



Chapter 12: The Man Cave of MUD

The Garage of Legends

After dinner, when the plates were cleared and the house quieted, Jesse motioned for Chet to follow him outside.

"Got something to show you," Jesse said, a mischievous grin on his face.

Chet's ears flicked in curiosity. "You're not gonna try to sell me something, are you?"

Jesse laughed. "Not unless you've got deep pockets, Punaab. Follow me."

He led Chet around the side of the house to a **massive, reinforced garage**, its doors bearing the emblem of a **starship engine wrapped in flames**.

"Welcome," Jesse said, punching a code into the keypad, "to my little slice of paradise."

The doors slid open with a hiss, revealing a space that was anything but little.

The **garage** was enormous, lit by bright overhead lights that reflected off polished hulls and gleaming metal. Inside were **dozens of starships**, each one a **work of art**, their sleek designs blending **MUD industrialism with the daring aesthetics of an outlaw hotrod**.

Chet whistled low. "This... is not what I expected."

Jesse smirked. "What, you thought I was just some old war dog who grills meat and tells stories? Nah, this is my real pride and joy."

"You built these?" Chet asked, stepping closer to a ship painted in black and gold, its surface etched with intricate designs.

Jesse nodded. "Started as a side hustle back in the day. Didn't like the cookie-cutter ships the corporations were putting out, so I started making my own. Next thing I knew, people were throwing credits at me to make 'em something unique."

Chet ran a paw along the hull of a smaller ship, its engines gleaming with chrome accents. "These aren't just ships. They're art."

Jesse grinned. "Damn right they are. And every one of 'em's got a story."

Stories Among the Stars

Jesse poured two glasses of something strong and amber-colored, handing one to Chet as they sat on a pair of stools in the corner of the garage.

"You've got stories," Jesse said, leaning back. "I can see it in your eyes."

Chet smirked, swirling the liquid in his glass. "I've got a few."

"Then let's trade," Jesse said. "I tell you about the time I outran a USTUR patrol in a prototype cruiser, and you tell me what brings a Punaab like you to MUD space."

Chet hesitated, then raised his glass. "Deal."

The night unfolded in **a blur of tales**—Jesse recounting his days as a **corporate operative turned entrepreneur**, his love for building ships, and the times he'd tested his creations in races that **defied the laws of physics**.

Chet, in turn, told Jesse about **his quest for the Tower of Babel**, his encounters with ancient ruins, and the mysteries he was still trying to unravel about **his own past**.

Jesse listened intently, his eyes sharp but kind. "You're carrying a lot of weight for one guy," he said.

Chet shrugged. "Comes with the job."

"Maybe," Jesse said. "But you ever stop to think that maybe the job doesn't have to come first?"

Chet tilted his head. "You sound like my old commander."

"Smart guy," Jesse replied with a grin.

An Appointment with the Stars

The hours passed quickly, and before Chet knew it, the first light of dawn was creeping over the horizon.

Jesse clapped him on the shoulder as they stepped out of the garage, the night air cool against their skin.

"You're welcome here anytime, Roberts," Jesse said. "Something tells me you're the kind of guy who could use a place to come back to."

Chet smiled faintly. "I appreciate that."

"But," Jesse added, "I get the feeling you've got somewhere you need to be."

Chet looked up at the sky, the faint glow of stars barely visible against the morning light.

"Yeah," he said quietly. "I've got an appointment with the stars."

Jesse nodded. "Then you'd better get moving. Just don't forget—you've got friends in MUD space now."

Chet extended a paw, and Jesse shook it firmly.

"Take care of your family," Chet said.

"And you take care of yourself," Jesse replied.

As Chet walked toward his ship, ready to carry him back to his quarters, Chet Roberts felt something he hadn't felt in a long time.

He felt like he had **a home to come back to.**