khan wanted to pretend to be interested, but all that technology-related talk quickly bored him. The runes on the equipment, walls, and other tools soon captured his attention, and he inspected them while attempting to understand their purpose and functioning.

Of course, Khan's preparation didn't allow him to understand those runes. The symbols in the factory didn't only belong to a field he knew nothing about. They were also far more intricate than those he had started studying with.

At times, Khan managed to recognize one or two lines in a few runes, but his luck ended there. He was simply out of his depth, but that didn't stop him from trying to apply his short studies to the environment.

The two Thilku led the group deeper into the factory, climbing on the upper floors and crossing multiple sections that handled different parts of the assembly line.

The factory was almost entirely automated, requiring only a few workers for each section. Some were directly empty, limiting their workforce to scientists that overviewed the situation.

As expected, Khan couldn't sense anything odd. The weapons in the open made him slightly curious, and he even spotted a bomb identical to the one seen on Honides. However, his senses didn't pick up on anything, which wasn't a surprise.

"We can switch up the pace now," One of the Thilku leading the group announced, stopping before the Ambassador. "We have been authorized to give individual tours if that's acceptable."

The Thilku didn't have to add anything for the Ambassador to understand the meaning behind his words. Separating him from the group would create the opportunity to share classified information which his companions probably couldn't hear.

"It's acceptable," Ambassador Abores agreed, turning to glare at his companions. "We'll match this courtesy with our best conduct."

"Yes, sir!" Khan exclaimed, performing a military salute and making his companions imitate him.

Ambassador Abores inspected Khan briefly before facing the Thilku again and nodding at them. The two aliens started to lead the way, splitting the Ambassador from the group to show him more of the factory.

The Ambassador wasn't the only one to get that treatment. The Thilku political team also split, reaching for one human each to handle individual tours. The pairs matched the arrangements of the first day on Neuria, and Khan didn't need to rely on his senses to understand what was about to happen.

The muscles on Khan's left shoulder instinctively grew firmer before a huge hand landed on them. Amox's usual laugh reached Khan's ears as he went over that friendly approach, and the two soon exchanged a knowing smile as they left the group.

"[How did you find the factory]?" Amox questioned as soon as he and Khan put some distance from the group. "[This is peak Thilku technology]!"

"[It does look imposing]," Khan praised, his gaze wandering across the heavy machinery in his surroundings.

"[It does]," Amox proudly agreed. "[Our war industry makes the entire Empire proud]."

"[Are you war-oriented]?" Khan asked.

"[Don't start with that now]," Amox scoffed, claiming Khan's shoulder again. "[Let's enjoy the tour before getting something to eat]."

"[Do you think we'll have free time later]?" Khan wondered, sensing that something was off in Amox's mana.

"[Maybe]," Amox remained vague before pointing at a door in the distance. "[This way]."

The vague reply deepened Khan's confusion and made him slightly wary. There was more at play there, but Amox's mana couldn't give him specific answers. Moreover, Khan was alone in a Thilku factory now. He couldn't avoid what was coming for him.

The wariness intensified when the two crossed the door and ended up in an almost-empty storage area. Only a few metal boxes occupied the big room's corners, clearly showing how there was nothing to see there.

Khan's face grew cold when the door closed behind him. He almost reached for his knife only to suppress that urge. Showing hostility would do him no good there, and one look at Amox told him that the situation didn't involve danger.

Amox shook his head as soon as Khan looked at him, but the opening of another door distracted them. Khan's eyes widened even before a huge figure could cross that entrance. The symphony told him what was happening, and he struggled to believe it.

Khan hastily bowed according to the Thilku's customs, and Amox did the same to welcome Lord Exr's arrival. The latter stepped into the room and let the door behind him close before nodding at Amox.

"[I'll take my leave]," Amox announced, avoiding looking at Khan while crossing the entrance to leave him alone with Lord Exr.

Khan didn't know what was happening but remained in his bow for safety reasons. That situation felt surreal, and his thoughts tried to find an explanation or motive. Still, they came back empty-handed every time.

"Lift your head, Captain Khan," Lord Exr ordered in a slightly hoarse human accent.

"[I understand your language, my Lord]," Khan stated, straightening his stance to inspect Lord Exr. He had never been so close to him, and his huge frame appeared even taller at that distance.

"You are a guest," Lord Exr said. "Using your language is basic courtesy."

"I appreciate that, sir," Khan tried to sound as polite as possible. "To what do I owe the honor?"

"Personal interest, I suppose," Lord Exr revealed. "Amox is a good soldier. I wanted to see the human he learned to respect."

"I consider Amox a friend, sir," Khan declared.

"And he does the same with you," Lord Exr replied, slowly approaching Khan. "It's odd, isn't it? A human and a Thilku bonding so quickly."

Initially, Khan believed that Lord Exr was accusing Amox of something. However, his mana had no barriers or cloaking techniques. Khan could sense the lack of ill intentions in Lord Exr's presence.

"Are you checking me, Captain Khan?" Lord Exr wondered, almost amused by the idea. "Amox told me you were a [shaman]. I never thought the Global Army could produce one."

Lord Exr was walking slowly, but his long legs made him reach Khan quickly. Soon, he stood before him, showing the sheer pressure generated by his impressive size.

"I'm no [shaman], sir," Khan corrected. "I told Amox the same thing."

"And yet," Lord Exr responded, "You checked me."

Khan didn't answer. He didn't know what to say in that situation, and his senses weren't a secret either. It was pointless to lie or try to justify his behavior.

"Do not worry, Captain Khan," Lord Exr reassured. "I have benevolent intentions."

"I'm not sure what you might want from me, sir," Khan admitted.

"Just honesty," Lord Exr stated. "Soldier to soldier."

"Honesty about what, sir?" Khan asked.

"Nothing specific," Lord Exr said, turning to wander into the empty room. "I appreciated how you protected my citizens. I didn't expect that from a human."

"My companions would have done the same, sir," Khan announced.

"Maybe," Lord Exr sighed. "Though, they wouldn't have gotten accepted so quickly."

"Sir?" Khan called.

"I'll be blunt, Captain Khan," Lord Exr exclaimed, interrupting his aimless wandering to look at Khan. "I loathe politics. I would have died a soldier if my Lord didn't order me to rule these sectors."

Khan remained silent. That comment reminded him of something Jenna had said in the past, but the memory quickly vanished. Khan was too focused on Lord Exr to let his thoughts distract him.

"Ambassador Abores is a qualified human," Lord Exr continued. "However, he is no soldier. We struggle to see, how was that human saying, eye to eye."

"Ambassador Abores is a good leader," Khan complimented. "I'm sure it's only a matter of time before you understand each other, sir."

"See," Lord Exr voiced. "I'd rather have someone who already sees eye to eye with me. It would make future cooperation easier."

'What is he even implying?' Khan cursed in his mind.

"Captain Khan," Lord Exr called. "I'm not trying to insult your superior. I'm just saying that you and I might be a better match. I'm sure the Global Army won't mind a shift in authority as long as the investigation runs smoothly."

Khan had understood Lord Exr's intentions, but explaining them was far harder. He didn't believe Lord Exr only wanted him for his perspective. There had to be more to the matter.

'Does he want a less experienced Ambassador?' Khan considered. 'Someone he can trick as he wishes?'

"I hope I didn't offend anyone," Lord Exr added. "Our cultural differences can be hard to keep in mind."

"You didn't, sir," Khan smiled. "I'm flattered you considered me as a replacement, but I'm afraid I'm not qualified."

"And who decides that?" Lord Exr wondered. "I don't think the Global Army would hesitate to put you in charge were I to make an explicit request."

Khan knew that Lord Exr was right. The Thilku held all the authority in their territory, and the Global Army would do anything to please them.

"That would help your career, right?" Lord Exr asked. "I seem to remember that's how things work in the Global Army."

"If I may, sir," Khan exclaimed. "In exchange for what?"

"As I said," Lord Exr stated, "Honesty. I feel our cooperation would be smoother because of our similar perspective."

Chapter 566 Negotiations

The development had taken Khan by surprise. He couldn't have predicted something similar even in his wildest dreams. Yet, here he was, receiving an offer that anyone else in his position would kill to obtain.

Humankind was no stranger to those political maneuvers. The Harbor had taught Khan that they were the norm in certain fields, and he had also played similar roles in the past.

However, Neuria was no Nitis or Milia 222. Khan wasn't a random soldier with no responsibilities or relevance. He was playing a key role in a small team, making his actions valuable on multiple levels.

Khan couldn't do as he wished, and keeping his actions a secret wasn't an option either. Playing both sides with Amox would have been possible in a different situation, but Lord Exr's direct involvement added too much political pressure.

'This stuff could get me discharged,' Khan thought. 'What is he even thinking?'

"Think about what I said, Captain Khan," Lord Exr continued, resuming his casual stroll among the room. "You can give your answer to Amox when you are ready."

"How long do I have, sir?" Khan asked.

"Not long," Lord Exr replied, approaching the other exit to face Khan again. "Farewell for now, Captain Khan."

Lord Exr slightly lowered his head, and Khan promptly performed a traditional Thilku bow. The alien seemed to like that reaction but didn't add anything as he left the room.

Khan lifted his head only when the door closed. He had remained alone in the room, but his eyes barely recorded that. His thoughts had grown wild, preventing him from considering anything outside his mind.

'What the fuck just happened?!' Khan cursed as the urge to break something showed itself.

Khan almost glared at one of the metal boxes before shaking his head. He instinctively reached for his pocket only to recall that he had left his phone in the political building. He was alone in that decision, and the entirety of his experience and studies barely helped.

Something moved behind Khan, distracting him from the chaos inside his mind. Amox returned to the room, and Khan welcomed him with a pissed expression.

"[What was that]?" Khan didn't hesitate to ask.

"[Lord Exr expressed his desire to meet you]," Amox explained. "[Orders are orders]."

Khan was slightly angry at Amox for putting him in that situation, but his reasonable side realized he wasn't to blame. Khan would have done the same if Ambassador Abores had given the order. After all, they were both soldiers doing their superiors' bidding.

"[Do you know what we talked about]?" Khan asked, rubbing the corners of his eyes to calm himself down.

"[I don't like that political stuff]," Amox proudly claimed. "[It's better to stay away from it]."

"[I agree]," Khan sighed, pointing a finger at Amox. "[You owe me a drink]."

Amox laughed, finally reaching Khan to pat his shoulders. The Thilku appeared relieved by that development and resumed his friendly behavior while pushing Khan outside the room.

"[We have time for a feast today]," Amox revealed as the two returned to the factory's open areas.

"[I need to handle this problem today]," Khan shook his head. "[Let's do it another time]."

"[A feast can clear your mind]," Amox pointed out.

"[My mind was far from clear the last time]," Khan chuckled, and Amox wore a proud expression while resuming harassing his shoulder.

The chitchat with Amox distracted Khan, but part of his mind remained on the problem. The factory's imposing beauty and runes crossed his vision without triggering any emotion. Khan could pretend to be calm, but his thoughts remained a mess.

The individual tour lasted a while, but a reunion eventually happened, bringing both teams back together. The group explored more of the factory afterward but left the building once lunchtime approached.

Formal goodbyes unfolded before the human team returned to their ship. The Thilku in the cabin set off as soon as everyone had taken their place, marking the end of that political task.

During the flight, Khan wore his poker face, but his attention split toward two main tasks. Much of his mind remained on Lord Exr's offer while his senses tried to identify the faintest details in Ambassador Abores' mana.

The Ambassador had lost his initial tension but remained focused on topics only he was aware of. The tour had left him partially satisfied, but Khan could see that nothing major had happened.

That silent stalemate ruled the entirety of the flight, and the landing didn't break it. The team had to enter the political building before Ambassador Abores decided to break the silence.

"Good job today," Ambassador Abores announced, crossing the building's main hall to head for one of the elevators. "I'll summon you later. Enjoy lunch now."

"Thank you, sir," Khan and the others exclaimed, donning military salutes and waiting for the Ambassador to enter an elevator before moving again.

The Ambassador's departure created a far friendlier atmosphere. Sighs resounded left and right, and an invitation didn't take long to arrive.

"Captain, will you eat with us?" Elvis asked, making seven gazes fall on Khan.

"I have something to handle today," Khan smiled, politely rejecting the offer. "I'll see you all at dinner."

"Good luck, sir," Elvis stated, and his companions echoed those words. They also wore military salutes again, and Khan nodded at them before heading for an elevator.

Khan leaned on the elevator's wall as soon as its doors closed. He bumped his head a few times on that metal surface without pressing any key. He didn't know where to go, so he used that temporary privacy to think.

Usually, Khan would take the side of the aliens. It wasn't on purpose. He simply didn't like humankind very much compared to other species.

However, the Thilku didn't match Khan's inclinations. They were similar to the Global Army, and the current political situation was completely different from what Khan had experienced in the past.

A political maneuver aimed at dethroning Ambassador Abores had a high chance of working with Lord Exr's support. Khan could skip years of ordinary jobs and move his career to the next level. Yet, that approach involved multiple risks.

The political environment heavily relied on fame and the value of one's word. Khan had taken part in partial betrayals, but overruling Ambassador Abores would set a serious precedent that would stain his profile forever.

Cooperating with fellow experts would become a problem if Khan decided to press forward with Lord Exr's plan. He had the connections to suppress eventual rumors, but the Ambassador probably did too. Khan would create a distrustful aura around himself, and every higher-up would know why.

The actual job was another considerable risk. Khan was good but lacked the qualifications and knowledge to replace Ambassador Abores. He might risk messing things up with the Thilku, creating another troublesome precedent that would take years to clean.

The other side of the issue also had problems. Lord Exr had personally approached Khan. That was no small matter, and an eventual refusal would require careful words and actions.

Truth be told, Khan didn't know how to approach that option without endangering his current position and relationships with the Thilku. The offer had put him in a lose-lose situation that he had no idea how to handle.

Khan had retrieved his phone from the hall's main desk, but that device was useless on Neuria. In a different situation, he would have contacted the Headmistress or Monica. Even Lucian and the other descendants would have been decent counselors, but that path wasn't an option now.

'This might be too much for Monica even,' Khan realized. 'I'd have to ask her parents to understand what to do.'

Khan was in a pickle, but the situation wasn't completely hopeless. Neuria had one figure who might know the best path forward. Picking him was the same as making a decision, but Khan didn't see other alternatives.

A gesture accompanied Khan's decision. He finally pressed a key, and the elevator rose, bringing him to the intended floor. The building's vast corridor welcomed him, but he barely inspected his surroundings while heading to an office he knew quite well.

Khan held back a sigh when the waiting message disappeared. The metal door opened, showing Ambassador Abores with his head lowered on the interactive desk. The group had just returned from the factory, but the man was already deep in his work.

"What is it, Captain?" Ambassador Abores questioned, keeping his eyes on the desk. "I'm busy right now."

"It's urgent, sir," Khan explained, remaining on the entrance's edge.

Ambassador Abores realized something was off, so he disregarded his reports to inspect Khan. The latter's face didn't reveal anything, but the Ambassador still welcomed him. "Come in."

Khan advanced, letting the entrance close while approaching the office's desk. He skipped the military salute to take his place before the Ambassador, and some hesitation arrived.

"I thought it was urgent, Captain," Ambassador Abores pressed.

"I met Lord Exr during today's tour," Khan went straight to the point. "He offered to support me as the new leader of the political team."

"What are you saying, Captain?" Ambassador Abores asked.

"Lord Exr wants me to replace you, sir," Khan explained.

Ambassador Abores fell silent as his green eyes tried to dig through Khan's skull to inspect his thoughts. His attempt failed, but his experience compensated for the lack of understanding of Khan's intentions.

"I see," Ambassador Abores whispered, leaning backward to get more comfortable in his chair.

The silence returned, and Khan didn't dare to break it. He and the Ambassador looked at each other, almost waiting for someone to make the first move.

"Why are you telling me this?" Ambassador Abores eventually questioned. "This was your chance to get my chair."

"I don't like to be a pawn in someone else's ploy," Khan revealed. "And I'm not sure I can handle your chair right now."

"Wasn't it worth the risk?" Ambassador Abores asked. "Ambassadors are rare to come by, and you could probably do decently at your first attempt."

"You said it yourself, sir," Khan reminded. "I set the bar too high. I must aim for perfection because a single failure might destroy me."

"How frail fame can be," Ambassador Abores scoffed. "To think that a single problem could humble you down so quickly."

Ambassador Abores' attempt to mock Khan didn't cause any reaction. Khan's expression didn't even twitch while those words echoed through the office.

"This was a careless move," Ambassador Abores continued. "Relying on me gives me full power over the situation. I might very well send you back to the Harbor to secure my position here."

"You won't, sir," Khan finally spoke.

"Why is that?" Ambassador Abores asked. "Are you giving me orders now?"

"Even if we don't consider the Thilku," Khan explained, "I'm not someone you can screw over."

Khan didn't need to add anything else. The entire network knew he had the Solodrey family's support and many wealthy descendants as allies. The involvement in Rick's marriage was only the cherry on top of his political figure.

"Captain," Ambassador Abores called, sounding irritated as he stood up. "Your arrogance is misplaced. You are alone here."

Ambassador Abores was a fourth-level warrior with a remarkable political position. Any ordinary soldier would shrink down before his cold approach. However, Khan had dealt with far scarier figures, and power alone couldn't worry him.

Khan's calm slightly surprised Ambassador Abores. It was in line with Khan's profile, but seeing it first-hand left a deep impression. Words and veiled threats didn't work with Khan.

"I knew you would have caused problems," Ambassador Abores sighed, returning to his seat.

"I didn't do much, sir," Khan admitted.

"Apparently, you did," Ambassador Abores commented. "I guess we can use this to our advantage."

Some warmth returned to Khan's face after those words, and Ambassador Abores didn't hesitate to comment. "What? Did you think getting me on the same side would have been harder?"

"You are the proud type," Khan voiced. "Sir."

"Lord Exr's offer might not have anything to do with you," Ambassador Abores snorted. "I might have poked the correct spots and asked the right questions."

"Anything you say, sir," Khan stated.

"You are enjoying this, aren't you?" Ambassador Abores asked.

"I can't hold back from teasing stiff characters," Khan claimed, using his most serious tone.

Ambassador Abores opened his mouth to speak but promptly closed it and shook his head. That wasn't the time to deal with Khan's idiocy. The situation was actually quite serious.

"Tell me exactly what Lord Exr said," Ambassador Abores requested.

"He wanted to deal with a soldier," Khan explained shortly, "Not an Ambassador. At least that's what he claimed."

"I expected as much," Ambassador Abores nodded. "That's quite perfect too."

"How so?" Khan didn't hold back his curiosity.

Ambassador Abores was tempted to keep Khan in the dark. Yet, that opportunity existed because Khan had chosen to be open. The reasons behind that decision weren't exactly pure, but Ambassador Abores felt that he owed Khan some honesty.

"Lord Exr has a Lord above him," Ambassador Abores revealed. "I'd be willing to leave things to you as long as I can establish a connection with his superior."

'Oh,' Khan understood. Ambassador Abores wanted to get something out of that political maneuver, and his career would only benefit from success.

"I'll poke harder," Ambassador Abores continued, "Before presenting my counter-offer. I'll only request an introduction to increase our chances."

"Sounds reasonable, sir," Khan exclaimed. "Then, I'll wait for your recommendation letter before filling in for your absence."

Ambassador Abores had begun to lose himself in his thoughts, but Khan's words pulled him back to reality. The two fell into a challenge of stares that forced the Ambassador to speak again.

"Are you negotiating now?" Ambassador Abores asked.

"I also want a detailed report about how you intend to proceed," Khan added. "With your guidance, I'll be able to take over your job properly."

"And blame me if you fail," Ambassador Abores pointed out.

"I don't want to fail, sir," Khan said. "It's in my interest to perform well in your absence."

The stalemate returned, but both sides understood each other now. Ambassador Abores wanted to benefit from that unexpected development, and Khan was willing to help, but that came at a price.

Chapter 567 Knowledge

Both Khan and Ambassador Abores had a lot to gain from their alliance. Their career could get to the next level if everything went according to plan. However, a few differences existed.

Ambassador Abores couldn't immediately gain benefits from the alliance. Actually, he would have to pressure Lord Exr to plan a meeting before even hoping to achieve his goals.

Instead, Khan could only wait for the time being, but that didn't mean standing still. If the plan were successful, he would inherit Ambassador Abores' current position, which required heavy studies and preparation.

Those studies couldn't happen overnight. Khan would be too late to the party if he started as soon as the plan succeeded. He would have to begin to prepare immediately to hope to be ready for that new job.

The negotiations had that purpose. Ambassador Abores couldn't move without Khan, which made him vital to the plan. Khan could exploit his position to get benefits in advance, which was exactly what happened.

Khan seized a few bottles from the canteen, returned to his room, and settled behind his interactive desk. The Ambassador had sent vital information during the meeting. Still, a single glance at the menus told Khan that he had heavily underestimated the amount of work he had to do.

Tens of reports, summaries, notes, and more became available to Khan's genetic signature. That info didn't only involve Neuria. It went over the Thilku as a whole and contained many personal opinions that Ambassador Abores had written down as he gained experience.

'This is a treasure trove,' Khan exclaimed as awe spread inside him.

Khan had completed the Harbor's advanced classes and had gone through Professor Parver's special course. He was no stranger to intricate studies digging deeply into multiple topics. However, Ambassador Abores' notes went above and beyond that, showing the difference between him and a scout.

'I'll need a month to review all of this,' Khan realized, skimming through the various labels on his interactive desk to check how many pages each file had.

Khan had already suspected that, but the agreement confirmed his guess. He wasn't ready to be an Ambassador. His general preparation and natural inclination for that job were extraordinary, but he lacked the knowledge and attention to detail of someone who had been in the field for years.

The issue didn't discourage Khan. He had just gotten his hands on knowledge and classified information far beyond his reach. Only excitement could exist inside him, but tackling the problem required a plan.

'I can ignore anything beyond Lord Exr for now,' Khan decided. 'Ambassador Abores will continue to be the sole connection with the Global Army, so I can skip that too.'

Ambassador Abores' tasks involved reporting to the Global Army and conveying the intricacies of the investigation. He basically had to convince the higher-ups at home that his presence on Neuria was working as intended, and Khan didn't have the connections or reputation for that role.

'Later,' Khan thought, sorting through his pile of files. 'Later. No way I'm studying this now. This is definitely last.'

It took a whole hour, but Khan eventually completed the first step. He had arranged the files according to necessity, creating multiple groups to make his studies easier.

Of course, that precision didn't come from Khan's messy character. Monica had spent weeks engraving that approach into his brain. It wasn't anything special, but it still added some needed discipline that could save a lot of time.

Khan instinctively tried to refill his glass, only to discover it was already full. The rearrangement of the notes had kept him so focused that he had forgotten to drink, but that didn't escape his mind now that his studies were about to begin.

'Serial number,' Khan thought, bringing his drink to his mouth while his free hand moved toward a bright label, 'Factory, dock.'

Ambassador Abores had come to Neuria with a plan that didn't entirely come out of his brain. The specialists on the Harbor and his superiors had given directives that had greatly helped put pressure on Lord Exr, and Khan planned to follow the same path.

Weapons had serial numbers. Criminals would obviously avoid marking them when possible, but the bomb was different. Something like that required specialists, classified equipment, and more, which got in the way of a secret production.

Things would have been different with a secret factory, but the Thilku Empire was too strict in those fields. The criminals had removed the serial number from the bomb, but its remaining marks had told the Global Army that its assembly had gone through official channels.

That knowledge had forced Lord Exr to open the factory and share data that confirmed its involvement with the bomb. Khan had initially labeled the information as useless, but Ambassador Abores' notes revealed a far different truth.

Due to the serial numbers, the Empire knew where its weapons went. The security around bombs was even stricter, so the eventual absence of one item couldn't go unnoticed. The criminals could only do their best to hide its movements and disappearance, but those actions left a trail.

Ambassador Abores' plan involved exactly that. He knew the Thilku were aware of the missing bomb and wanted to handle the investigation privately. However, his accusations and knowledge could force Lord Exr to involve the human team in the process since it would appease the Global Army.

'The next step is to find inconsistencies with the shipments,' Khan read on the notes. 'The missing serial number led to a factory, which will point at one of the stations in the seas.'

Ambassador Abores noted down considerations after describing that strategy. He was confident finding the actual criminals was impossible. Yet, the guilty station had to have traces of corruption, which could make the plan advance even further.

'A station,' Khan thought, interrupting his read to refill his drink. 'I might be able to find something if Lord Exr lets me interrogate the workers.'

That hope was slim. As far as Khan knew, Mister Chares' organization could have smuggled the bomb years ago. Moreover, months had passed since the incident. The Thilku criminals still in the station would have probably disappeared by now, but that was the only trail Khan could follow.

'I guess the Empire's strictness helps,' Khan thought, slowly sipping his drink. 'I can't imagine the workers having much freedom with Neuria still in construction.'

Khan wouldn't have had that opinion in the past, but his mission in the Thilku district kept his hope alive. There was a good chance a few criminals could still be in the involved station. Finding and incriminating them was the only problem.

'Well,' Khan scoffed, moving to the next file. 'Ambassador Abores has to convince Lord Exr first. I don't see him granting us access to the station so easily.'

Lord Exr's offer gained a different meaning when Khan thought about the issue. It was impossible to stop the Global Army from getting to the station. Yet, the presence of a less experienced Ambassador could lead to a few mistakes that would decrease the price of eventual reparations.

'That can't be, can it?' Khan wondered. 'Amox and Lord Exr think I'm a shaman. I'm probably more dangerous than the Ambassador on the field.'

Another idea arrived. Maybe, Lord Exr wanted Khan as the Ambassador precisely because of his senses. That could give the Thilku an excuse to keep Khan away from the field and restrain his troublesome abilities.

'I need to make my presence on the field mandatory,' Khan considered.

Most of Khan's thoughts involved pure speculation, which was part of the job. Preparing for any eventuality would make him ready for every unexpected situation, which could be the difference between success and failure.

Khan moved to the next file and read it from start to finish before continuing his studies. The basics were easy to grasp, but the real power was in the details. He wouldn't be able to explain the validity of his requests to Lord Exr without them, and the mission wouldn't go forward in that case.

Ambassador Abores had to use the same approach to get to the factory. He had relied on details only specialists could know to force Lord Exr's hand, and Khan would have to employ something similar to get deployed.

The initial excitement for the amount of knowledge in the notes slowly waned as the interactive desk continued to show holograms. Yet, a different emotion arrived when a pattern became clear, generating a curse that made Khan wear a cold face.

'That bastard,' Khan cursed as he let go of the drink and used both hands to move through the menus faster.

Countless lines ran through Khan's eyes as he skimmed through most of the notes again. He tried to be slightly thorough at the time, but the approach only confirmed his suspicion.

'I didn't expect him to be this petty,' Khan sighed.

The notes had everything except for a specific topic. They didn't describe Lord Exr's character at all, and their absence left a void in that otherwise thorough knowledge.

The issue was impossible to miss because someone had removed it on purpose. Ambassador Abores had chosen not to share what he had learned about Lord Exr. He didn't leave any advice for Khan, which was understandable.

'Ambassadors are as valuable as their connections,' Khan recalled something he read during his lessons in the Harbor. 'How they built them is a professional secret. I guess Lord Exr isn't too bad as my first since he's a fellow soldier.'

Chapter 568 Politics

Studying stole a good chunk of Khan's free time. The lack of political events or missions with the Thilku team helped, but Khan still had to juggle multiple tasks, inevitably leaving some aside to make room for the most pressing ones.

Ambassador Abores' notes had priority, and Khan continued his studies of the Thilku runes too. He couldn't neglect training either, so his team got the short end of the stick. Khan still ate with his companions when possible, but his initial plan of deepening his relationship with them vanished due to the recent developments.

That trend continued for two weeks, during which Khan and the Ambassador had little to no interactions. They understood how busy they were, so they didn't bother each other more than necessary. Still, something changed in the morning after the weekend.

A message reached Khan's training hall and made him interrupt the simulated mental battle. He jumped on his feet and recovered his clothes before hurrying toward his room.

A shower went by, and Khan barely took the time to dry his hair before hurrying outside. One trip to the elevator brought him in front of the Ambassador's office, which opened as soon as he notified it of his presence.

"Sir!" Khan exclaimed before taking a step back. The Ambassador wasn't behind his desk. He had already reached the entrance, and his impeccable appearance revealed his intentions.

"We are going out, Captain," Ambassador Abores revealed at the sight of Khan's military salute. "I hope you aren't planning to accompany me like this."

Khan didn't need to look at himself to understand what the Ambassador meant. His military uniform was full of greases, and his slightly wet hair was a mess. That wasn't an acceptable appearance.

"I'll be ready in ten, sir," Khan promised.

"I'll be on the first floor," Ambassador Abores stated. "Don't make me wait."

Ambassador Abores didn't wait for Khan's reply and departed toward an elevator. Still, Khan ran past him and occupied the first empty lift to complete his task.

Luckily for Khan, he had prepared for a similar occasion, and Monica had also carved a basic aesthetic routine into his brain. He had a pair of clean and ironed uniforms ready for important events, and his hair was still short enough to require little attention.

After exactly nine minutes, Khan arrived on the first floor's main hall and spotted the Ambassador waiting beside its entrance. The man didn't bother to sit, and noticing Khan's new look made him nod before heading outside.

Khan hurried to the Ambassador's side to ask questions, but leaving the building put him before a surprising sight. The metal sidewalk was big enough to act as a landing area, and a circular ship had used it for that precise purpose.

A trace of hesitation tried to appear inside Khan. The Thilku had been careful not to show their technology during the stay on Neuria, but that morning seemed to be an exception.

Ambassador Abores didn't stop, and his advance forced Khan to ignore his hesitation. The two directly headed for the vehicle, reaching it in a few seconds. Their gazes also remained straight and never wavered, but that didn't prevent Khan from inspecting his surroundings.

The Thilku ship had a circular shape. It resembled a disk that grew thicker toward its middle areas. A long, dark window stood on its upper side, touching a gap that stretched from its center to the vehicle's edges, creating a space in that otherwise perfectly round figure.

Neuria's eternal night tried to hide some details, but the street lamps in the area solved that issue. Still, Khan couldn't spot anything special or unusual during the short walk. The ship's surface was rough and dark, showing red runes every few meters, and that was it.

A ramp stretched from the ship's gap and touched the floor, allowing Khan and the Ambassador to step on it. A passage under the long window opened when the two reached it, showing a metal staircase that led deeper into the vehicle.

A Thilku donning the iconic red cape stood on the top of the staircase and wore a traditional bow at the pair's arrival. Ambassador Abores and Khan didn't hesitate to perform the same greeting, eventually following the alien deeper into the ship.

The staircase led to a big, circular room. Consoles and screens filled its edge, leaving room for four doors on opposite sides of the area.

Thilku sat behind each console, and Khan tried to peek at the technology, only to immediately give up on the matter. Those machines had a single, intricate red rune as their control desk, and Khan couldn't read any of them.

The screens were different since they mostly featured cameras and scanners pointed at the outside world, but the arrival of a heavy glare forced Khan's inspection to an end. The Ambassador only needed his eyes to warn him, and Khan obeyed that silent message.

The Thilku led Khan and Ambassador Abores into one of the four doors, which turned out to be a spacious passenger area. The seats were too big for humans, but Khan and the Ambassador still expressed gratitude when the alien left them alone.

The urge to ask questions surged inside Khan as soon as the two sat, but Ambassador Abores shook his head as soon as their eyes met. He could understand Khan's curiosity but only had silent answers for him.

Ambassador Abores briefly inspected the passengers' area before glaring at Khan again. He was warning him about the possible presence of scanners and bugs, so no words flew between the two as the ship set off.

The lack of explanations tried to keep Khan in the dark, but developing a few sound hypotheses wasn't hard. The presence of a Thilku ship, the attention to appearances, and the silent welcome pointed toward a precise direction. There was a high chance the two were about to meet Lord Exr.

Khan didn't feel worried. He had spent the past two weeks immersed in Ambassador Abores' notes and had even developed his own strategy. Most of it relied on his superior's information, but he had a completely original edge he might be able to exploit.

Time flowed slowly in the silence of the passengers' area, but Khan didn't mind it. He used that time to sort out his thoughts and review his knowledge, allowing him to have a far firmer mindset by the time the ship landed.

The same Thilku from before picked up Khan and Ambassador Abores and led them to the metal staircase. The exit opened to show the ramp, and a different floor expanded in their vision. The rain had also begun to fall, but an umbrella didn't hesitate to arrive.

The Thilku kept the big umbrella above Khan and Ambassador Abores while they left the ship. The two found themselves at the top of a large building in the middle of the city, and the big gazebo at the center of that open space immediately attracted their attention.

The alien under the gazebo was even more interesting. Lord Exr was sitting alone at a big, circular table with only two more seats. No soldiers or waiters stood around him, but food and drinks had already arrived. Everything was ready for a political meeting.

The Thilku with the umbrella accompanied Khan and the Ambassador under the gazebo before hurrying back to the ship. The vehicle didn't leave, but the human side couldn't worry about it. Khan and the Ambassador were too focused on greeting Lord Exr to mind those details.

"Sit with me, human friends," Lord Exr announced, slowly waving his hands toward the empty seats. "We have much to discuss."

"[Thank you for having us, my Lord]," Khan and Ambassador Abores exclaimed almost simultaneously before sitting at the circular table.

"Eat and drink with me," Lord Exr suggested. "The Thilku take pride in their hospitality."

Ambassador Abores went for a plate, resorting to slow and controlled movements. Instead, Khan was far rougher, almost conveying his eagerness for food and drinks.

Of course, that roughness never reached impolite levels. Khan had still received proper training for those occasions. He was simply less controlled than his superior, and Lord Exr smiled at that sight.

"I was worried you might have seen my offer as an insult," Lord Exr continued, eyeing Ambassador Abores. "I'm glad to see that Captain Khan showed loyalty."

"Captain Khan never misses the chance to make the Global Army proud," Ambassador Abores praised. "He is a prodigy in many fields."

"I've seen that," Lord Exr commented, looking at Khan. "I would have never considered him as a replacement otherwise."

"You flatter me, Lord Exr," Khan voiced, respectfully lowering his head. "I just follow orders and do my best."

"To move to," Lord Exr continued, taking a second to recall the words he wanted to say, "The matter at hand, I think it was. I agree to make this exchange without involving the Global Army."

Khan hid his surprise while Lord Exr looked at the Ambassador. The two had already discussed the deal, and it seemed that Ambassador Abores had requested to keep it silent.

'No wonder he is the Ambassador,' Khan cursed.

Lord Exr had given Khan a vital role in the deal, but Ambassador Abores had turned the tables with his request. Without the involvement of superiors from the Global Army, the Ambassador would be the only one able to vouch for Khan's actions. He needed him to add value to his profile.

That development had taken Khan by surprise, but he remained calm. He would still try to get his recommendation letter before actually replacing the Ambassador. He needed that to create a political shield around him.

"Thank you for your understanding," Ambassador Abores exclaimed. "This kind of paperwork takes a long time to explain and complete. It's faster to keep these deals on Neuria."

That blatant lie didn't go unnoticed, but neither of the involved parties called it out. Lord Exr was happy with that development, so Khan had to agree.

"My Lord will visit Neuria soon," Lord Exr explained. "Everything around his arrival is classified, so I can't give you more details. You'd have to trust my word on this."

"I do already, Lord Exr," Ambassador Abores stated. "I wouldn't insult you like this."

"I'm glad," Lord Exr replied. "I'm still sorry for my request. My whims are coming out now that I hold some power."

"Don't even mention it," Ambassador Abores responded. "I'm honored I could help."

"Well then," Lord Exr announced, looking at Khan. "Captain Khan, the rest of our cooperation is on you now. Do you have suggestions already?"

"I do," Khan declared. "I wonder if Lord Exr wants to hear them now."

"Please, speak freely," Lord Exr uttered. "As I said, honesty is all I ask from you."

"Then, I'll be honest," Khan said. "The Global Army needs access to the shipments connected to the factory to look for any irregularity."

"I can't give you that," Lord Exr promptly refused. "The Global Army would learn information the Empire isn't willing to share."

"We are willing to leave that task to the Empire," Khan offered, "As long as the human team joins eventual inspections on the station found guilty."

"The Empire will do what the Empire wants," Lord Exr said, using a firmer tone.

"It wasn't my intention to offend you or the Empire," Khan stated. "However, we both want to put this incident behind us. I see no point in postponing an inevitable inspection."

"The factory being on Neuria doesn't necessarily involve one of the stations," Lord Exr exclaimed. "There are still a few illegal routes due to the incomplete colonization."

"I trust the Empire's security," Khan declared. "I'm sure a trail exists somewhere."

Lord Exr's smile broadened, but no words came out. Refusing Khan's statement would insult the Empire, which Lord Exr couldn't do. He had basically cornered him.

"Finding a trail takes time, Captain Khan," Lord Exr announced, reaching for a big worm in one of the plates. "These criminals must have been exceptional to go unnoticed until now. I'm not sure we can handle this quickly."

"With all due respect, Lord Exr," Khan responded. "We can find all the shipments involved with the bomb's materials with your support. Yet, inspecting the production plants would take months, and we'd still be going in the wrong direction."

"Are you telling me the Global Army would be satisfied with isolating the last phase of the criminal organization?" Lord Exr questioned.

"We wouldn't dare to request more from the Empire," Khan explained. "We are here only to find potential connections with our criminals, not learn about your internal arrangements."

Ambassador Abores' mana confirmed that Khan was filling his role perfectly, but that wasn't a surprise. None of those lines had come from Khan's brain. He was merely repeating what he had studied on the notes.

"I will see what I can do," Lord Exr promised. "If we can isolate one station, I'll notify the human team and order a joint investigation."

"Thank you, Lord Exr," Khan exclaimed.

"I hope you'll join me while our soldiers deal with it," Lord Exr immediately continued. "I'm quite curious about you, Captain Khan."

"On that topic," Khan voiced. "I'd like to be part of the investigation. I need to lead my team."

Khan had already predicted a similar outcome, so his plan didn't falter. He hoped a simple request would be enough, but Lord Exr kept going.

"That won't do, Captain Khan," Lord Exr refused. "We must entertain each other while our soldiers handle the job. That's how things work."

Ambassador Abores' mana told Khan how unwise refusing Lord Exr was, but leaving the human team on its own wouldn't do. Khan needed to be on the field to get that mission over with.

"Lord Exr, I'm a soldier," Khan stated. "I wish to perform my duties."

"Leadership involves responsibilities," Lord Exr commented. "I'd also like to be a soldier, but my duty comes first."

"Lord Exr," Khan called, but his phrase was cut short.

"Captain Khan," Lord Exr interrupted, "I'm starting to think you don't enjoy my company. Did I get the wrong idea about you?"

Ambassador Abores' mana began to radiate anger. He wanted that opportunity to meet Lord Exr's superior, and Khan was squandering it. However, Khan's wasn't done just yet.

"It's not about you," Khan sighed, lowering his head and reaching for the cup near him. "While this admission is unprofessional, I must convey it to avoid misunderstandings."

"What is it, Captain Khan?" Lord Exr asked, feeling intrigued. "I told you. You can be honest."

"My Lord," Khan cleared his throat, sipping from his cup. "The investigation is personal for me. I can't tackle it as a simple soldier."

"I know you found the bomb," Lord Exr stated. "I understand your feelings, but orders are orders."

"It's not that," Khan said, his mana altering the general vibe under the gazebo to convey chilling anger. "My girlfriend was there with me. I can't remain on the sidelines when she almost died."

Ambassador Abores feigned ignorance, but his brain grew messy. Lord Exr didn't know how important Monica Solodrey was, but Khan wasn't trying to use her position. He was speaking as a simple soldier who had risked losing his partner.

"[Ah]!" Lord Exr snorted, spitting on the floor to express his disgust. "I see. No need to add anything else, Captain Khan. I won't get in the way of your revenge after you protected my citizens."

Chapter 569 Deal

With Lord Exr convinced, the meeting continued in a happier tone. Everyone drank, ate, and exchanged casual chats until the time to leave arrived.

Khan and Ambassador Abores remained silent during the trip inside the ship. They both had things to say, but the location didn't allow them to disclose their thoughts, so they waited for the right opportunity to arrive.

The ship eventually landed on the sidewalk before the political building, letting the two humans free to return home. They crossed the main hall and headed straight for one elevator, and neither said anything when the Ambassador pressed the key for his floor.

Khan and the Ambassador were on the same page. They crossed the corridor and entered the office without exchanging military salutes or pleasantries. They remained silent even when they reached opposite sides of the main desk, but the time to speak arrived at that point.

"You surprised me out there," Ambassador Abores announced, sitting behind the desk. "Mentioning your girlfriend. That was a good move."

Khan didn't answer. The Thilku weren't the sentimental type but respected values like personal honor and loyalty. The fact that the bomb had endangered Khan's partner wasn't something Lord Exr could ignore or dismiss for the sake of politics.

"Though, I wonder," Ambassador Abores continued. "Was it necessary? That was your chance to deepen your relationship with Lord Exr."

"Political relationships are pointless if we don't complete the mission," Khan explained, "And having me on the field is our best bet."

"That it is," Ambassador Abores sighed. "Still, I didn't expect you to use your girlfriend like this. The network had me believe you weren't that type of man."

"Just because it's useful to the mission," Khan stated, "It doesn't make it a lie. My anger for how things unfolded on Lauter is very real."

Khan was speaking the truth. He had almost lost Monica and died on Lauter. He couldn't help but take the matter personally, even if the Thilku didn't necessarily matter.

The Thilku were involved in the delivery, but Khan mostly blamed the human criminals. The Hive and Mister Chares' organization were the targets of his anger. Using that feeling to his advantage simply was an approach he had planned in the past weeks with the knowledge acquired from Amox.

Of course, Khan didn't feel good using Monica in that way. He didn't want to be that kind of person. He even hated himself a bit for resorting to such a move. Yet, Khan knew Monica wouldn't mind it. It was more of a personal gripe toward his integrity rather than an insult to his girlfriend.

"Well," Ambassador Abores uttered, spreading his arms. "The mission is in your hands now. Don't mess it up."

"On that topic," Khan voiced. "I need my recommendation letter."

"I'll write it when the time is right," Ambassador Abores stated.

"No," Khan firmly refused. "I need it now. I won't handle anything otherwise."

"Are you saying you will compromise the mission without the letter?" Ambassador Abores asked. "I hope I misunderstood you, Captain."

"Lord Exr can still contact the Global Army on his own," Khan reminded. "Your deal with him works only if I play my part, which I won't without some insurance."

"And how is a single letter going to provide that?" Ambassador Abores wondered. "If something happens, it would be your word against mine, which doesn't look good."

"I don't care if the public doesn't learn about this," Khan declared, "But the upper echelon must know. These additional risks must bring benefits."

"And they will arrive," Ambassador Abores responded. "After the mission is over."

"Insurance," Khan repeated.

"It will come when I decide so," Ambassador Abores stated. "Don't forget who is the commanding officer here."

"I don't understand, sir," Khan revealed. "I thought we had a deal."

"And we still do," Ambassador Abores confirmed.

"Why this delay, then?" Khan asked. "Why change the terms when we both got what we wanted?"

"Chain of command," Ambassador Abores explained. "You are a wild card, Captain. You need to be controlled."

"I've done nothing but follow your orders," Khan pointed out. "I haven't been out of line even once."

"And yet," Ambassador Abores said, raising his voice, "Here we are. Never once in my career I've been asked to be replaced. It's insulting."

'He took it personally,' Khan thought. Truth be told, he couldn't blame the Ambassador for feeling like that, but his safety came first.

"Sir, you received an opportunity you would have taken years to build," Khan exclaimed.

"I didn't receive anything," Ambassador Abores snorted. "I requested it, making the best out of an unexpected development."

"It's the same outcome," Khan replied.

"It is," Ambassador Abores agreed. "I'm only limiting your agency. I warned you about reckless behavior under my watch, Captain."

That treatment was far from fair from Khan's perspective. He was truly innocent there, but the Ambassador didn't care. In a way, Khan was simply a victim of Lord Exr's whims.

"I'm not getting that letter, aren't I?" Khan asked.

"If you mess things up," Ambassador Abores announced, "The responsibility is on me. I can't give you that kind of power."

"You are setting me up if something goes wrong," Khan summarized.

"I am," Ambassador Abores confirmed. "However, do your job properly, and the upper echelon will learn about your efforts. I'll even praise you publicly in front of my superiors."

"And the letter?" Khan asked.

"Same with the letter," Ambassador Abores said. "You have my word."

That outcome wasn't ideal for Khan. He actually didn't like it at all. Yet, complaining to Lord Exr was his only alternative, which would end up hurting him in the long run.

Lord Exr would help Khan with Ambassador Abores, but that wasn't a move he could take back. He risked destroying that agreement and getting nothing in return.

Nevertheless, a positive side to the story existed. Ambassador Abores would probably stay true to his word if everything went as planned. Someone in his position couldn't lose face in an agreement that benefitted him, and Khan had connections that prevented him from getting screwed over.

"I'm willing to wait on the letter," Khan eventually accepted defeat, "But I expect the same amount of preparation on your side. I'm not jumping into this job without your support."

"It's my job to continue studying the issue," Ambassador Abores declared, "And I will share it with you to allow you to perform your new role properly."

Khan and the Ambassador fell into a contest of stares. Their discussion had ended, but leaving like this didn't feel right. Yet, Khan couldn't see other options. He had no leverage worth exploring to improve his position.

"Thank you, sir," Khan eventually stated. "Permission to get back to my studies."

"Granted," Ambassador Abores said. "Don't forget your job either. If the investigation on the stations happens, the team needs to be ready."

"It will be," Khan promised. "I'll make sure of that."

"Good," Ambassador Abores voiced. "Dismissed."

Khan performed a military salute but lingered on it for only a second before leaving the office. The meeting didn't go as planned, and the matter burned him a bit, but he was too busy to worry about his mood.

Returning to the flat didn't change anything. Khan actually found himself busier than before. He didn't only need to finish studying Ambassador Abores' notes now. He also had to write reports for his companions to prepare them for an eventual inspection of the stations.

'If I do this right,' Khan thought, settling behind his interactive desk, 'The mission will come to an end, and I'll be able to return to the Harbor.'

Khan generally despised being stuck on a glorified space station, but the recent development made him yearn for that home. He didn't miss Andrew or Francis, but the lack of freedom in Neuria was starting to get to him.

Hanging out with Amox was fun, and Khan loved being immersed in an alien environment. However, depending on Ambassador Abores' whims wasn't ideal, especially due to his lack of connections with his best allies.

Being unable to contact Monica didn't help either. Khan was already suffering from their distance, and that isolation worsened his situation. He missed her and calls alone couldn't quell that urge. He wanted his girlfriend back and escape his current working environment.

'I wonder what they'll make me do once this is over,' Khan thought, preparing himself for a long studying session. 'Maybe they'll keep me close to the Thilku since I'm already briefed on them.'

Khan also considered other aspects of the matter. Ambassador Abores was right. Khan had left a positive impression on the Thilku with just a handful of missions. That was an impressive achievement the Headmistress and other higher-ups had to acknowledge.

'No point worrying about the future now,' Khan cursed as the interactive desk reminded him how much he had to study. 'I need to focus on the matter at hand. I can't lose sight of the goal now.'

The worries ended on those thoughts. Khan immersed himself in his studies and job, doing his best to fulfill his promises to the Ambassador. That trend went on for days and weeks until the official announcement arrived. Lord Exr had agreed to open up one of the sea stations.

Chapter 570 Demands

After two more weeks of being immersed in studies and training, Khan received a message from the Ambassador. The notification didn't only describe Lord Exr's approval to investigate a station that raised some red flags. It also contained more notes meant to prepare Khan for his new role.

One look at the number of notes was enough to make Khan curse. The inspection was set for the end of the week, barely giving him seven full days to learn everything he needed to know.

Khan found some reassurance in his preparation. He had already written reports for his companions with the stations in mind. Yet, he had to adjust them according to the new data, which could happen only after studying the Ambassador's notes.

Needless to say, Khan had to cut back on his social side even more, also opting for less training since his studies had the priority. That time wasn't pleasant, but ignoring his duties wasn't an option either. Getting everything ready for the mission by the weekend was his only consolation.

On the morning of the last day of the week, Khan, Ambassador Abores, and the rest of the political team left their temporary home to gather on the sidewalk. They had come out before the Thilku for once, but an explanation for that arrived soon.

Khan was the first to notice the unusual event, but only a few seconds had to pass for his companions to become aware of it too. Whooshing noises resounded as two ships reached the district and headed for the sidewalk. One vehicle was human, while the other belonged to the Thilku.

Ambassador Abores' mana began to echo some excitement that didn't affect his stern expression. Firmness spread through his figure as he slightly lifted his chin to appear prouder. He knew the meaning behind that uncommon event, and his invisible reaction confirmed Khan's guess.

'The meeting with Lord Exr's superior,' Khan thought as the two ships landed. 'So, it's happening today.'

The Ambassador didn't make any move, and the same went for his team. Everyone waited for the ships' ramps to come down so that additional orders could arrive, which didn't take long.

Two Thilku, one for each ship, reached the sidewalk before approaching the group. They both went for their respective targets, stopping in front of Khan and Ambassador Abores to perform traditional bows.

"Please, follow me," The Thilku said simultaneously, and Khan and Ambassador responded with similar bows before following the aliens.

The team was already briefed on some details. Adele and the others didn't know about the secret deal, but seeing Ambassador Abores heading for the Thilku ship told them that Khan was in charge now.

That knowledge made the team follow after Khan and end up in the human ship. Everyone settled inside the passengers' area, and the set-off began once its doors closed.

"Captain," Elvis called since the privacy of the room gave him confidence, "How come the Ambassador isn't with us today?"

"He has another assignment," Khan explained shortly.

"So, will you replace him?" Elvis continued, sparking the curiosity of his teammates.

"I'm only borrowing his authority," Khan revealed. "I'll still be on the field with all of you."

Khan shouldn't have revealed as much, but the Ambassador wasn't there to scold him. Moreover, he wanted to get some revenge for the sudden change in the deal.

"Isn't it bad to be on our own?" Another member of the team questioned. "Lacking a political representative can be dangerous."

eaglesnovel "That's why you should keep this for yourselves," Khan warned. "Besides, the alien party is already briefed, and we trust it, am I right?"

"Yes, Captain, sir," Adele promptly exclaimed, and her companions echoed her statement, even if a few chuckles followed.

"Focus up now," Khan ordered. "If everything goes well, we can look forward to returning to the Harbor in the next weeks."

In theory, Khan shouldn't have said that either, but his vague explanations could start rumors, which might reach the general public. The Ambassador could notice that plan if he had a spy on the team, but Khan didn't care. He wasn't the one who had started playing dirty anyway.

The trip continued silently, and the lack of active scanners made it feel longer. Still, leaving the city's range allowed the pilot to ignore some regulations, so the flight barely lasted a few minutes.

The ship's comfort measures made the landing unnoticeable, but Khan felt a change in the engines from behind the metal walls. His eyes lit up before the official announcement, and his gaze ended on the cabin as soon as its door opened.

Two Thilku exited the cabin and opened the side doors to reveal a different environment. The ramp stretched downward as the team stood up and began to inspect the outside world. Heavy rain had arrived, but far louder noises engulfed it.

Khan led the way, following closely behind the Thilku, and his eyes couldn't help but wander as soon as he peeked outside the ship. He had landed at the center of an immense circular platform illuminated by many red beacons dug into the metal floor, but a far more interesting view stood past them.

Two-story-tall waves raged around the platform, crashing on its sides and filling the area with noise. The sea was angry, and the rain fueled its fury, but the station remained unaffected by its might.

Khan couldn't see much from his position but knew those tall waves couldn't reach the station's floor. It was simply too high for the sea. Moreover, the whole structure swayed, using the forces trying to submerge it to gather energy. Khan was standing on a technological masterpiece that stretched deep underwater.

The symphony alone couldn't give Khan that knowledge, but he remained aware of many details. Lord Exr and Ambassador Abores had made sure of that. He didn't feel surprised even when he gazed to his left and met serious faces he had long learned to recognize.

Amox and the rest of his team stood at some distance from the human ship, and the former broke his stern stance when he noticed Khan's gaze. The Thilku wore a smile, and Khan nodded at him to convey respect. Khan would usually opt for friendlier greetings, but the situation prevented that.

The two Thilku in charge of the ship had completed their role by then, so they returned inside the vehicle to shield themselves from the rain. Meanwhile, Amox led his team toward the humans, and Khan made sure to meet them halfway.

"[Khan]!" Amox exclaimed, holding back a laugh to perform a traditional bow. His companions created a line at his sides and imitated him, and Khan prompted his team to do the same.

That customary greeting was brief, and Amox didn't hesitate to explain the situation once he straightened his position. "[We'll split into the usual pairs and inspect different areas of the station]."

"[That's perfect]," Khan announced, translating the order for his companions. The humans and Thilku quickly split into pairs, and each team promptly headed for different areas of the platform.

The station's surface was immense. It was bigger than most of the Harbor's hangars. The area could fit more than twenty ships due to the absence of structures on its top, but that didn't make it empty.

Amox led Khan near the platform edge, where a beacon partially hid a rune. He crouched down to reach the symbol, and tracing some of its lines made whooshing noises come out of the floor.

A circular edge became visible around Khan and Amox, and the latter quickly straightened his position before performing a nod. Khan didn't need anything else, so he got closer to Amox and waited for the machine to move.

The edge belonged to a circular lift that began to descend in the next seconds. Khan and Amox dived into the station, and the other teams underwent a similar process. Each elevator led to a different area, but Khan knew that and didn't bother to question his companion.

Khan had a specific role, and his duties increased after the deal. However, the Thilku decided how to handle the investigations, and being paired with Amox prevented him from doing any leadership.

Khan's companions would have to rely on his reports to complete their tasks, but he didn't expect much from them. They were good at their job, but the station shared the factory's issues. Too long had passed since the criminal activities, and the Thilku would have already found something incriminating by then.

Moreover, Khan and Amox usually got the tricky parts due to their status. Khan welcomed the challenge since he was the most likely to find something, but that also put pressure on him. If he came back empty-handed, the investigation would probably fail.

Of course, that was a possibility Khan couldn't affect. He could only accept it and deal with the eventual consequences. In the worst-case scenario, he would have to spend far longer on Neuria or wherever the Ambassador decided to send him.

Khan didn't know how many underground floors the station had but was pretty sure he had crossed six of them by the time the elevator stopped. That was only a guess since the descent didn't show any opening, but the speed and symphony made him quite confident.

An opening appeared at the end of the descent. The elevator stopped before a narrow corridor covered in runes and small red lights that illuminated the area. The place was empty and stretched for a while.

Amox didn't hesitate to leave the elevator, and Khan had to wait for him to make some room before following along. The corridor was too narrow to allow walking side by side, but its cramped environment created a more friendly atmosphere.

"[I thought Lord Exr would greet us]," Khan mentioned as the two advanced.

"[I don't handle Lord's stuff]," Amox declared before adding something. "[Another task required his presence]."

Khan and Amox left the topic be. They probably both knew about Lord Exr's superior and the Ambassador's request, but discussing it wasn't proper. That wasn't even the place and time to delve into political matters.

"[How will this work]?" Khan questioned.

"[We already gave the order to gather the workers into the larger areas]," Amox explained. "[We'll go section by section, inspecting the accommodations first]."

"[Do you expect resistance]?" Khan asked.

"[No]," Amox firmly said.

"[Even if they are guilty]?" Khan pressed on, using the same words Amox had spoken in the past.

"[These stations aren't like the living districts]," Amox stated. "[There is nothing to gain from resisting]."

"[What about pride]?" Khan wondered.

"[They will hide it]," Amox declared. "[They will avoid a riot]."

Amox didn't convey the usual confidence in the Thilku, and Khan noticed that. Something worried him, but he wouldn't lie to Khan. Still, he would hide details, which seemed to be the issue in that situation.

Khan couldn't help but review what he knew. The stations were similar to the districts or factories in terms of workforce. That issue simply involved Neuria's population as a whole, with a few rare exceptions.

The stations tended to have a higher number of volunteers and a more reliable workforce, especially those dealing with valuable goods. Yet, that could cause a problem since eventual criminals would have gone unnoticed for far longer.

Nevertheless, the stations' locations prevented any retaliation. Reinforcements would take longer to arrive there, but escape routes didn't exist. Even if a riot happened, the criminals would have nowhere to go.

The workforce was another problem. The pride in the Empire would move many Thilku against eventual criminals. The latter wouldn't have the chance to cause a riot unless they had the numbers to back it up, which was unlikely.

That put a lot of pressure on the investigators on the scene since they would suffer from the same lack of escape paths. Yet, it was safe to assume that eventual criminals would try to behave to prevent the worse from happening. There was simply no victory to attain there.

Those thoughts matched Amox's explanation, but his mana remained an oddity Khan couldn't explain. Everything seemed to point toward a peaceful mission, but Amox remained worried, and Khan began to share his feelings.

The long corridor ended in a door with a big central rune that Amox promptly touched. A bit of tinkering opened it, expanding into a far larger room that sent multiple tremors to the symphony.

The station was built for Thilku, so Khan never felt too cramped inside the corridor. Still, Amox was big enough to cover the door, so Khan couldn't get a proper look at the room until he left the passage.

The symphony had prepared Khan for the scene, but seeing it with his own eyes remained surprising. The corridor led to a large cafeteria that had stashed its metal tables and stools in a corner to make room for an entire platoon of workers. Almost fifty Thilku had amassed near a wall, waiting for Khan and Amox to arrive.

The vibe was different from what Khan had seen in the living district. Even the factory didn't have that seriousness. Yet, something else reached his nostrils. He could smell a specific smell in the synthetic mana, which added value to Amox's worry.

"[The cabins are this way]," Amox muttered, glaring at the workers standing before the wall.

Khan imitated Amox but did his best to appear more relaxed. He was still a human in Thilku territory. Biases always accompanied his authority, and preventing a violent reaction was for the best. However, the smell intensified as the two crossed the cafeteria, and some curiosity had the best of Khan.

The specific smell belonged to a feeling Khan knew well. Tension filled the cafeteria, creating a suffocating atmosphere that seemed ready to explode. That reaction was nothing unnatural during an official investigation, but some details stood out and made Khan's eyes move accordingly.

The workers were mostly first-level warriors. Khan only counted a handful of second-level warriors in the platoon. In theory, such a weak group could produce those strong effects in the symphony only with a joint feeling, but that wasn't the case.

A few isolated Thilku conveyed intense tension fueled by a deep resolve. That was pure loyalty that didn't target the Empire. Amox's glare was enough to make it skyrocket, hinting at something far different.

'There are criminals here,' Khan immediately concluded, doing his best to identify the potential targets of the imminent interrogation. He looked at them on purpose, trying to send signals that would reveal more clues, and the reactions that came back confirmed his suspicions.

Of course, Khan didn't utter any word until Amox led him past the cafeteria and across another corridor to reach a long area filled with open rooms. Beds and personal belongings occupied each accommodation, and it was Khan's job to search for anything incriminating.

"[Amox]," Khan voiced once he made sure that the two were the only ones in the area.

"[What is it, Khan]?" Amox asked.

"[There might be criminals on the stations]," Khan uttered.

"[Are you sure]?" Amox questioned, interrupting his search to look for Khan's face.

"[No]," Khan admitted. "[I only know they have something to hide]."

Amox didn't need anything else to trust Khan. He had actually believed him on his first statement, but asking for confirmation was mandatory.

Once the matter was settled, Amox and Khan developed a plan to isolate the spotted criminals from the rest of the workforce. They set a keyword to make the suspects go into a different area at the end of each interrogation. It was a simple strategy that both scouts could pull off without preparing too much.

The new strategy didn't get in the way of the inspection. Khan and Amox went over all the beds and rooms to search for incriminating goods but returned empty-handed. That lack of findings was reassuring, but the atmosphere between them grew tense once they reapproached the cafeteria.

Amox obviously was in the lead, and the station's narrow corridors prevented Khan from getting a complete view of each area as long as he covered the entrance. Yet, something odd happened when Amox stepped into the cafeteria, and Khan couldn't help but push him forward to check the situation.

The orderly environment seen only half an hour before had disappeared. It wasn't chaos, but the situation came quite close to it, at least according to the symphony.

Khan was still in the corridor. He had merely peeked into the cafeteria from under Amox's arm since the Thilku had stopped walking. Yet, that was enough to grant him a complete view of the scene, which explained Amox's worries.

The number of workers had increased. Seventy of them were now in the cafeteria, but almost sixty were on their knees. Those still on their feet were wielding rifles that they pointed at their prisoners, and the presence of a few corpses stated the seriousness of the situation.

"[This station is under our control now]!" One of the rifle-wielding Thilku shouted at Amox.

"[You'll hear our demands]!"