

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Chaol Westfall strategically interrupts a private trade meeting of the khagan, leveraging his connections with palace guards to gain entry. Despite the khagan's initial irritation, Chaol maintains his composure, refusing to be intimidated by the ruler's power or his own physical limitations. He deliberately bypasses protocol by addressing the foreign trade vizier directly, revealing his knowledge of Aelin Galathynius's large firelance orders. This calculated move sets the stage for his bold proposition, demonstrating his political acumen and refusal to let his wheelchair diminish his authority in the high-stakes negotiation.

The chapter's tension escalates as Chaol reveals his intent to double Aelin's weapons order, offering his kingdom's priceless treasure as payment. The viziers react with shock, particularly when Chaol confirms the treasure's valuation is already underway. The khagan's silent calculation and subsequent dismissal of his advisors suggest Chaol's strategy is working. This confrontation highlights the protagonist's clever manipulation of economic incentives to sway political decisions, while maintaining an outward appearance of respectful diplomacy despite the underlying power struggle.

In a pivotal one-on-one exchange, the khagan accuses Chaol of manipulating him into the war through financial incentives. Chaol neither confirms nor denies this, allowing the ruler to draw his own conclusions. Their conversation shifts from commerce to philosophy as the khagan challenges Chaol's understanding of true warfare, emphasizing the psychological and unified commitment required beyond mere weapons and strategy. This moment serves as both a test of Chaol's resolve and a revelation of the khagan's deeper understanding of conflict.

The chapter concludes with an unspoken tension between the two leaders, the khagan's words hanging heavily in the air. While no formal alliance is declared, Chaol's actions have forced the ruler to seriously consider involvement. The exchange

underscores the novel's recurring themes of power dynamics, the true nature of strength, and the complex calculations behind wartime alliances. Chaol's physical limitations contrast sharply with his strategic prowess, proving his worth as a diplomat and leader despite the khagan's attempts to undermine him.

