

CHAOS' HEIR

Chapter 16 - Trade

Everyone in the world knew the meaning of those stars. The Global Army was so important that even the citizens of the Slums could evaluate a soldier from that feature.

The Lieutenant had three stars on each shoulder. He was a third-level warrior and a third-level mage. He had the shape of a human, but he hid enough power to earn the label of a monster.

Bloke didn't dare to speak anymore. His surprise slowly vanished to make room to regret. The boy knew how the ranks in the Global Army worked, so he had never expected that a mere Lieutenant could wield so much power.

"You must be pretty strong," Khan commented while feigning naivety.

"I won't buy your act," The man snorted. "Remember that I've watched your fight."

Khan smiled, but he didn't add anything. The man could see right through him. Pretenses were useless in that situation.

"How can you be a simple Lieutenant?" Bloke eventually asked. "You can become a Major at your level. I can't understand how you can even accept to be a mere guard in the prisons of the camp."

"You are too young to understand the intricacies of the politics," The man sighed. "I'm a simple soldier. Fighting is what I do best."

"Wait a moment," Another boy said while nearing the metal bars. "I think I've heard about you. You are Carl Dyester, the butcher of Istrone."

Khan limited himself to listen to that conversation. He had heard about Istrone from Martha, but he was completely unaware of the events that involved that place.

"That's impossible," Bloke replied. "I've also heard those stories. The crisis on Istrone happened forty years ago, and Carl Dyester had already become a Major by then. Look at him. He is too young!"

The man was tall and burly. Khan didn't manage to inspect his skin because the light of the electric torches was too dim. Still, he wouldn't give the Lieutenant more than forty years from his facial features.

"Mana can keep you young if used correctly," The man sighed. "I didn't think kids these days could still learn stories about that mess."

"How could we not?" The second boy asked. "You have singlehandedly suppressed a revolt. The Global Army would have lost the planet if it weren't for you."

Carl suddenly punched the door of an empty cell. A clanging noise resounded through the basement as the metal bars bent and shattered under the might carried by his arm.

Everyone fell silent at that scene, but Carl soon understood that he had gone too far. He scratched the corner of his eyes before explaining his reasons.

"Stories rarely are accurate. I had my entire platoon on Istrone. I wouldn't have been the only survivor of the crisis if it weren't for my troops."

Silence spread through the basement, but a beeping noise quickly broke it. Carl took his phone and browsed through the notifications before nearing the screen to Khan's cell.

"You can go," Carl explained as the cell unlocked. "The others must remain here a bit longer."

Khan left the cell, but he didn't immediately leave the basement. A soldier who had been on other planets was right in front of him, and he couldn't waste that chance to satisfy his curiosity.

"Did you ever see a Nak?" Khan asked without bothering to add the annoying "sir".

The sudden question took Carl by surprise, but he still shook his head to answer.

"Do you think that they are still out there?" Khan continued to question him.

"They must be," Carl replied while moving back to his table. "We have learnt a lot from those aliens, but there are immense blank spots in their history."

"What do you mean?" Khan asked.

The entirety of the human race had studied those aliens for more than five hundred years. The Global Army had also developed methods to deploy their power and surpass their peaks. It was impossible to know everything about them, but Khan still believed that there couldn't be many doubts left.

"The Second Impact has shown us that some of them still live," Carl explained while picking a pack of cigarettes from the pocket on his chest.

"You didn't mean this with your previous words," Khan replied, and Carl inspected him for a few seconds before placing a finger on the cigarette to light it up.

"Do you promise to go away if I give you my honest opinion?" Carl asked while taking a drag off the cigarette, and Khan promptly nodded.

"How did we defeat the Nak during the First Impact?" Carl asked. "We had rifles, bombs, and planes, but no mana. How did we win the war against those aliens?"

The images of the mines in the Slums ran through Khan's vision. He had seen what a single Nak could do against weapons that didn't use on mana.

The First Impact had theoretically involved the main force of those aliens. The entire planet Earth had suffered from the invasion, but humankind had won the war anyway.

'How did they win without mana?' Khan wondered. 'How did I never consider this part of the story?'

It was hard to be accurate about something that had happened more than five hundred years in the past, but Khan felt stupid anyway. That aspect of the war featured a massive flaw that no one in the Slums had ever questioned.

"My take on the matter is that the Nak were a suicidal bunch," Carl laughed while stretching his legs on the table and tilting his chair. "Only the higher-ups know the real story, but they never reveal proper details. You might gain access to those reports if you make it to Colonel."

Khan respected the promise and left the basement. The sunlight still illuminated the camp, but it was clear that the day was about to end.

'Suicidal?' Khan asked himself while reviewing everything that he had learnt about those aliens. 'The greatest enemy of humanity is a suicidal bunch? That can't be.'

Khan agreed with Carl, but he didn't share the same opinions. The Global Army was definitely hiding a secret, but he knew too little to formulate conclusions.

'Colonel is too far away for now,' Khan thought while moving his reasoning on another topic. 'I don't even know how to become a first-level warrior. I can only stick to Dad's training until the lessons start.'

Khan could easily find his way back to the dormitory with his phone. The machine seemed unable to exhaust its battery, so it accompanied him through the entire day.

It took Khan one hour to return to his room. The other beds were still empty, so he had the entire flat to himself.

Khan decided to take a shower and change. He even studied the instructions for the laundry and tested his first cleaning. Everything went well since most of the functions were automatic.

It was too late to visit the canteen, but Khan didn't mind skipping a meal. Becoming aware of Carl's power had given birth to a tingling sensation in the back of his head. He wanted to become stronger quickly to enter that seemingly immense world featuring aliens, mages, and other planets.

'I could order something directly from my room if I weren't broke,' Khan sighed in his mind before sitting on his bed and trying to enter a meditative state.

The mana appeared in his vision. That azure energy flowed from his nape and expanded through his entire body. Yet, a sudden noise resounded in the room and pulled Khan out of his meditative state.

Khan opened his eyes and turned toward the source of that noise. His mouth broke into a smile when he saw the boy standing in front of the entrance of the room. A dense cream covered the left side of Samuel's face and tried to hide his surprised expression.

Samuel's face had turned pale when he recognized Khan, but the latter didn't focus too much on him. The boy had dropped his backpack, and Khan had clearly heard food cans among that noise.

"Do you happen to have food there?" Khan asked without dropping his smile.

Samuel seemed frozen in fear, but he still managed to perform a faint nod.

"Let's make a trade then!" Khan exclaimed. "I'll give you the top bunk for your food."

Samuel looked around the room. Both top bunks were empty, but Khan was still using them to take his food. However, something told him that he had to accept that trade.