

Chaos' Heir 91

Chapter 91 - Divine Reaper

Khan had almost forgotten that he had yet to receive the entirety of his rewards. The Captain on Nitis had to give him his new martial art, and some excitement inevitably built inside him.

However, that reminder also brought negative emotions since it made Khan recall Istrone and the very reason behind his current situation.

The faces of the Kred that he had killed on Istrone ran through his vision. Khan recalled that he had paved his way to Nitis with blood. The new planet had made him feel like his first day in Ylaco's training camp, but the situation was far different, and his personality had also changed.

'Can I really enjoy all of this when Martha is in a coma and blood still taints my hands?' Khan wondered while following Paul inside the camp.

Khan had already found an answer to that question but applying it felt hard. He had to move on without forgetting, but reminders of his actions always appeared. Still, Nitis was succeeding where Ylaco's training camp had failed. The alien planet held the potential to make him happy.

Paul led Khan in front of the tall building. Strange symbols that gave off a cold feeling glowed on its black surface, and the lack of windows surrounded it with an eerie aura.

"I've brought Khan, ma'am," Paul shouted while performing a military salute.

Khan imitated him, but the sight of a white figure shooting through the sky distracted him. The mental connection allowed him to confirm that Snow had left, but his mind suddenly sensed a dense pressure and made him turn toward the building again.

A tall woman had come out of the sliding metal doors of the building. Her military uniform enhanced her muscular physique, and her short scarlet hair didn't manage to distract Khan from her glowing bionic left eye. She had three stars on each shoulder, but Khan felt that she was even stronger than Lieutenant Dyester.

Captain Erbair had a long scar that ran through the entire left side of her face. It was clear that she had lost her left eye due to that injury, but the army had patched her up nicely. The only issue with that machine was that its red light conflicted with the natural green color of the right eye.

The Captain walked toward Khan until she was right in front of him. Khan couldn't help but notice that she was at least thirty-five centimeters taller than him. She was the tallest person that Khan had ever seen in his entire life.

"How can this wren be the same recruit who solved the mess on Istrone?" Captain Erbair asked while scratching a spot next to her bionic eye.

"I didn't solve anything, ma'am," Khan promptly replied. "Captain Foxnor and the rest of the Global Army have handled the situation. I only set a piece of the jungle on fire."

"He is even humble," Captain Erbair commented before turning toward Paul. "Didn't you make your usual speech about pride?"

"What do you mean by usual, ma'am?" Paul asked while keeping his eyes on the building. "I did it, but that doesn't mean that I do it often."

"He does it often," Captain Erbair whispered when she turned toward Khan. "Still, he is right. You get nothing by being humble here. Are you implying that you don't deserve the reward that the Global Army has sent here before your arrival?"

"I totally deserve it, ma'am!" Khan exclaimed as his eyes lit up. "I've been crucial in saving lives and putting an end to the Kred's rebellion."

"Good boy," Captain Erbair said while patting Khan's head with her huge hand. "Follow me inside now. We have to talk about the Aduns and your relationship with the Niqols girl."

Captain Erbair turned to walk inside the building, and Khan shot a glance toward Paul to see how he reacted to those words. However, Paul shook his head and showed an innocent expression at that gaze. He didn't mention the inappropriate interactions between Khan and Liiza in his report.

Khan could only follow Captain Erbair inside the structure at that point. It became evident that the Global Army didn't build that place once he could inspect its insides. The building featured the same smooth surfaces and almost-absent décor iconic of the human architecture, but it had glowing symbols instead of electric torches and digital menus.

Captain Erbair didn't give Khan the chance to stop and inspect the various peculiarities of that structure. She directly led him to the second floor and into a large room, where she sat on a large couch before pointing at an armchair.

Khan couldn't help but notice how the familiar furniture created a stark contrast with the room's functions. The overly large couch didn't match the mystical symbol on the ceiling that filled the area with a faint azure glow. The armchair's style was too intricate for the simple rotating square on the wall that seemed to represent the Niqols' version of a digital menu.

The color of the furniture enhanced that stark contrast. The couch and armchair had pale-yellow shades, which disrupted the faint dark environment that the room was trying to create.

"You'll grow used to everything quickly," Captain Erbair announced. "You have lived in Ylaco's Slums for eleven years. This change can't affect you too much."

"It won't, ma'am," Khan answered while taking his seat on the armchair. "I have a lot to learn about the Niqols, but they appear quite similar to us. I can't wait."

"I hope your impatience doesn't involve getting into Miss Liiza's pants," Captain Erbair snorted while taking a metal casket from the side of the couch. "Also, yes, Niqols wear pants."

"My interest is purely academic, ma'am," Khan announced while ignoring the last part of her speech.

"You aren't the first boy to fall for her," Captain Erbair revealed. "The others only got the chance to learn their place before meeting her."

"Is she so important?" Khan asked as his eyes fell on the casket.

"Her mother called me when she didn't return home on time," Captain Erbair explained. "She has enough authority to call the leader of the human troops on Nitis. That should be enough to explain how important her daughter is."

Khan didn't reveal any expression, even if his thoughts were running wild. Part of him felt glad that Liiza appeared unreachable since it would give him an excuse to remain focused on Martha. Yet, he knew that Martha would want him to live his life, especially due to her unclear condition.

'I guess I can only see how things go and adapt,' Khan thought while his eyes remained on the casket. 'I don't know if she likes me, and my feelings are still too messy to think about relationships.'

Captain Erbair took his behavior as an expression of his curiosity toward the reward. A proud smirk appeared on her face as her fingers started to tap on the metal casket with her fingers.

"I want you to take this as proof of the Global Army's goodwill," Captain Erbair continued. "The higher-ups have understood how valuable you can be, and they are willing to reward you properly. I hope you can keep up with our expectations."

Khan limited himself to nod. Other words wouldn't matter now.

Captain Erbair lifted the casket's lid and revealed the small white disk contained in its insides. Still, Khan could immediately notice how the fabric around the item appeared as luxurious as it could get.

Khan glanced at the Captain before timidly picking the disk. His hand was already pulling out his phone in the meantime, and he quickly put the item on the screen to make his device absorb it.

"Get out now," Captain Erbair ordered before Khan could check the list of magic devices connected to his phone. "Paul will show you where you'll sleep. The briefing is tomorrow at five am. Don't be late."

Khan stood up to leave the building, but the Captain added a few lines before he could exit the room. "Good job with the Aduns, by the way. Your feat might actually convince the Niqols to give us more freedom. Make sure to treat that beast well."

A loud "yes, ma'am" came out of Khan's mouth before he turned again to leave the building. The Captain's words would basically give him the chance to take Snow out for a flight often, which meant spending more time with Liiza.

Curiosity tried to make him pull his phone to check the new magic device, but he eventually decided to wait until he arrived in his room. Paul was waiting for him in front of the building. The two moved toward one of the large structures while remaining silent for most of the walk.

"Telling you stuff now would be pointless," Paul announced when they entered the building. "The briefing tomorrow will explain everything you need to know about Nitis. Also, I couldn't help but notice that you are quite good. You'll do well if you don't listen to your dick."

Khan nodded while ignoring the obvious meaning behind Paul's words. The soldier led him in front of a small room with a simple bed and a hole surrounded by glowing symbols. The habitation didn't feature anything else.

"The building already has our language," Paul explained while tapping on a rotating azure square on the room's wall.

The cube opened to reveal multiple options that Khan could activate if he filled his fingertip with mana. They were similar to the menus on Earth, but they founded their functioning on mana rather than technology.

The hole in the ground turned out to be the bathroom. The various symbols around its edges activated different functions, and one of them even made dark-blue water fall from a spot on the ceiling.

"See you tomorrow," Paul announced before leaving Khan alone in his new room.

The cramped space and the strange bathroom didn't leave Khan disappointed. Eleven years in the Slums had made him learn to accept everything he got, and he felt happy as long as the area didn't appear too peaceful.

Khan closed the metal door and browsed through the menus to seal it. His phone immediately appeared in his hands at that point, and the wall seemed to react to the device.

'Do you want to charge your device?' Khan read a writing that had suddenly appeared on the wall.

Those words didn't take much to make sense in his mind. Nitis experienced almost complete darkness every day. Devices powered by sunlight wouldn't last much in that environment, so they required a different type of fuel.

Khan followed the instructions and placed his phone on the floor to activate the charger and connect the item to the room. He could reach the list of magic devices directly from the wall at that point, and he didn't hesitate to tap on the black metal to see what the Global Army had decided to give him.

'Divine Reaper,' Khan read right under the Lightning-demon style and the beginner's training for chaos element users. 'What an arrogant name for a martial art.'

Khan quickly opened the training program and noticed that it featured as many lessons as the Lightning-demon style. It even had the same detailed options that could introduce and overview the martial art before approaching the actual teachings.

A hologram came out of the phone and filled the center of the room. Khan saw a woman wearing a strange military uniform that featured a large star on each shoulder. He had to inspect her figure to understand her sex since a hood and a piece of cloth left only her eyes uncovered.

"My name is classified," The woman announced once the summary began, "But you aren't here to learn names. I'll teach you one of the deadliest knife techniques in the world, so use it carefully. You might kill someone by mistake with the instincts that the training program will force you to develop."

Khan couldn't help but feel excited. The Global Army seemed to have respected all his requirements. He only wanted to know the points earned by the martial art to be completely satisfied.

"The Divine Reaper doesn't work well alone," The woman continued. "The Global Army has assigned it sixty-five points when used on its own. However, its value can surpass ninety points when matched with a suitable style. I hope your decision to learn it has come after an accurate study of your needs."

Khan could barely believe his ears. The Global Army had given him a martial art with immense potential. Yet, some doubts remained in his mind since he didn't completely understand how a style could gain more than twenty-five points if paired with suitable techniques.

Silence fell in the room as Khan waited for the summary to continue, but loud knocking suddenly resounded from his door and forced him to close the training program.

Khan worried when he noticed that it was pretty late. He hoped that his actions with Liiza and the Aduns didn't cause any major issue, but his fears disappeared when he unlocked the room and saw a familiar face unfolding in his view.

"I hurried here as soon as they told me that you had also come to Nitis," George explained while wearing an honest smile at the sight of Khan's surprised expression. "I didn't expect us to meet again so soon."

Chapter 92 - Briefing

"I didn't expect this offer," George explained after the duo entered Khan's room and started conversing about their situation. "Apparently, the Global Army sent all the survivors in different training camps. I simply got the best due to my feats on Istrone."

Khan couldn't help but nod at those words. George could already cast spells, and his battle prowess was way above average. It wasn't surprising that his profile suited Nitis' training camp after Istrone's crisis.

"What about you?" George asked once his story ended. "I thought you would have remained on Earth to take care of your girl."

"I can't do much for her," Khan sighed while lying on his bed, "And everything was too peaceful. I was losing my mind there."

Khan gave an honest reply. George had already seen his ugliest face. He had no reason to hide his real feelings. Yet, he decided not to talk about Martha in detail since the topic was hard to explain.

"Trust me, I get you," George sighed while laying his back on the wall and stretching his legs on the floor. "I have guards at home, right? One of them approached me from behind when I was meditating inside the woods near the mansion. I almost took off his eye."

"Do all recruits have mansions?" Khan asked.

"That's just the holiday home," George explained. "Some members of the main family always live in the central districts. My father thought that a messy city wasn't ideal in my condition."

"But they still sent you here," Khan laughed.

"I flew between the training camp and the holiday home every day after I returned," George commented. "I was going crazy, and my family even wanted to hire private professors until the Global Army came up with something. I basically escaped when I heard that I could go to Nitis."

"Did they brief you already?" Khan asked. "What did they say about the Niqols?"

George revealed a shameless smile when he noticed Khan's interest. He lowered his voice before announcing something that made Khan divert his eyes. "I heard some rumors. There seems to be a newcomer who made Miss Liiza laugh."

"He must be a handsome and virtuous man," Khan suggested.

"Cora and your girl on Ylaco weren't enough," George teased him. "You also had to hit on a Niqols. Did they tell you that she is basically a princess here?"

"First of all, Martha and I are only friends," Khan eventually decided to clarify his position. "We have probably liked each other for a long time, but the packed schedule inside the training camp never left room for feelings. We had decided to talk about us right before the semestral missions, but you know how it ended."

George suddenly felt bad about his last tease. He didn't think that Khan had been so unlucky. He clearly liked Martha a lot, but Istrone had ruined their hopes of ending up together.

His lack of reactions in front of Cora's feelings also made more sense now. Khan had spent his time on Istrone waiting to understand if he had a girlfriend, but Martha's condition had put that matter on hold.

"I'm sorry to hear that," George sighed. "Luck only pretends to be on your side. You never had the chance to appreciate what you had."

Khan shrugged his shoulders. He didn't have a proper answer to that statement. The two fell silent as they remained on the bed and floor with various thoughts running inside their minds.

"What about Miss Liiza then?" George eventually asked. "Is that a misunderstanding?"

"Well," Khan exclaimed while diverting his eyes again. "We flew together twice. I don't think there's much more. I don't even know how the Niqols handle that stuff."

"Do you mean flirting?" George asked.

"I mean, they must have different customs, right?" Khan continued. "How can a few smiles prove anything?"

"The Niqols are a straightforward species, Khan," George explained. "You don't have to imagine complicated reasons to explain her behavior. The simplest answer is usually correct with these aliens."

"Did you just reveal classified information?" Khan teased George. "I didn't think recruits could share them."

"Shut up," George snorted. "Let's make a deal. You don't rat me out, and I'll pretend that you didn't smile before."

Khan's hand suddenly went on his mouth. He was really smiling, but he had needed George to point it out to notice it.

"Dammit," Khan cursed while lightly bumping the back of his head on the metal wall.

"There is nothing wrong in liking her," George commented. "I have yet to see her with my own eyes, but they showed me holograms of her during the briefing a few days ago. I would also smile if I were in your situation."

"There is no situation," Khan snorted. "She only brought me to the Aduns' nests."

"How did she even bring you there?" George asked in his teasing voice. "This is a small camp. Rumors run quickly. Everyone knows that you couldn't get an Udu, so how did you reach the nests and come back in less than a day? Did you have to ride behind her?"

"I won't answer that," Khan laughed while pushing George away with his feet. "Get out now. I have to wake up in less than six hours."

George laughed while straightening his position and walking toward the metal door. He exited the room quickly, and Khan could soon enjoy the silence again.

'Straightforward species, he says,' Khan repeated in his mind before sealing the door and reactivating the training program of his new martial art.

The summary continued and briefly described the Divine Reaper's main features. The martial art relied on quick techniques and deadly attacks that aimed to take down opponents in a single move.

However, the Divine Reaper had evident flaws. It almost completely lacked defensive stances. It was an extremely aggressive martial art that forced the user to go all-out during every battle.

Khan soon understood why the Divine Reaper couldn't get more than sixty-five points if used on its own. The user would risk suffering counterattacks half of the time since each move left large openings whenever they failed to kill an opponent.

Still, Khan also saw how his Lightning-demon style could remove those weaknesses. The fast moves of the Divine Reaper were perfect. He felt confident in bringing their value to their intended value once he fused them with his other techniques.

The training program explained a few requirements of the Divine Reaper before approaching the actual lessons. It recommended a few exercises meant to merge two martial arts faster, and it even listed a series of knives that suited the powerful moves.

'A normal knife would break during every failed execution with mana,' Khan read on the holograms, 'It's better to use magic weapons with enhanced resilience. Sharpness isn't mandatory as a feature since the Divine Reaper will handle that part.'

Khan closed the training program at that point. It was late, and he even felt a bit disappointed. He didn't consider the issue of a suitable weapon. George had made it appear so easy on Istrone that he had ended up underestimating the difficulty of the martial art.

'Weapons require a completely different set of skills,' Khan sighed in his mind. 'That's so obvious. I shouldn't even try to fuse my martial arts until my proficiency with the Lightning-demon style reaches the competent level.'

It was clear that Khan had to spend a long time in his training. Obtaining a new martial art didn't immediately make him stronger. He needed to invest sweat and blood before that resource could give results.

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Khan didn't sleep much and reached the building meant for the briefing in no time by following the instructions on his phone. He even managed to have breakfast in a simple canteen that mostly served some of Nitis' iconic worms and insects.

The strange food didn't faze Khan, so he reached the briefing hall five minutes before the appointment. The room was empty, so he sat on one of the small desks that filled the area and meditated as he waited for someone to arrive.

A relatively young soldier soon entered the hall and showed a surprised expression when he noticed Khan meditating on one of the desks in the front lines. His eyebrows even arched when Khan opened his eyes and jumped on the floor to perform a military salute.

"At ease," The man quickly announced while walking toward the end of the hall. "I'm Lieutenant Glenn Kintea. I will now share classified information that you aren't allowed to spread with anyone under the grade of Captain. Am I clear?"

"Yes, sir!" Khan promptly shouted while inspecting the soldier.

The Lieutenant was relatively short, but he had a severe face that his square head enhanced. He had short black hair, dark eyes, a short beard, and his uniform featured two stars on each shoulder.

The soldier didn't waste time. He went right to the point of the briefing as he activated some of the alien menus on the black walls and let them scan his eyes and genetic signature before unlocking more options.

Lieutenant Kintea threw a storm of information toward Khan and used holograms to make the process smoother. The soldier started from Nitis' general layout, fauna, and flora until he arrived at the Niqols' hierarchy, customs, and relationship with the humans.

Nitis' environment didn't have much to say. Its often uneven surface made ground vehicles hard to use, and relying on the Udu showed the Niqols that the Global Army was willing to compromise to improve the relationship between the two species.

The flora didn't thrive much on the planet due to the absence of suitable nutrients. Sunlight didn't shine on the surface, and the ground wasn't as rich in mana as Istrone.

Instead, the fauna thrived in every corner of Nitis. The planet didn't need the Nak to obtain the mana, so the animals had evolved with that energy throughout countless years. Every creature in that world was a Tainted beast.

The Niqols had a tight relationship with Nitis' fauna due to their excellent understanding of the mana. They relied on those creatures for different purposes, which often allowed the aliens to replace technology with them.

The Niqols had never needed to develop vehicles, but Lieutenant Kintea confirmed that the Niqols had gone to space. The aliens had yet to reveal how a species that had founded its growth on mana could fly past Nitis' orbit, but the Global Army guessed that most of that technology came from the Nak.

The aliens' hierarchy was quite simple. They had organizations that resembled tribes created according to the connections among each family. The Niqols would belong to the same group even if they shared a single drop of blood.

The elders of the species could join the organizations in charge of the entire population, but they mostly handled borders and specific resources. Those groups became vital only in front of a global crisis.

Smaller organizations handled different quadrants of the planet and various tasks. The Global Army didn't know many details, but it didn't care about them either. Its only focus was on the alien ambassadors that managed the relationship between the two species since they were the ones in charge of accepting eventual permits.

Liiza's mother turned out to be one of the ambassadors who managed the relationship between the two species. She wasn't alone in the task, but she was in charge of her team, which made her the most important alien on Nitis in the eyes of the Global Army.

Liiza and others had to take care of helping the humans on the field. The task seemed beneath her, but she had offered herself for that role, which inevitably caused her mother's anger.

Nitis didn't have many humans on its surface. Only one captain, two lieutenants, four gradeless soldiers, a few professors, and four classes of recruits lived on the alien world.

Khan's current training camp featured only two classes. The others were near a different city on the other side of the mountain chain. The tasks of each group mainly consisted in continuing their studies, but the army forced them to help the Niqols with various tasks to reinforce their relationship.

"Nitis contains priceless knowledge," Lieutenant Kintea explained as the briefing reached its end. "Imagine having a society that has evolved around mana for thousands of years. We can accelerate our development by entire centuries with each discovery that the Niqols are willing to share. Our job here is vital for the Global Army and the entirety of humankind."

Lieutenant Kintea cleared his throat at that point before opening a menu and confirming that he had sealed the door. Khan didn't miss that action, and a tinge of interest filled his mind and made him straighten his sitting position.

"Great job with the Aduns, Khan," The Lieutenant exclaimed. "We have tried to gain access to those birds for years already. We didn't think that the solution to our problems could be with the new generations of Niqols."

A strange feeling spread through Khan. He didn't know why, but he had started to feel dirty after inspecting the soldier's keen eyes.

"I know that the Captain wants to play it safe," Lieutenant Kintea continued, "But I believe that establishing a tight relationship with Miss Liiza could bring incredible benefits in the next years. These aren't official orders, but I hope you realize how great it would be if you brought Liiza on our side."

Chapter 93 - Honesty

The briefing ended on that strange note. Lieutenant Kintea couldn't order Khan to get close to Liiza on purpose, but he didn't hide his desires when the two were alone.

Khan had to admit that he understood the Lieutenant's intentions. Liiza seemed to have a rebellious character. She could be the perfect lever in the relationships between the two species. Also, even if

Khan were to fail to seize immediate benefits, he could always come back once Liiza was among the elders and make sure that humankind got its share.

It was an almost failproof plan since the Global Army could use Khan as a scapegoat if something went wrong. Still, he didn't feel good when he thought about exploiting the Niqols' character for his personal benefit. He wasn't a stranger to lies and pretenses, but he didn't want to do that to Liiza, especially since she seemed to loathe the tactics connected to the politics.

Khan didn't say anything about his conversation with Lieutenant Kintea when he met Paul. He limited himself to follow him toward the building where all the recruits attended their mandatory and optional courses.

The Global Army had chosen Khan's lessons already, and he couldn't help but approve once Paul listed them. It turned out that many recruits on Nitis aimed to become ambassadors or similar political figures in the future, so the camp already had professors able to teach xenolinguistics, human and alien politics, and alien customs.

Those three subjects were the core of every good ambassador, and they were necessary for the recruits living on Nitis. After all, knowing the Niqols' language and customs would significantly improve their performance during the semester, and it might even lead to positive outcomes during the interaction with the aliens.

Most professors were relatively weak soldiers who handled common subjects like "history of mana" and "mana cores". Lieutenant Kintea taught politics and customs, while Captain Erbair took care of the lessons of xenolinguistics that involved the Niqols' language.

The recruits' main task was to learn, and Khan did nothing else for the entire day. The academic year had already reached its seventh month, so everyone's schedule was full of lessons. Khan and the others had to spend ten hours straight inside the classes for four days a week.

That packed schedule didn't leave much time for their training, but Khan quickly discovered that he didn't have many options on Nitis.

The camp didn't have any training hall since the Niqols limited the type and number of buildings that the Global Army could send on the planet. Structures meant to strengthen the humans didn't fit those standards, and the same went for observatories and similar stations.

Khan's weeks still featured three free days in which he could train freely, but Paul revealed that missions executed together with the Niqols often happened during that time. They mostly involved hunts of dangerous creatures or similar simple issues, but they would still force him to waste a lot of time.

The usual darkness of Nitis unfolded in Khan's eyes when he came out of the lessons. It was already late afternoon, and most of the recruits around him felt the need to throw themselves on their respective beds after such a long day. However, some still tried to make Khan join the few recreational activities available in the camp.

"The others are going to a river nearby," George explained once the various recruits started to separate. "I went there two days ago. It was nice, and the others aren't bad either. I might even need your charm to get closer to a cute one."

"I don't have a charm," Khan snorted, but his eyes inevitably fell on the recruits who had stopped near the exit of the camp.

Those boys and girls didn't seem bad. George wouldn't have vouched for them otherwise. Moreover, they were all eager to know the guy who had successfully tamed an Aduns.

Yet, Khan felt out of time when he checked the phone. He had yet to do his usual mental training and meditations that day, and he wouldn't mind adding some physical practice to those exercises.

Time wasn't on his side in the days with the lessons, but Khan would completely lose it if he left to kill time with his classmates. Also, he had something else in mind already, so he politely declined.

"Maybe another time," Khan replied while looking toward the sky.

Khan had sent a message through the mental connection when the lessons were about to end, and a foreign feeling had spread inside his mind while he talked with George.

A white figure unfolded in his vision when he raised his eyes to the sky. Snow dived toward the insides of the camp and spread its large wings when it was about to crash on Khan and George.

The other recruits had instinctively retreated during that sudden event. George had even fallen on the ground when the intense winds landed on his back. Only Khan had remained immune to Snow's appearance, and he kept his eyes on the creature while it landed in front of him.

"You must enjoy scaring others," Khan commented, and the Aduns gave voice to a loud screech before sending a proud feeling through the mental connection.

"Yes, they can't stand your might," Khan added, and the Aduns showed a satisfied expression before realizing that he had been sarcastic.

Still, Khan was already on its back when that realization arrived. His legs were even clung at the base of its wings by then.

'Let's go to the mountains,' Khan sent through the mental connection.

Snow understood what Khan wanted and quickly set off under the astonished gaze of everyone in the camp. Even Captain Erbair and Lieutenant Kintea had come out to inspect the scene, and faint smiles appeared on their faces when they saw the white spot disappearing in the distance.

The flight felt far more comfortable at that time. The injuries suffered during the test had mostly closed after a day and a short meditation performed before going to sleep. Khan felt perfectly fine, and he didn't fear the Aduns' sudden movements anymore after establishing the mental connection.

Khan let Snow fly freely. He didn't give orders nor force it to slow down. He even tried releasing the grip on its neck to see how stable his legs were.

The almost complete lack of fear and insecurities allowed Khan to enjoy the flight properly. He felt free among the sky. The problems that had afflicted his past weeks couldn't reach his mind with the winds blowing on his face.

Snow eventually descended toward the base of a mountain and left Khan there before resuming its flight. The screeches of the other Aduns echoed in the sky as Khan sat on the cold, rocky ground and crossed his legs. The environment was perfect for his mental training.

Khan spent a few hours on the ninth lesson of the mental training before a sudden flapping of wings awakened him from the exercise. A dark-grey Aduns appeared in his vision when he opened his eyes, and Liiza's charming face soon peeked out of that feathered neck.

"I've never seen a human training outside the camp," Liiza announced without jumping off her Aduns.

"The cold helps," Khan explained while showing a faint smile. "I didn't think I would have seen you today."

Khan had spoken the truth about his training. He had almost completed the ninth exercise, and the tenth wouldn't be a problem since his expertise with the mental barrier had increased a lot after Istrone's events.

It was only a matter of months before Khan could approach the Wave spell, and he could barely contain his excitement. His achievement wasn't much when he compared himself to George, but the nature of his element made him accept his pace.

"Why wouldn't I?" Liiza asked. "I'd rather be here than at home."

"Did your mother say anything about me?" Khan asked as his smile became complicated.

"I rarely see her," Liiza revealed while wearing an emotionless face. "I guess they told you about her. Does that mean that you can't fly with me anymore?"

"I've already called Snow," Khan laughed as he straightened his position.

Liiza arched her eyebrows, but a faint smile appeared on her face when she saw the white Aduns landing next to Khan. He didn't hesitate to climb on his eagle, and the duo left as soon as Liiza set off.

Liiza led Khan across the mountain chain. Her flight was reckless and fast, and Khan couldn't help but appreciate it whenever he saw her smiling face. Risking his life almost felt worth it to make that usually aloof Niqols happy.

The two Aduns eventually landed on a large flat area that expanded from the center of a mountain. The structure was quite peculiar, but it allowed Liiza and Khan to jump off their rides in a spot that wasn't too cold and didn't risk getting submerged by snow.

"Why did you call it Snow?" Liiza asked. "Doesn't that mean [snow]?"

"The snow is white on my planet," Khan explained while patting his Aduns and letting it fly on its own.

Liiza did the same with her eagle. The two soon remained alone in the middle of the mountain, and their eyes inevitably met.

Liiza was wearing longer clothes that hid most of her skin at that time. Khan didn't know if yesterday's matters had something to do with that, but he didn't mind her new look. Her white tracksuit managed to hide her curves, but it couldn't diminish her beauty.

"You have yet to explain what Paul meant with his gesture," Liiza reminded Khan while walking toward the edges of the flat area and sitting with her legs laid on the rocky side.

"You really don't want to let that go," Khan laughed while imitating her.

Khan sat next to her and put his legs past the area's edges while supporting himself with his hands. The dark scenery of the mountain chain was marvelous from that position, but the few strands of fluttering white hair that appeared in his vision often made him turn toward Liiza.

"Is that a secret?" Liiza asked as honest confusion appeared on her face.

"Of course not," Khan laughed before scratching the side of his head. "It's just embarrassing, I guess."

"How can a gesture be embarrassing?" Liiza continued.

"Trust me on that," Khan replied, but Liiza's expression grew detached at that answer.

"Hey," Khan said before clearing his throat and continuing, "I want to remind you that I still don't know much about the Niqols. I wish you could tell me what's wrong instead of having to watch you growing sad."

Khan's sudden burst of honesty startled Liiza. She didn't expect him to be so direct. It was even hard to contradict him when he fixed his azure eyes on her.

"I don't understand you," Liiza eventually revealed while giving voice to a sigh. "We learn a lot about humans from a young age, but we only know what those on the camps show us. You are definitely different."

"How so?" Khan asked as a tinge of interest filled his mind and made him widen his smile.

"I sensed your pain," Liiza explained, "But you can joke around easily. Your behavior didn't change after learning about my mother, but you still keep secrets for the army. I just can't see you clearly."

His decision to keep the meaning behind Paul's gesture a secret ended up creating a big misunderstanding. Yet, Khan could learn more about Liiza's character from her words.

"Do you also hate secrets?" Khan asked.

"I hate lies," Liiza revealed. "I understand the need to keep a face in front of your superiors, but I can't stand fake people, and my mother is their leader."

"I thought Niqols were straightforward," Khan commented.

"Straightforward doesn't mean honest," Liiza replied, and the two moved their eyes back toward the dark scenery past the mountain.

"I'll tell you," Khan eventually sighed, "But don't get strange ideas."

"I can't control my ideas," Liiza coldly replied. "You wouldn't have an Aduns otherwise."

Khan sighed before tilting his head and giving voice to a simple explanation. "Paul thought that I was hitting on you. He was only expressing his worry."

"Hitting on me?" Liiza turned to show a confused expression to Khan. "What does that mean?"

"You know flirting?" Khan tried to explain while turning toward Liiza and trying to summon his entire knowledge about the Niqols' language. "It should be something along the lines of [romance] if I'm not wrong."

"Oh," Liiza seemed to understand at that point, and her gaze returned toward the scenery past the mountain's edges. "Did your superiors think the same?"

"They are just worried that I might create a mess with the Niqols," Khan sighed while looking toward the dark scenery too. "Some of them even want me to use you to get more benefits for humankind."

"Why are you telling me this?" Liiza gasped while turning again toward Khan.

"You like honesty," Khan said while shrugging his shoulders. "I give you honesty."

Liiza didn't know what to say, but a smile ended up appearing on her face. Khan looked at the scenery and avoided her eyes, and she couldn't help but appreciate his cold vibes.

"Get down," Liiza eventually ordered while lying on the ground and pulling Khan from his shoulder. "The sky is better than the mountains."

Khan let Liiza pull him to the ground. The two ended up side to side with their eyes toward the sky. Their shoulders and arms touched, but neither of them said anything about that.

"Was he right?" Liiza eventually asked.

"Who?" Khan promptly replied with a question.

"Paul," Liiza continued. "Were you hitting on me?"

"A bit," Khan honestly revealed. "You can blame the Nak if you want. They must have done something to my taste."

"Am I ugly then?" Liiza asked while supporting herself on her elbow and turning toward Khan.

Liiza's curves inevitably touched Khan's shoulder and arm. She seemed about to lie above him, but she made sure to keep her free arm on her side.

"No," Khan sighed. "I struggle to stop looking at you."

Liiza giggled as her eyes met Khan's. The two continued to look at each other even after Khan spoke again. "You did the same, right? I don't know how to recognize the signals of your species."

"Niqols use signals only when actions might cause problems," Liiza revealed. "They don't bother to talk when they know that everything is fine."

"Were they signals the-?" Khan was about to ask, but Liiza suddenly placed her free arm on his chest and lowered her head above his.

Her long white hair fell to the sides of Khan's head, but her glowing white eyes allowed him to see her perfectly. The light started to vanish as Liiza continued to lower her body, and it completely disappeared when their lips met.

Chapter 94 - Talk

Liiza's lips felt cold and smooth. They were completely different from Cora's warmth, but Khan didn't even think about the human girl in that situation.

His mind barely managed to generate thoughts. Everything had disappeared when Liiza kissed him, and his hand instinctively rose to reach the back of her head. Her white hair felt like the softest material in the world while he pulled her closer.

Liiza's fingertips scratched Khan's chest before closing on his uniform. The kiss became more passionate, and Liiza soon relaxed enough to lay completely on his torso.

She felt light, and her hand slowly reached his cheek to caress it. Khan couldn't help but wrap his arm around her waist and lay his palm on her side.

The two remained immersed in their kiss for a while. Sometimes, Khan tilted his head and made their lips separate to adjust his position, but Liiza dived on him in the next instant. Other times, Liiza lifted her chin and showed a happy smile whenever Khan followed her to bring her back into their romantic moment.

Liiza eventually raised her head and giggled before lying on his chest. Khan revealed a broad smile as he glanced at the long white hair right under him and continued to caress it.

The two fell silent. Only the howling winds and the sporadic screeches of the Aduns echoed in the area, but Khan couldn't hear them. He felt at peace under that dark sky and with the cold Niqols resting on him. He didn't feel the need to do anything for the first time in weeks.

"One of us has to speak at some point," Liiza giggled.

"Everything else will return if we talk about it," Khan said while enjoying the slight reactions that caressing the back of Liiza's head caused.

Liiza gave voice to a cute sound to express her agreement. The two remained in silence for a few more minutes, but the world eventually showed its presence again in their minds.

"You are warm," Liiza eventually exclaimed. "It's strange to kiss a human."

"Did you kiss many Niqols?" Khan instinctively asked, and Liiza raised her head to show a canny smile toward him.

"Jealous?" Liiza teased him. "Do you want to go possessive on me already?"

Khan planned a perfect answer, but those words vanished from his mind when the glowing white eyes filled his vision. His smile disappeared as his face wore a captivated expression and rose to meet Liiza.

Liiza was only teasing Khan, but her smile also vanished when she saw how serious Khan had become. The two kissed, and she wrapped her arms around his head to make their lips touch for as long as possible.

Liiza moved a bit forward after the two separated to make sure that she could watch Khan straight in the eyes. She laid her arms at the side of his head and played with his hair while wearing a complicated expression.

"Do we really have to talk?" Khan asked as a helpless sigh escaped his mouth.

"It's necessary, right?" Liiza replied without showing any happiness about the matter. "Our situation kind of requires it."

Khan knew that she was right, but he didn't want to talk about politics right away. He felt the need to clarify his position first.

"I went through something before reaching Nitis," Khan revealed while lowering his eyes. "I had, no, I might have had a girlfriend if she didn't end up in a coma. Part of me wanted to wait for her, but you arrived."

Liiza's eyes widened in front of that sudden revelation. She pursed her lips before asking something in a calm voice. "Do you feel guilty?"

"No," Khan honestly replied while fixing his eyes on the Niqols. "I feel at peace."

"Are you using me to forget her?" Liiza asked.

"Not at all," Khan replied in a firm voice. "I actually wanted to stop thinking about you."

"That didn't go so well," Liiza giggled, and Khan opened his mouth to say something, but the Niqols lowered her head to kiss him.

Khan felt surprised, but he eventually lost himself in the kiss. The two spent a few more minutes in that situation before separating again and exchanging captivated expressions.

"I shouldn't have revealed that I liked honesty so soon," Liiza commented while moving her fingers around Khan's lips.

"I won't abuse this power," Khan laughed, "Too much."

Liiza smiled before giving a proper answer to Khan's previous revelations. "We just started this relationship. We'll have time to see if we truly like our characters. I might have decided to kiss you only to go against my mother for all you know."

"Relationship?" Khan asked as his eyes lit up. "Do you mean it in the human meaning?"

"Niqols have the same idea of relationships," Liiza replied while diverting her gaze. "Is that a problem?"

"So, I only kiss you, and you only kiss me?" Khan asked to make sure that he had understood correctly.

"If you want," Liiza answered while continuing to divert her gaze, but her eyes slowly returned to Khan's face since he didn't answer.

A warm smile unfolded in her vision. She didn't need to hear Khan's answer anymore at that point. His expression had already confirmed that he agreed with her, and she couldn't help but kiss him again at that point.

The two continued to kiss until Khan turned and gently placed her on the ground. He pulled her close as his hand remained on her waist, but she eventually pulled his upper lip with her teeth and revealed a smile in front of his confused expression.

"I'm not ready for that," Liiza said after releasing Khan's lip.

Khan didn't need to question her to understand the meaning behind "that". He limited himself to smile and make his hand slide toward the upper part of her back until he could pull her into a hug.

Liiza snuggled closer and rested on his chest. She enjoyed Khan's caresses for a few minutes, but she eventually pushed him down before lying on him again.

"We have to talk!" Liiza complained, but a giggle escaped from her mouth when she saw Khan rolling his eyes.

"What's there to talk about?" Khan said in a helpless tone. "The army will kick me out once your superiors learn about us, and your mother will ask for my head on a silver plate to mend the relationship between our species."

"Does the plate have to be made of silver?" Liiza asked while tilting her head. "Is that a human thing?"

"I'm dead either way," Khan announced while raising his hand toward the sky and speaking in a fake dying voice. "If only I had a beautiful girl willing to satisfy my last wish."

"Niqols reach physical maturity when they are fifteen," Liiza revealed while poking Khan's cheek with her finger. "I'm almost eighteen. I'm an adult."

"If only I had a beautiful woman willing to satisfy-," Khan repeated in the same tone, but Liiza covered his mouth with her hands before exploding into a cute laugh.

"We must make sure that they don't find out about us then," Liiza said while continuing to cover Khan's mouth. "I will also face many problems if my superiors learn that I'm with a human."

Liiza revealed a happy expression when she sensed Khan's smiling from under her palms, but the arrival of a wet sensation made her remove her hands and sit on his chest.

"Don't lick it!" Liiza complained, but laughs seeped into her voice and stopped her from using an angry tone.

"You have a secret boyfriend then," Khan smiled while caressing her legs.

"And you have a secret girlfriend," Liiza continued while crouching on Khan and kissing him.

The two continued to laugh, kiss each other, cuddle, and reveal small pieces of their lives as time flowed. They were so caught in each other that they lost track of their surroundings. Their eyes barely managed to go past their figures.

"How can I contact you once I return to the camp?" Khan eventually asked as Liiza rested on his shoulder.

"The humans have given us phones," Liiza explained without opening her eyes, "But they work on their system. My superiors strongly believe that humans keep track of every conversation."

"What about the Niqols?" Khan asked. "How do you communicate?"

"We have special stones powered by mana," Liiza revealed, "But they require a core to work. My superiors can inspect it and understand if there are unwanted presences connected."

"I won't be able to learn if something happens to you then," Khan sighed.

"I won't know if you need me to save you then," Liiza scoffed. "Do I need to remind you that this is my planet?"

"It's still annoying," Khan added while caressing Liiza's hair and enjoying feeling her snuggling closer.

"We can talk through the Aduns," Liiza eventually revealed. "It won't be a proper conversation, but we'll be able to learn if we are both outside."

"Can we?" Khan asked in a surprised tone, and Liiza nodded before pointing her palm on his chest and straightening her position to sit on the ground.

"Call Snow," Liiza said while covering her mouth to hide a yawn. "Let's make them talk."

Khan imitated Liiza and sat cross-legged on the ground. He sent a message through the mental connection and raised his eyes to the sky as he waited for the familiar white dot to appear in his vision.

"I can get used to your warmth," Liiza yawned while placing her head on Khan's shoulder.

Khan quickly took her in his embrace and let her rest on the side of his chest. He even lifted her legs and made her sit on his lap. It was clear that Liiza couldn't handle all-nighters as well as him, but he didn't mind that since he got the chance to see her cute sleepy face.

Liiza fell asleep, but the familiar noise generated by the flapping of wings soon awakened her. Both her Aduns and Snow appeared in her vision when she opened her eyes.

"Keep track of each other," Liiza ordered. "It's the only way to know if we are outside. We must rely on you."

Snow turned toward Khan and gave voice to a short screech when it saw him nodding. The two eagles turned to leave at that point, but Khan's phone suddenly rang and made them look toward the couple sitting on the ground.

Khan's eyes widened when he saw the hour on his phone. It was almost six am. The lessons were about to begin, and Paul had sent him a message when he failed to appear for morning count.

"Those aren't nice words, right?" Liiza commented when she read Paul's message from Khan's screen. "Are they what humans call slurs?"

"I have to go," Khan sighed while kissing Liiza's forehead. "I didn't think you could be worse than the meditations."

"Are you insulting me?" Liiza asked while pulling herself back and showing a confused expression.

"Hours last seconds when I'm with you," Khan briefly explained while caressing her cheek and standing up. "You made me experience two of the best days of my life. I hope to do the same with you."

"You need to keep trying then," Liiza smiled before lying on the ground. "I hope to see you tomorrow."

"Will you sleep here?" Khan asked when he saw that she had no intention to move.

"I often sleep on the mountains," Liiza revealed. "It's fine, but we should avoid ending up like this too often. Once can be a coincidence, but our superiors will start to suspect something if we both arrive late to our appointments."

Khan nodded and turned to reach Snow. The Aduns had understood how Khan was feeling, so it prepared itself to fly at full speed and in a straight line toward the human camp.

"Khan?" Liiza suddenly called before Khan could jump on the eagle.

"What is it?" Khan asked while turning toward the Niqols resting on the ground.

"Won't you say goodbye?" Liiza asked as a tinge of shyness appeared in her voice.

Khan couldn't help but smile and hurry back to her. He quickly crouched, and Liiza didn't hesitate to take his face into her hands. The two exchanged a long kiss, and Liiza delivered a last short one before pushing him away.

Both of them ended up smirking, but Khan eventually turned and ran toward Snow. Liiza waited until his figure disappeared among the sky before turning to her side and falling asleep while wearing a warm smile.

Chapter 95 - Monster

"You are late for your morning lessons on your second day," Paul scolded while looking at the boy performing a military salute in front of him.

"I lost track of time during my meditations," Khan lied. "It won't happen again."

Paul had come out of his habitation as soon as he heard Snow's wings flapping in the camp. Khan wanted to hurry toward the lesson, but Paul had intercepted him before he could enter the building.

"Being on time is an important skill in all recruits," Paul commented. "Your presence here should mean that you are among the best of the best, and that includes not being late for the lessons."

"I understand," Khan replied while keeping his eyes on the soldier.

"Look," Paul eventually sighed while breaking his stern expression. "I know that you are a special case, and I don't want to be too harsh on you after everything that you have done on Istrone. However, I can't have recruits late or sleeping during classes. That behavior might affect my promotion."

"I won't be late again," Khan promised, "And I won't fall asleep during the lessons either. I'll be the perfect recruit that you need."

"How can I trust you?" Paul asked. "The schedule here is harsh, and you make it worse by training all night somewhere on an alien planet. You might be able to last for a few days, but the lack of sleep will definitely affect your performance in the missions with the Niqols."

"I have remained awake for almost three days before fighting a first-level warrior," Khan commented. "I won't make you lose face during those missions."

Paul suddenly recalled the reports of the Istrone's rebellion. He didn't know what to say in front of those facts. Khan had already proven that he could handle the lack of sleep perfectly.

"Just take care of yourself then," Paul signed. "The fact that you can endure the lack of sleep doesn't mean that you should remain awake as much as possible. Take it easy. You have earned it."

Paul began to leave, but Khan gave voice to a weak "sir" that made him turn.

"Would it be possible to skip the morning lessons?" Khan asked. "I know that a soldier should know our history and how mana cores work, but I'd rather spend that time training."

"Do you want to remain ignorant about such crucial topics?" Paul asked.

Khan snorted inside his mind. He came from the Slums. Most of the soldiers there didn't even know that they were immune to Tainted animals.

Moreover, learning about the various details of human development and the many stats of the mana cores felt pointless. Khan would rather have them as separate books to read whenever he had time. Having the chance to look them up on his phone was far better than spending four hours of his day listening to a professor.

"You aren't the first to complain about the tight schedule," Paul revealed. "The army thinks that the lack of training halls and the three free days are enough to make up for the time spent in the additional lessons. The higher-ups didn't add the missions with the Niqols to their math. They even tried to add courses unrelated to mana in the past."

"How would they even fit them?" Khan asked while shaking his head.

"Don't ask me," Paul shrugged his shoulders. "Captain Erbair has tried to reduce the number of lessons for quite some time as far as I know, but it seems that the higher-ups are stubborn."

"Why would they even oppose that?" Khan wondered. "I thought getting stronger soldiers was the army's priority."

"What do you want me to say?" Paul sighed while spreading his arms. "The higher-ups probably want to leave easy subjects to make even idiots graduate."

The training camp was free for two years, but the recruits often left it sooner to join different specialized fields. Still, they had to complete a few requirements to leave it and successfully graduate as soldiers.

Becoming a first-level warrior was the easiest and most common requirement due to the help of synthetic mana. Many recruits managed to make their attunement hit fifty percent in a bit more than a year, so they didn't even need to continue attending the lessons.

Other requirements involved successful mastery of a subject. Those events needed written tests planned through the network and helped to add value to a soldier.

Khan would need to pass tests in xenolinguistics, human and alien politics, and alien customs to appear on the list of potential ambassadors. He even had to add a decent level and multiple achievements to his profile to gain more value in the eyes of the Global Army.

Soldiers would gain access to contests and similar tests for specific positions as long as their profiles met their requirements. The network of the Global Army updated a list of available tasks and roles every hour, and a simple phone was enough to browse it.

Martha had taught Khan how to check his list in the past, which had obviously turned out to be empty. He didn't look it up after Istrone's events, but he knew that the process would remain pointless as long as his profile lacked proper certificates of his abilities.

"I'll ask if you can skip those two lessons," Paul continued. "They might make an exception for you. Giving you more free hours can only help my situation."

"Thank you, Paul," Khan honestly replied. "Though, make them send the lessons to my phone anyway. I want to read them when I have time."

"Sure, sure," Paul said while turning and waving his hand. "I'll try to get you everything you want as long as you stay away from alien pants."

Khan remained expressionless, but he still felt lucky that Paul wasn't looking at him when he made that comment. The soldier was quite perceptive, so Khan wanted to avoid giving even the slightest hint about his situation. It was better if Paul never learnt that he had already gone against his orders.

The conversation with Paul didn't exempt Khan from the morning lessons. He had been a mere thirty minutes late to the first class, so he had nine more hours to go before regaining his freedom.

The lack of sleep tried to get to Khan's head, but he easily vanquished those sensations. He paid attention during the lessons, even if many of them were incredibly dull, and his tiredness reached its peak once the night approached.

"Will you come with us tonight?" George asked while a small group of recruits hurried toward the camp's exit and turned to wait for him.

"I think I'll go for a flight again," Khan showed a sorry smile before looking toward the white dot that had appeared in the sky.

Snow landed next to him, but it didn't manage to scare George at that time. The boy had already grown used to the eagle, which ended up giving voice to a disappointed screech at that scene.

"Don't be late again tomorrow," George laughed, "And try to sleep a bit. I don't want to think about Istrone when I look at your face."

"How did it go with the girl in the end?" Khan asked while climbing on the eagle.

"It would have been better if I had your charm on my side," George laughed. "Be sure to help me one of these days."

Khan limited himself to laugh. Snow set off and flew toward the mountains in the distance. The Aduns had yet to see Liiza's eagle that day, and Khan could only hope that she went out for a flight at some point.

Spending time on his own wasn't an issue. Khan set the alarm and dived into his training. It was almost six pm, so he had twelve hours left before the lessons in the morning. He could easily fit his mental exercises, meditations, practice with the Lightning-demon style, and a nap before that.

Khan approached the mental training right away and finally completed the ninth exercise. He could move one step closer to the Wave spell now, but he felt a bit tired, so he decided to meditate for a few hours before standing up and repeating all the techniques of the Lightning-demon style.

'Only four hours before the lessons,' Khan sighed in his mind when he checked his phone.

His training could occupy his entire day. The lack of training halls didn't affect his packed schedule at all, especially since he could spend many hours meditating and increasing his attunement with mana.

Snow could require almost an hour to fly between the camp and the mountains. That time depended on how long it played during the flight, and Khan didn't want to take that away. He liked keeping his eagle happy, which meant that he only had three hours left.

Khan had returned to the large flat area where Liiza had kissed him, but she didn't arrive. The winds were strong there, but he didn't need to fear avalanches, so he decided to walk near the rocky wall and sleep in a partially covered corner.

The rocky surface was nothing too hard to withstand after Istrone's events. Khan even ended up falling asleep faster than usual there. The cold on that spot couldn't affect his body, and the winds didn't manage to keep him awake. He felt free and safe in the wild.

The noise generated by the flapping of wings awakened him before his alarm could ring. Khan opened his eyes and saw a dark-grey figure landing next to the edges of the flat area.

"I didn't want to wake you up," Liiza announced after jumping off her Aduns. "You must be exhausted after yesterday."

"I would have sensed your mana anyway," Khan revealed before scratching the corner of his eyes and reopening them to gaze at the stunning figure walking toward him.

Liiza was wearing her usual aloof expression when she was on her Aduns, but a smile had appeared on her face seeing Khan. She hurried toward him and knelt to lay her shoulder on the rocky side next to him.

"Hey," Liiza whispered.

"Hey," Khan replied, and his eyes inevitably fell on Liiza's mouth when she saw her biting her lower lip.

The two smiled as their faces drew near and eventually led to a kiss. A slight tinge of awkwardness had been in the air, but the two returned to the previous night when their lips met.

"My mother has come back today," Liiza explained before sitting on Khan's lap and facing him. "It's always hard to sneak out when she is home."

"It's fine," Khan said while their foreheads touched. "We can't spend every night together. Finding the time for everything is getting hard."

"I can always break up with you to give you more free time," Liiza teased before exploding into a laugh when she saw Khan's frown.

The two remained in that position for a while. They exchanged kisses, jokes, and long, meaningful gazes, but Khan's alarm eventually rang and reminded him about his lessons.

"I have to go," Khan revealed in a helpless tone while putting the phone back inside the pocket hidden by Liiza's leg.

"This is so annoying," Liiza sighed while tightening her legs around Khan's waist and doing the same with the arms clung to his neck.

"We will have more time together during the weekend," Khan explained. "I still have to train, but I wouldn't have to spend ten hours on the lessons."

"You won't," Liiza revealed. "Your team will have to help with a monster. The entire travel to the hunting area will take three days."

Chapter 96 - Bad Boy

"Monster?" Khan asked before thinking about something. "Wait. Don't tell me about that stuff. I don't want to risk using you."

"You are my boyfriend," Liiza said while wearing a sober expression and placing a hand on his cheek. "I won't keep secrets from you due to political reasons. Deal with it."

Khan opened his mouth, but the words remained stuck in his throat. He didn't have a proper response, and Liiza's eyes made him lose the desire to speak.

"What is it?" Liiza asked when she saw that Khan limited himself to stare at her. "Either kiss me or leave."

Khan couldn't help but place his hands on her waist to pull her closer, and the two exchanged a long kiss.

"Now give me a proper goodbye," Liiza whispered when their lips separated, and Khan wrapped his arm around her waist while pointing his feet to the ground and standing up.

Khan straightened his position while lifting Liiza with him. The Niqols gave voice to a cute giggle before kissing him again. She remained wrapped to him while he slowly walked toward Snow.

Liiza bit her lower lip when the two separated, and Khan couldn't move his eyes from her while her legs left his waist and returned to the ground. That was only the second day of their relationship, and the few minutes they had managed to spend together weren't nearly enough to satisfy them.

"On a positive note," Liiza continued while diverting her gaze and playing with her hair. "I'll have to oversee the Niqols class during the hunt, so I'll get the chance to see you fight."

"Are you looking forward to that?" Khan teased her while pulling her closer.

"A bit," Liiza turned to show a smile, and the two inevitably kissed again.

Khan had to muster the entirety of his mental strength to push Liiza away. He lightly squeezed her sides to enjoy her softness before giving a short kiss and turning toward his eagle.

Liiza and Khan exchanged a meaningful glance as their fingers left each other. They both could understand their desires, but neither of them acted to delay the separation even further.

"How strong are you anyway?" Khan asked while climbing on his Aduns.

Khan could sense the intensity of the mana inside Liiza's body. She didn't feel like a first-level warrior, but that feature sounded strange when he considered how Niqols had a great understanding of mana.

"Humans fill their bodies with mana before understanding how that energy works," Liiza explained after wearing a calm smile. "Niqols don't do that. We accept mana only after proving our understanding. I probably started my training after you."

"How can you be so strong then?" Khan asked in a shocked tone.

The mana contained inside her body put her near his level in terms of attunement. Khan knew that his similarities with the Nak had made his meditations quite effective, so he couldn't understand how Liiza could have reached his level in a shorter time.

"Nitis developed through mana for a long time," Liiza revealed. "The Niqols are like the other animals. Our starting point is above humans."

Khan understood at that point. It even made a lot of sense when he thought about it. The Niqols probably had mana inside their bodies since birth, so they could make up for the late start of their training with that advantage.

"Hurry up now," Liiza pressed.

Khan smiled and kept his eyes on Liiza while he patted Snow's neck. The Aduns set off and made sure to fly in a circle above the flat area a few times before shooting toward the camp.

Khan managed to arrive on time for his first lesson, and another long day started. His few hours of sleep were more than enough to keep him up and running until late afternoon arrived and he could leave for the mountain chain again.

Nitis allowed Khan to experience true freedom. He had a mandatory appointment to attend for ten hours a day, but he was more independent than all the other humans on the planet after that.

His Aduns gave him the chance to fly in areas that the other humans couldn't reach. Khan could move between different regions in a matter of hours. No one could even bother him due to his achievements on Onia and Istrone.

The meetings with Liiza went better in the following nights. The Niqols managed to sneak out of her home early, so the couple could spend a lot of time together.

The relationship ended up affecting Khan's sleeping schedule badly, but he felt the tiredness only when he reached the morning lessons. Curiosity took control of him when he attended the subjects necessary to become an ambassador, and his energy seemed endless when he was with Liiza.

Truth be told, Khan had the chance to rest, but his training would have suffered at that point, and he preferred to avoid that, especially with the new martial art and the Wave spell waiting behind the corner.

Stepping on the competent proficiency level with the Lightning-demon style would give him the chance to start studying the Divine Reaper without affecting his current ability. Meanwhile, the mental training for his element only needed him to clear three more exercises before approaching his first spell.

Khan ended up clearing the tenth mental exercise on his fourth night spent on the mountains. He didn't have to attend lessons the next day, so he didn't leave the flat area even after morning arrived.

Liiza had fallen asleep on his lap after spending the entire night flirting, kissing, and joking around, and Khan had used that chance to take a nap and resume his training. The captivating figure in his embrace had only benefited his already great mastery over the mental barrier and had made him clear the tenth exercise in no time.

'Paul has yet to call,' Khan thought when the mental exercise ended.

The beauty on his lap had revealed that the human troops would have to join a hunt during the three free days, but Paul didn't mention anything during the last period. Khan knew that Liiza didn't lie to him, so he expected a message to reach his phone soon.

"Why don't you ever rest?" Liiza complained in a sleepy voice while moving her hand on Khan's torso. "I caught a glimpse of your sleeping face only on the second night."

"I slept a few hours before," Khan said in a soft voice before kissing her forehead and sliding his hand over her back to reach her head. "A few naps are enough for me."

Khan couldn't help but smile when he noticed Liiza pouting with her eyes closed. He began to caress the back of her head, and Liiza replied by snuggling closer and putting her hand between the buttons of his uniform.

Khan had no experience with relationships, but he knew that it was impossible to reach the same level of intimacy with a human after only four days. The two were already sleeping together in the end, and Khan thoroughly enjoyed those moments.

Holding back was a problem at times, especially since Liiza was quite bold with her actions. She lay on him whenever she had the chance, and her hands had even started to sneak inside his uniform lately. Khan could suppress his arousal through his training, but Liiza had caught him right after completing the mental exercise now.

"I know," Liiza commented while caressing Khan's bare chest with her cold fingers. "You move and sweat a lot when you sleep."

Khan didn't say anything. Liiza was usually curious about those things, but she didn't question him at that time. She limited herself to point out that she knew about Khan's messy sleep, but no inquiry arrived from her side.

Liiza couldn't possibly imagine that Khan experienced the same nightmare whenever he fell asleep. Still, she knew about his azure scar, and he had even revealed that something had happened to him before Nitis. She connected the messy sleep with one of those events, but she decided to let Khan talk about it only when he felt ready.

Liiza never let go of her curiosity, so Khan could understand that she was remaining silent on purpose. That care for his feelings made him feel warm, and his mind grew messy when that sensation fused with her cold touch on his chest.

"Human girls would never sneak under my clothes so soon," Khan teased.

"I studied what you humans call decency," Liiza announced before sneaking her whole palm past the opening between the buttons and placing it on Khan's bare side. "You can be so stupid at times. Why would you even wait to get this?"

Liiza squeezed Khan's side and revealed a satisfied smile when she felt his firm muscles. Khan almost lost his mind, and his free hand went on her thigh while he bent forward and gently put her on the ground.

A white glow shone on his face at that point. Liiza had opened her eyes, and she fell in a daze when she noticed Khan's serious face. He appeared on the verge of exploding, and her grip on his naked side inevitably tightened.

Khan descended on her, and Liiza welcomed him by wrapping her free arm behind his neck. The two exchanged a passionate kiss, and one of the uniform's buttons came off as Liiza's hand began to move freely on Khan's naked skin.

Khan didn't hold back either. He felt slightly shy, but his desire was cutting off most of his restraint. The hand that had been on Liiza's thigh slid upward, caressed the side of her butt, and found the opening in the upper part of her tracksuit to reach her bare waist.

Thoughts stopped flowing when the coldness of Liiza's soft skin spread through his mind. The two became more passionate during their kiss, and their clothes suddenly started to feel uncomfortable.

However, Khan's phone suddenly rang, and a groan escaped his mouth. Liiza's relaxed her grip and gave him the chance to leave her lips. Still, a teasing smile appeared on her face when she saw that Khan used the hand behind her head to pick his device and left the other under her tracksuit.

'Mandatory meeting in one hour,' Khan read Paul's message on the screen, and the faint desire to destroy his phone filled his mind.

That desire intensified when his eyes moved on Liiza. She had her gaze on him while an arm rested on the ground above her head. Her foot was scratching Khan's leg, and part of her waist was in the open.

"I'm starting to hate humans," Liiza sighed. "When do you have to be there?"

"One hour," Khan replied while storing his phone. "I can stay a bit more."

Liiza's smile broadened, and she quickly spread her legs to catch Khan's waist in their grasp. She pulled him closer, and he let her guide him above her.

"You'd better set the alarm," Liiza said as more of her arm slid inside his uniform and made another button come off.

"I'd better set the alarm," Khan repeated as his hand slid over Liiza's naked side and reached her bra.

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Paul and the other recruits had gathered at the center of the camp. Even Lieutenant Kintea was there, but they all wore awkward expressions while they waited for Khan to arrive.

"How long?" Lieutenant Kintea asked when turning toward Paul.

"He still has five minutes," Paul replied while looking at his phone.

The Lieutenant was clearly annoyed that the time wasn't up yet, but a white figure suddenly appeared in his vision when he looked at the dark sky.

Snow dived at full speed toward the camp and unfolded its wings right before touching the ground. Khan quickly jumped off the eagle, and the scene made the recruits, Paul, and the Lieutenant wear confused expressions.

Khan was shirtless. Everyone could see his naked torso covered with small patches of grey snow. Meanwhile, the Aduns next to him had the torn upper part of his uniform in its beak, and it seemed happy when it swung it left and right.

"I'm on time, right?" Khan asked while wearing his best innocent face and patting his eagle. "I'm sorry. I would have come sooner if this bad boy stopped playing around."

Chapter 97 - Flashes

The group struggled to understand what had happened. It was clear that Khan had lost control of his Aduns, but they ignored how it had ended up with his uniforms in its beak.

"You aren't late," Paul quickly exclaimed before the Lieutenant could say anything. "Go get a new uniform and come back here. You have sixty seconds."

Khan nodded and patted Snow's neck before hurrying toward his room. The Aduns immediately set off, but only the male recruits gazed at the beautiful animal leaving the camp. The girls among the group couldn't help but shot glances at Khan's uncovered torso before giving voice to whispers, gasps, and giggles.

'I love that eagle!' Khan shouted in his mind while removing the snow from his torso.

The process revealed faint red marks on his back and chest. Liiza had grown more passionate during the last minutes they spent together, and her nails had left signs on many spots.

Khan didn't even have a proper way to justify the missing buttons from his uniform, so he had opted to return without it and blame Snow about the matter. The army couldn't do anything to a creature that the Niqols viewed as part of a holy species.

Messy thoughts ran through Khan's brain as he searched for a clean uniform in his room. The memories of the sensations experienced just a few minutes ago were still clear in his mind, and captivating images appeared in his vision whenever he went back to those moments.

'How can I even keep a straight face in front of her after tonight?' Khan cursed in his mind while buttoning his uniform and running back toward the center of the camp.

'We are definitely getting close to that,' Khan thought as he reached the recruits and performed a military salute after getting in line. 'Can I skip the condoms since she is a Niqols? Who can even know this? Wait, our sexual organs are compatible, but can we procreate?'

Countless doubts filled Khan's mind now that his chances of experiencing his first time seemed to increase. He knew a bit about the topic, and he valued his father's last words, but his options on Nitis were almost non-existent since his relationship could cause a major uproar.

"It's time to start the meeting," Paul cleared his throat. "We'll complete a mission with the Niqols in these days. Lieutenant Kintea will take care of explaining the various details."

Paul took a step back and performed a military salute. The Lieutenant nodded at that gesture and started walking in front of the recruits in silence. His glares made some of them lower their eyes, but Khan and many others remained unaffected by those gestures.

"Many of you have already completed missions with the Niqols," Lieutenant Kintea eventually announced. "Nitis' powerful fauna often generates problematic specimens that hurt the environment. The Niqols take care of them, and they have started to request our help more often after we proved ourselves useful."

Lieutenant Kintea waited for his words to seep inside the recruits' ears before continuing. "This mission won't be different from the others. You'll still have to help with a hunt. However, the target will be stronger this time. I know for a fact that the Niqols believe it to be a monster."

Some recruits frowned, others gasped, and a few looked around them to see if their companions knew more about the matter. Khan was the only one who didn't show any reaction. He was still thinking about Liiza with part of his mind, and the confusion of those around him confirmed that he wasn't alone in his ignorance.

"Are you even listening, Khan?" Lieutenant Kintea walked in front of Khan and asked when he noticed his lack of reactions.

"Yes, sir!" Khan promptly replied.

"What did I just say?" Lieutenant Kintea asked in a stern tone.

"We have to help the Niqols kill a monster, sir!" Khan exclaimed.

"Do you know what a monster is?" Lieutenant Kintea continued.

"No, sir!" Khan shouted.

"Why didn't you ask anything then?" The Lieutenant asked.

"I believed the Lieutenant or Paul would have explained it sooner or later, sir," Khan replied. "I didn't want to waste your time with questions, sir."

"What if we didn't say anything at all?" Lieutenant Kintea asked as his eyebrows arched.

"I would have killed the monster anyway, sir," Khan shouted, and a tinge of arrogance even seeped into his voice.

Khan had obviously given that answer on purpose. He was following Paul and Captain Erbair's advice. Playing it low and avoiding problems wasn't the right approach in that training camp.

"Hmph," Lieutenant Kintea snorted before leaving Khan and taking a few steps back so that the entire group of recruits could see him. "A monster is an unstable evolution of a Tainted animal. Mana can naturally cause mutations, even if it isn't as pure as the Nak's. Those are extremely rare events, but Nitis experiences them every once in a while due to the high number of Tainted beasts."

Khan felt actually surprised to learn that. He knew a lot about the Tainted status, and he was even aware of the chances of developing mutations from mana that didn't come from Nak. They were basically non-existent.

The chances of experiencing a second wave of mutations after achieving the Tainted status were even lower. Still, a reasonable explanation formed in Khan's mind when he thought about Nitis' situation.

The planet featured Tainted animals that ate each other for years. In theory, that could trigger new mutations after a while. The chances were still incredibly low, but they weren't impossible anymore in front of the fauna of an entire planet.

Khan found the matter quite interesting. He didn't know how strong a monster could be, but it couldn't be weak since the army was willing to deploy an entire class for the mission. He would finally have the chance to fight and deploy his techniques against a proper opponent.

Thinking that Liiza would be on the mission made Khan's mind go back to the last moments spent together, but Lieutenant Kintea suddenly turned to leave, and Paul forced the group to salute him.

"We'll leave in an hour," Paul explained once the Lieutenant entered a building. "Prepare your stuff and rides. Miss Liiza will lead us to the gathering point where we'll join the class of Niqols. The travel should take half a day, but I'll handle the provisions."

Everyone voiced a loud "yes, sir", but they slowly turned toward Khan due to the obvious issues connected to his ride.

"Will you be okay?" Paul asked. "I hope your bird doesn't tear your uniform apart again."

"I'll manage," Khan replied before sending a message through his mental connection.

An annoyed feeling spread from the mental connection. Snow didn't like that Khan had sent it away just to summon it a few minutes later, but the eagle couldn't say anything when it sensed Khan's helplessness.

"We are finally going to spend some time together," George announced after Paul left, "Even if you'll enjoy the travel from the sky."

"Aduns aren't as comfortable as you think," Khan laughed. "It kills your legs to be on their back for more than a few hours."

"Well, I know that you can handle that," George smirked before recalling something and clearing his throat. "Let me introduce you to everyone else."

A group of fifteen recruits stood behind George. They were the members of the class handled by Paul, the fourth human class in the entirety of Nitis.

A series of names flew toward Khan, but he only paid attention to a few of them since they belonged to recruits who stood out even among that experienced group.

Harris was a tall, muscular guy who already had a thick beard. His azure eyes created a stark contrast with his dark skin, and his slightly long curly hair fell to the side of his face to give it a round shape.

Natalie was as tall as Khan, and she wore a cold expression that threatened to ruin her natural beauty. Her olive skin mixed perfectly with her long black hair and dark eyes, and her uniform failed to hide her well-developed curves.

Sonia was a short girl who never stopped smiling. Her clear skin, long blonde hair, and azure eyes gave her an angelic appearance, but the rusty knife that she spun around her fingers ruined her pure aura.

Veronica was slightly taller than Khan. She had a metal stick sheathed on her back, and she wore armguards above her military uniform. She had short brown hair and green eyes, and her expressions gave off a gentle feeling.

It wasn't hard to understand that George liked Natalie. He had put more emphasis on her introduction, and Veronica had even rolled her eyes during that part. Still, Natalie didn't appear interested in those attentions.

The other recruits felt rather plain. They appeared as slightly better versions of Dorian right after the end of Istrone's rebellion. Their attunement with mana was decent, but Khan didn't feel threatened by them.

Only Harris, Natalie, Sonia, and Veronica seemed to be on George's level, but Khan didn't let his senses convince him that he was the strongest among the recruits. He didn't believe that his sensitivity to mana and instincts could evaluate battle prowess accurately after a single interaction.

None of the recruits mentioned their last name. George explained that the camp had that tradition and that everyone agreed to respect it. The boys and girls didn't want their families to have some influence there. That would lower their value in the eyes of the Lieutenants and Captain.

Khan exchanged a few superficial talks with the recruits. They mostly joked about his shirtless appearance from before, but they remained polite in their behavior.

George clearly was the reason behind their behavior. The recruits often mentioned some stories about Istrone that the boy had shared in the past days now that Khan was there. Luckily for him, Snow descended in the training camp before they could question him about specific events.

Khan led Snow to the holes containing worms and made it sit on the ground as he waited for the familiar dark-grey figure to appear in the sky. The other recruits gathered around him to take care of their Ugu, but they soon understood that those creatures were too anxious next to the eagle and him.

Khan decided to move by a few meters to accelerate the process, and the group became ready in minutes. The familiar noise generated by the flapping of wings also resounded in the area at some point and announced Liiza's arrival.

The dark-grey Aduns landed among the group. Liiza inspected all the recruits while wearing her aloof expression, and her face didn't flicker even when her eyes went over Khan.

Khan did the same. His poker face was flawless, but his mind had fallen into pure chaos when he noticed that Liiza was wearing the same tracksuit from before.

"Let's move," Liiza ordered before Paul could perform one of his usual polite greetings. "The Niqols class is already on the move. We don't want to be late."

The recruits could only follow their orders. Everyone mounted their Ugu and prepared for the long travel. Only Paul handled three of those mole-like animals since two of them took care of carrying the provisions for the trip.

Khan also climbed on Snow's back and waited for Liiza to set off. The girl shot a short glance at him before performing an emotionless nod and crouching her body forward.

Her Aduns took off, and Khan noticed Paul's proud gaze on him before following Liiza in the sky. She had performed that respectful nod on purpose. Khan's companions would basically believe that he had gained the Niqols' respect due to his ability with Snow.

Khan and Liiza flew recklessly when they were among the mountain. They accelerated, dived, and laughed when they were sure that no one was watching them.

The same couldn't happen during the travel. They had to maintain a low altitude to make sure that the Ugu could follow them, and their flight had to be relatively stable.

Snow quickly grew bored about that flight, but Khan could only pat its neck to reassure it. Still, he also grew annoyed about the process, and his mind soon slipped inside the meditative state.

It would take the group half a day to reach their destination, and Khan had no intention to spend that time doing nothing. He didn't feel confident enough to sleep while mid-air, but the meditations and the mental exercises were a different matter. Snow wasn't performing any sudden movement, so he could sit on it and train without relaxing the grip on his legs.

The eleventh exercise for his element was incredibly harsh, but Khan had learnt how to approach that training by then. He had to create and revert ten intricate hexagons five times in a row to succeed in the level, and he could only face the matter step by step.

A happy feeling eventually spread inside his mind and forced him to open his eyes. Khan felt glad to see that Liiza had started to descend toward a small forest situated in a valley between two large mountains.

The large dark leaves of those trees created an eerie scene when inspected from the sky, but Khan didn't have the chance to focus on them since a bluish light flashed in the distance every few seconds.

Khan didn't manage to see much from his position. It seemed that the sources of those flashes were lightning bolts exploding in the distance, but they weren't falling from the sky.

Chapter 98 - Teams

Bluish flashes disrupted the dark scenery and illuminated a distant patch of trees in the valley between the two mountains. The large dark leaves created thick crowns that hid the surface, so Khan didn't manage to see much from the sky.

Liiza made her Aduns land at the edges of the forest, and Khan didn't hesitate to follow her. The two dismounted and let their eagles leave before turning toward the incoming group of Ugu approaching from the distance.

"Did you manage to get some sleep?" Liiza whispered while the two kept straight faces and continued to stare at the Ugu.

"Not really," Khan replied, "But I'm not tired. How could I?"

"Don't let it get to your head," Liiza sneered. "You are cute, but I want to know you more before that."

"I'll tell you more," Khan promised.

"Don't do it for the wrong reasons," Liiza complained. "Niqols might have fewer restraints than humans, but we share the same feelings."

Khan frowned. He felt that was something wrong with Liiza, but that wasn't the right situation to question her properly.

"Hey, it's not simple attraction on my side," Khan revealed while mustering the entirety of his self-control to keep his face fixed on the Ugu. "It's deeper. I don't know how to explain it."

"I know," Liiza whispered. "I can read it in your eyes. I feel the same. Our mana is probably telling us that we are a match."

"Mana?" Khan asked as he failed to relax his frown. "Why would it have something to do with us?"

"That's so human of you," Liiza replied while clearing her throat to avoid giving voice to a short laugh. "Did you think that mana would have only changed your strength? Your feelings come from your brain, and you have mana there."

Understanding suddenly dawned upon Khan. Liiza was right. The human approach was quite barbaric now that he thought about it.

Mana already filled multiple spots inside his body, brain included. His base physical strength had increased due to that energy, so it was only normal that his feelings and sensations had gone through similar changes.

"Do I like you due to our mana?" Khan asked as a tinge of disappointment seeped into his voice.

"Khan, our mana is only an expression of ourselves," Liiza explained. "It's the most honest part of our character. Niqols consider it to be the purest form of attraction."

"That's a good thing, right?" Khan exclaimed as his eyes flickered.

He was dying to see Liiza's expression, but he couldn't leave any clue about their relationship. Appearing too intimate or relaxed next to the daughter of the ambassador handling the humans would only make the incoming group suspicious.

"That's really good," Liiza sighed, "But it means that now I'm worried about your safety."

Liiza didn't let Khan speak anymore. She stepped forward and walked toward the group of Ugu carrying Paul and the other recruits. Khan couldn't help but remain in a daze when he stared at her long white hair fluttering in the wind and revealing her captivating back. Still, he promptly shrugged his shoulders, wore a fake helpless smile, and pretended not to have control over his actions when he noticed Paul's admonishing gaze.

Some of the boys on the Ugu hid their smiles, while the girls shook their heads and revealed disgusted expressions. Yet, Paul soon glared at all of them and made them regain stern faces.

Khan's expression grew cold as soon as the others stopped focusing on him. He preferred his companions to believe that he was an idiotic horny kid rather than endangering his relationship with Liiza.

Her last words had made him desire to hold and reassure her, and his lustful thoughts had even dimmed after learning about the influence that mana had on his mind. Khan found himself wanting to talk about feelings with Liiza rather than thinking of ways to get her naked.

Khan followed Liiza, making sure to keep enough distance from her. He even took his position among his group once they reached their destination without getting close to the Ugu.

"My superiors have contacted me during the flight," Liiza announced while the human troops waited for her instructions. "The situation appears more dangerous than they had initially predicted. We must reach the Niqols group right away."

Liiza didn't wait for an answer and turned to walk toward the forest's edges. The other recruits dismounted from their Ugu, and Paul approached Khan while carrying two backpacks almost as tall as him.

"You get one," Paul ordered while dropping a backpack on the ground.

"I was only looking," Khan complained while crouching to wear the backpack.

The item was incredibly heavy and forced Khan to bend forward to carry it properly. Still, his current attunement with mana and training with the Lightning-demon style made his balance quite firm even with the additional weight.

"We have fine butts in the camp," Paul snorted. "Look at them next time."

Paul reunited with the group, and Khan followed him after regaining his cold face. The soldier shot glances at him while everyone walked toward Liiza, but he could only see the most driven recruit in the world now. The heavy backpack on his back didn't even manage to slow him down.

"I don't get you at times," Paul whispered.

"You aren't the first to say that," Khan revealed as a sad smile appeared on his face.

"I'm sorry," Paul quickly said when he noticed that his words had awakened sad memories. "Just focus on doing well in the hunt. Handle it like you handled Lieutenant Kintea."

Khan smirked, and the conversation ended there. Paul made sure to walk in front of the group and reach Liiza, who entered the forest when everyone gathered at its edges.

The group moved on foot among the uneven terrain inside the forest. Large roots came out of the ground and made it impossible to walk through the area in a straight line, but Liiza's steps never faltered as she led everyone across the seemingly identical trees.

A relatively large empty spot eventually unfolded in everyone's vision. Khan and the others could see twenty Niqols sitting in a circle while an older alien drew maps on the terrain.

"[Our allies]!" The older Niqols exclaimed when he noticed Liiza and the humans behind her.

"Come, come. We were just starting the briefing."

The older alien had the aspect of a middle-aged man who carried the Niqols' iconic features. He was slender, with dark-blue skin and glowing white eyes. Long white hair combed into multiple braids fell on his back, and a gentle feeling filled his face.

"Chief Alu," Paul exclaimed while performing a polite bow once he approached the group. "It's an honor to meet you again."

"You are too polite," Chief Alu laughed. "It's always nice to work with humans. It's a pity that the situation today is quite serious."

Paul gestured at the recruits to form a circle around the sitting Niqols. Liiza took her seat on the ground next to some of them, and Khan couldn't help but notice how her companions appeared rather dismissive toward her arrival.

That reaction didn't apply only to Liiza. The young Niqols in the circle barely glanced at the humans even after they stood behind them. Only a few aliens took their time to inspect all the recruits before moving their attention on the map again.

"I believe we can start," Chief Alu announced in his perfect human accent. "I'll explain the situation and plan in both languages to make sure that all of us understand them properly."

Chief Alu resumed his explanation in the Niqols' language, and the human group politely waited for him to finish. Khan had the chance to inspect the mana in the aliens during that time, but their level seemed to be on par with his companions.

Only Chief Alu appeared clearly stronger than Paul. He gave off the same sensations that Khan felt with Lieutenant Kintea and other stronger soldiers. It was clear that he wasn't a simple squad leader.

"It's your turn now," Chief Alu announced. "As I said to the others, the monster has keen senses capable of warning it about potential threats. We have already tried to hunt it with stronger soldiers, but it keeps escaping them. Only those that aren't dangerous in its mind can approach it without making it run away."

Chief Alu then moved his gaze toward Khan and revealed a warm smile before continuing. "You have seen the forest from above. Hunting this monster with the Aduns will only put them in danger."

The young Niqols shot curious glances toward Khan at that point. They all knew the human language, and they had even heard that a human had successfully tamed an Aduns. However, they didn't think that he would have fought with them.

Khan saw different feelings on their faces. Some Niqols were angry, while others felt slightly curious. Still, they all made sure to glance at Liiza before moving their eyes back on the ground.

Anger inevitably built inside Khan's mind when he saw Liiza ignoring those glances. Nothing appeared on his expression, but it didn't feel good at all to see his girlfriend going through that treatment.

"We would normally send higher-ups with the recruits during these hunts," Chief Alu continued, "But the careful personality of this monster doesn't allow them to get too close. Even Paul will have to remain a bit far away during the hunt."

Chief Alu basically explained that the recruits wouldn't have any backup during the hunt. Paul would be nearby, but he would still need a few minutes to reach their position if something happened.

"Let me be clear," Chief Alu explained. "We have broadly evaluated the monster's power. You are more than enough to kill it. The only problem is that it can also kill you, so be careful."

Chief Alu then cleared his throat and moved his attention to the drawings on the ground. "We have other groups ready to intercept the monster if it decides to escape. Try to push it toward one of the exits marked on the map in that case."

The map was quite simple. It depicted the two mountains, the valley, and the passages connected to the area. The forest was vast, but the region only had a few clear entrances. The monster would sacrifice its favorable position if it tried to escape through other paths.

"A few warnings now," Chief Alu added. "This monster has developed special abilities. I believe you have heard the crackling noises when entering the forest. It has also subdued a few animals and created a small pack, so it won't be your only opponent."

The explanation continued with a description of the monster. Khan vaguely understood that it resembled a tiger with grey fur and black stripes, but it was hard to convey those details due to the differences between the two species.

Chief Alu even revealed that they had never managed to get a picture of the creature with their devices due to the lightning bolts that it released. However, he reassured the group by explaining how impossible it was to miss it.

"Rest for a few hours now," Chief Alu ordered. "I'll send a few explorers forward to confirm the monster's position. Make sure to gather your strength."

Paul and the others performed a polite salute and settled in a different corner of the empty spot. Khan could eat and take a short nap while the group waited for the explorers to come back, and he felt at his peak when Paul summoned everyone.

Niqols and humans gathered and created a simple battle tactic. Those groups couldn't work together correctly, but they could plan approaches that would make them cooperate better.

The two groups divided themselves into smaller teams that would approach the target from different angles and call for help whenever the battle started.

Khan had George, Sonia, and a tall boy called Glenn in his team. The four of them exchanged glances with the other teams before walking on different paths. Paul and Liiza remained behind the groups and started to follow them only after a few minutes.

The dark environment would normally prevent inspections from their spots, but Paul had brought two binoculars that featured precise heat sensors. Liiza could see the entirety of Khan's silhouette even if dozens of trees separated her from him.

Chapter 99 - Lightning Bolts

Khan and George moved through the forest without showing any hesitation. Sonia and Glenn couldn't help but notice how confident of their abilities they appeared when they walked toward their dangerous target.

George instinctively let Khan go first. He had developed those habits on Istorne, and he had never regretted them. Khan was the strongest recruit he had ever seen. The others in the training camp might have only heard rumors about his feats, but George had seen them with his own eyes.

Sonia and Glenn could only silently accept the gestures and whispered orders that the two boys threw at them. Khan and George were only newbies on Nitis, but they had survived Istrone's crisis. Their simple steps carried a confidence that the other recruits didn't have.

"Tainted animal ahead," Khan suddenly announced as he spread his arm to make the group stop. "Seven meters in that direction. I'll handle it."

Khan didn't wait for the others to reply. He didn't even check if they had understood his orders. His figure bent forward before shooting through the darkness that surrounded the trees.

"He migh-," Glenn tried to speak, but George promptly glared at him and made him fall silent.

George had been relatively friendly inside the camp. He had even joined the few recreational activities available on Nitis and established decent relationships with the other recruits. Everyone also knew about his attraction toward Natalie, which only made his character more approachable.

However, George seemed to have transformed into a different person now. His expression was cold as he kept both hands on the short sword sheathed at his side.

His solemnity existed in a different realm. The other recruits were worried and tense about the hunt, but they never forgot that their target was an animal. They took the mission seriously, but they didn't consider that they could lose their lives against the monster for even a second.

George was different. He had already seen how frail life could be. The other recruits were hunting, but he was at war. Luckily for him, someone else in his group shared that feeling.

A faint thud soon resounded in the forest and made the trio look at a dark spot among the trees. A figure slowly became visible inside the darkness, and Sonia and Glenn couldn't help but enter a defensive stance.

"Calm down," Khan whispered once he came out of the darkness. "There was another Tainted animal nearby. I had to change direction mid-way."

"We can close on both of them and kill them swiftly," Sonia suggested, but she wore a confused expression when she saw Khan's frown.

"What are you saying?" Khan asked. "The animals are already dead."

Khan didn't care about the surprised expressions that appeared on Sonia and Glenn. He directly turned to resume his march through the forest, and George nodded at the two recruits before following him.

Sonia and Glenn were still confused about the matter, but a squelching sound echoed from under them when they started to follow the two boys.

Glenn and Sonia suddenly noticed that a dense dark liquid had created a large spot on the ground. They didn't understand the nature of that substance among the darkness, but everything became clear when they saw that more of it stained the path ahead. Its source was Khan's left foot.

Khan's steps were too light to leave footprints, but he couldn't stop the blood that had tainted his shoe from falling on the ground. He had ended up killing two Tainted animals that resembled wolves with multiple tails in a few seconds. Two kicks had been enough to shatter their skulls.

The path ahead appeared clear. Khan couldn't sense anything off around him, but the air grew tense as he approached the target. A strange power seemed to run among the trees. It created sensations similar to those felt on the teleports, even if far milder.

"This feels dangerously close to a first-level warrior," Khan couldn't help but think as he proceeded forward.

Faint bluish flashes shone in the distance from time to time. They never happened in the same spot, but they came from the same direction. The monster had yet to notice the hunters, so the various teams could approach their target safely.

However, the valley was quite large and had many hiding spots. The Niqols' intelligence was pretty accurate, but it couldn't consider everything, especially when Nitis had Tainted animals that could live underground.

A series of loud barks suddenly resounded through the silent forest. The recruits and the Niqols couldn't fail to recognize those cries. Even Khan could link them to the Ugu when he heard them.

The forest grew messy after the barks echoed inside the darkness. Howls, roars, and growls started to resound through the area and warn everyone about the threat approaching the monster.

Sounds of battles quickly followed. Khan and his group started to hear humans and Niqols shouting whenever roars and other cries resounded through the forest.

Glenn immediately tried to move toward the nearest group, but Sonia promptly grabbed the side of his uniform and made him stop. Her usual smile appeared on her face as she explained the reason behind her actions. "Our mission is to kill the monster."

"But we have orders to help the others!" Glenn exclaimed before covering his mouth when he noticed that George and Khan were glaring at him.

"We have orders to help with the monster," Khan explained before turning toward the faint glows that continued to appear in the distance. "Move now. They are among the best recruits of the Global Army. They can handle a few Tainted animals."

Glenn couldn't respond to those words. Khan and George had already considered the situation and had found the best course of action. Still, a faint worry appeared in his mind when he thought that his group might have to face the monster on their own.

The four advanced until Khan spread his arms to make them stop. A crack suddenly opened on the terrain a few meters from them and tilted the tree right above it. A Ugu's head started to come out of the ground, but Khan didn't give it the time to get on its feet.

Khan shot ahead. The Ugu peeked out of the terrain, but a kick landed on the side of its head. Cracking noises came out of its skull, and more cracks spread on the ground, but the creature stopped moving after the attack.

The three recruits could see how Khan's foot had torn the creature's skin and had forced the side of its head to cave in after he retracted his leg. The same dark spots from before appeared on the ground as he walked deeper into the forest. He didn't even look at his companions since it was their job to keep up with him.

The team met two more Tainted animals on their path, but Khan killed them in a single blow. Those creatures couldn't survive his precise and merciless kicks. They weren't even able to follow his movements.

Needless to say, Sonia and Glenn felt utterly in awe of Khan's power. They didn't fear the Tainted animals, and they wouldn't even have problems dealing with them. Yet, Khan's kills were clean and immediate. They didn't feature any superfluous movement, and they were so fast that their eyes barely managed to understand when he shot ahead.

George also felt slightly surprised. He didn't let that emotion appear on his face, but he admired Khan's improvements. Only a few weeks had passed since Istrone's matters, but he had already grown stronger.

The bluish flashes intensified as the group approached their destination. Burnt trunks even started to appear on their path. It was clear that the lightning bolts had reached those spots, but the monster seemed to have moved by then.

"We must pick up our pace," Khan ordered. "The monster is retreating."

"Don't go too fast," George commented before preparing for the imminent sprint.

Sonia and Glenn imitated him, and the four started to run through the trees as they tried to reach the source of the bluish flashes. Khan obviously contained his speed, but his concentration increased during the sprint.

Traces of natural illumination eventually appeared in the distance. The sight initially surprised Khan, but he realized what had happened when he saw that a few trees were on fire.

Trunks filled with charred holes and burning cracks began to fill the area. Khan could finally see everything almost clearly, and his eyes caught a glimpse of a dark figure leaving that illuminated zone.

Khan took a deep breath as his body bent forward. The three recruits were right behind him, but they suddenly lost sight of his figure.

Messy images filled Khan's eyes as he sprinted at full speed, but their central part was clear. His peripheral vision felt unreliable, but his acceleration didn't affect his reading of the path ahead.

Khan moved quickly among the trees until he reached the escaping black figure that he had seen before. A two meters tall striped animal appeared in his vision, but he didn't have the time to inspect his opponent in that situation.

The creature suddenly turned and saw a rotating figure falling toward the center of its body. Khan's movements were too fast, so his heel descended on the animal's back before it could prepare for the battle.

The beast bent forward when the heavy kick landed on its back. It gave voice to a painful cry before turning its anger toward the figure that had resumed to spin once his right foot had touched the ground.

Khan threw a roundhouse kick toward the creature's head, and the latter couldn't avoid it. His foot landed on the animal's nose and made it bleed, but it didn't manage to fling it away.

'What?' Khan shouted in his mind when he saw that the creature had maintained its position after the powerful attack.

His execution had been perfect. Khan had thrown one of his strongest kicks toward the beast, but the latter didn't budge. The blow had hurt it, but it had remained rooted on the ground.

A faint bluish glow began to shine on the dark fur while Khan still had his foot on the creature's face. He immediately shot back to stop at a few meters from his opponent. His new position finally allowed him to inspect the beast, and his expression only grew colder when he sized it.

The animal only had the striped fur of a tiger. Yet, its body and face seemed the result of a fusion between a wolf and a bear. Its torso was large and thick, its legs were quite massive, but its triangular head and long pointy ears made its overall appearance feel quite off.

Khan didn't have any doubt about his target after the last exchange. He knew that he had found the monster, but surprise still filled his mind. He had clearly broken the creature's nose with his last kick, but that didn't seem to affect its condition.

The mana inside the monster's body grew messy as the bluish light coming out of its fur intensified. Its hair stood up as sparks started to leak out. Something was coming, and Khan didn't know if he could endure it.

Then, the light intensified, and Khan sensed a trail of mana approaching him at high speed. His eyes couldn't help him in that situation, but he instinctively dodged to the side and stopped when he slammed on a nearby tree.

The light dimmed at that point, and Khan became able to inspect the environment again. The tree behind his previous position was on fire now, and its trunk even fell due to the large crack that had opened at its center.

Other trees all around the monster had taken fire and had started to break. The creature didn't launch the lightning bolts only toward Khan. It had attacked different spots at the same time.

'Those are quite deadly,' Khan commented in his mind as his figure crouched.

His senses told him that the monster was weaker than a first-level warrior. The only issue was with its lightning bolts, but Khan was fast enough to dodge them. He wouldn't feel fear when the battle depended on his best quality.

The monster turned toward him and roared in anger as blood fell from its broken nose, but multiple figures suddenly appeared in Khan's senses. Nevertheless, the event didn't make him lose his cool since he recognized their familiar presence.

Multiple Niqols shot out of the trees and charged at the monsters while George and the rest of his group appeared behind Khan. The latter only needed to point at the creature to mark the beginning of the offensive.

Khan shot ahead and managed to deliver a powerful kick to the side of the monster's head since it had turned to inspect its new opponents. A cracking noise spread from its jaw, but the beast couldn't turn toward him right away since the Niqols arrived.

The aliens performed precise martial arts that heavily relied on palm strikes and blows featuring discharges of mana inside their opponent's body.

The monster suffered six different attacks in the span of one second, and bluish light immediately started to run through its fur again. Khan didn't hesitate to retreat at that sight, and the Niqols imitated him when they noticed his reaction, but the lightning bolts shot out of the creature far sooner at that time.

Khan barely had the time to perform a side-step that made him avoid a direct impact with the lightning bolt. The attack scorched his waist before continuing to fly past him.

The other Niqols also had a keen perception of mana, so they avoided suffering severe injuries during that reckless discharge of power. The lightning bolts hit their legs, shoulders, or arms, but they never managed to land on their vital organs.

Yet, the Niqols weren't the only soldiers on the scene. A painful cry suddenly reached Khan's ears and made him turn toward the team behind him.

Khan quickly saw George and Sonia, but he noticed how they were looking at a spot behind them. His eyes also moved there, and coldness spread through his mind when he saw Glenn lying on a tree.

The upper part of Glenn's uniform had vanished, and the right side of his charred chest was completely in the open. A spiderweb of red marks expanded from the spot where the lightning bolt had landed, and the scent of burnt flesh started to spread in the area.

Chapter 100 - Burns

Shock and fear spread among the group on the scene. Sonia and the Niqols remained still when they saw Glenn's state. Many aliens had even suffered injuries, but they weren't nearly as severe.

However, most of the injured Niqols couldn't fight anymore. Some couldn't stand up due to their fuming legs. Fears had also started to take control of their minds and affect their actions.

Khan, George, and a few aliens were the only ones who managed to remain calm, and they quickly recognized each other when their eyes swept the battlefield. Warriors didn't need words in those situations. Short exchanges of glances were enough to understand that they had to take the mess into their own hands.

"Sonia, bring Glenn away!" Khan shouted while his eyes remained on the massive monster.

"George, get me something sharp!"

The monster was puking blood. The palm strikes from the Niqols had hurt its insides and had inflicted decent damage. Yet, the creature remained on its legs, and angry roars mixed with its retches whenever it raised its eyes toward its opponents.

Khan found himself in the same situation experienced with the first-level warrior Kred. His martial art gave him the chance to approach his opponent safely and deliver powerful blows, but simple kicks weren't enough to fill the gap that divided the level of their bodies.

The pain spreading from his waist even forced him to accept that the monster could be more dangerous than the Kred. The creature had attacks that could almost match his speed, and he felt unable to predict their arrival properly.

Khan wanted to put an end to the battle quickly, but he lacked deadly attacks. Yet, everything would change if he could get close enough to stab the monster's head with one of George's enhanced weapons.

"He's not breathing!" Sonia suddenly shouted.

"Get him out anyway!" Khan ordered before shooting forward and slamming his knee on the distracted creature.

The skin on the monster's forehead opened, and cracks appeared on its skull, but the attack failed to fling it away again. The creature even tried to open its mouth and bite Khan's leg off, but a kick landed on its cracked jaw and completely broke it.

The monster didn't understand what was happening. The creature didn't even see Khan's movements, and the lower part of its mouth now hung from its broken jaw. The beast had even lost

track of him again after the last kick, and bluish light spread through its fur as anger built inside its mind.

The sparks that ran through its hair dispersed when a heel slammed on the back of its head. Khan completed his third technique and immediately flowed into a fourth when the monster's face touched the ground.

The spinning airborne kick had slammed the monster's head to the ground, and the fourth technique moved the entirety of Khan's bodyweight on its nape to make it dive deeper into the terrain.

Some of the escaping sparks managed to hit his body during the attacks, but they only created small red patches on his skin. The monster didn't manage to gather much mana before losing control of its ability, so Khan easily endured the bluish flashes.

Two Niqols approached the monster from behind at that point. Palm strikes landed on the creature's fur and spread tremors inside its body than Khan could feel from the foot still planted on its head.

"Catch!" George shouted as a flying mass of mana approached Khan from the side.

Khan's hand shot to grab the mass that turned out to be George's short sword. A dark-silver halo was covering the sharp edges of the blade. The boy had already enhanced the weapon, and Khan didn't hesitate to make it descend toward the monster's head as his foot left its nape.

The blade's sharp tip descended toward the center of the hole opened during the last two kicks, but an intense bluish light suddenly filled the environment and blinded everyone on the scene. Khan felt that mana was flying toward him, but he was too close to dodge it.

Khan lost his foothold and his grip on his blade. His senses were numb as his eyes tried to disperse the light that covered the environment. Something appeared in his vision when a rough feeling started to spread from his back. He slowly understood where he was, and his condition made him curse.

The last attack had flung Khan away by a full eight meters. He even suspected that the flight would have lasted longer if his back didn't hit one of the few intact trees in the area.

George's blade was nowhere to be seen, and charred flesh filled his palm. Tree-shaped patches of red skin spread from that spot and covered the entirety of his left arm. The lightning bolt had hit him, but the damage wasn't too severe. He could even open and close his hand if he ignored the pain.

Khan forced himself to stand up. Blood flowed through his back due to a few wounds that had opened after the impact with the tree, but they weren't worthy of his concern, not while the monster kept its eyes fixed on him.

The monster appeared tired and on the verge of fainting. Its condition gave Khan the time to inspect the battlefield, but the situation seemed far from promising.

The two Niqols who had been close to the creature couldn't dodge the attack either. Khan could see some of the injured aliens taking care of them and dragging them out of the battlefield.

George didn't move as he wielded his sheath with both hands and stared at the monster. He had never dared to get too close to the creature, but Khan couldn't complain about his decision. After all,

the boy had no way of dodging the lightning bolts. Only the distance was giving him the chance to react to those attacks.

Some of the injured Niqols who weren't busy tending those in bad condition stood up, but they also remained at some distance from the monster. They knew that they were close to defeating the creature, but it was clear that the first to charge ahead would have to endure the entirety of its rage.

Khan accepted that he was the only one up for the task. His injuries wouldn't slow him down either, so he had a high chance to dodge the next attack as long as he deployed hit and run tactics. Yet, waiting seemed a better option since it would be easier to react to an incoming lightning bolt than avoid it once he was up close.

Blood continued to flow from the monster's mouth and nose. The recent attacks had clearly affected it, but it continued to stand and stare at Khan. The creature had identified him as the biggest threat inside the group, and it didn't dare to stop studying him.

'Come on!' Khan cursed in his mind. 'Attack me already!'

The silence that had fallen on the battlefield was deafening. Only the crackling noise of the small fires, the creaking sounds of the bending trunks, the ragged breathing of the recruits, and the occasional retches of the monster filled the area. Everything else was still, but heavy steps soon took care of bringing movement again.

Many presences suddenly appeared in Khan's mind. The other teams of humans and Niqols came out of the trees and charged at the monster. The group had invested some time encircling the area, so they attacked the creature from every direction.

Khan's eyes widened at that scene. His mind generated images on its own when he saw the twenty recruits from both species jumping toward the monster. He could already predict what was about to arrive, so he quickly hid behind a tree.

A blinding bluish light filled the area. Khan could see that radiance even if he had closed his eyes and had hidden behind the thick trunk. The tree experienced a violent tremor when an attack landed on its surface, and Khan decided to take a peek at the battlefield after that event.

Recruits from both species were flying in every direction. Charred cracks had even appeared on the ground due to the many lightning bolts that had shot out.

Everything flowed in slow motion in Khan's eyes. The recruits were still in the air when he got a complete view of the scene. Thoughts were trying to move through his mind and develop a battle plan, but his instincts made him act before that.

The monster had always required some time to prepare that massive discharge of lightning bolts. The creature seemed to get faster after every attack, but its improvements didn't change that it had just released its accumulated energy. It was at its weakest now, and Khan didn't hesitate to exploit the safest seconds between the exchanges.

Khan pushed his body more than he had ever done in the past. The Lightning-demon style's power depended on how much speed he could endure, but his limits didn't matter now.

Khan had instinctively understood that he wouldn't get a better chance since the monster continued to shorten the time required by its ability. He had to make sure that his next attack killed the creature and put an end to that dangerous battle.

The pain released by his charred palm intensified as his skin burnt due to the friction with the air. Khan disregarded the physical limits set by his attunement with mana and reached the monster in an instant.

The mental barrier had surged to keep the pain away and make Khan focus on his technique. He had only one shot at that. Failing to deliver a proper blow would leave him open in front of the angry monster.

The entirety of his momentum flowed into his rising knee. An intense burning sensation tried to seep past the mental barrier during the execution of the technique, but Khan managed to keep it away until his attack landed on the monster's head.

The mental barrier crumbled at that point, and Khan experienced the entirety of his pain. He felt on fire, and the faint scent of burning flesh even spread from under him.

However, he quickly forced himself to stabilize his position and lift his hands when he saw the monster's shape rising and standing on its rear legs. Khan noticed that smoke was coming out of his arms, but he didn't let that detail distract him from the danger in front of him.

The monster raised its front legs when it straightened its position completely, but no attack descended. The creature bent backward and fell on its back right in front of Khan's incredulous eyes.

Khan relaxed after he noticed that the monster didn't move anymore. His eyes quickly moved toward its neck as he took careful steps to circle the creature's big figure. His legs lost power and made him fall on his knees when he noticed that the beast's head had disappeared. It had turned into a bloody pulp that had partially vanished inside its body.