

# CHAOS' HEIR

## Chapter 2 - Mines

The Slums' streets were full of people wearing ragged light clothes even if the temperatures weren't even close to being warm. Countless small houses built with cheap metal and other random materials filled the sides of the small paths that divided that district.

Khan walked toward the mines and nodded whenever he met a familiar face. It was still early in the morning, but everyone there was doing their best to reach their workplace in time.

The houses grew scarcer as Khan approached the mines. Some of them even featured charred marks or bullet holes. They still bore the signs of the battle against the Nak that happened almost eleven years ago.

A few lines forced Khan to stop. Many fellow workers were waiting for their chance to enter the mines and dig a few valuable materials. Khan knew that it would take him thirty minutes to reach his destination, so his eyes began to wander.

The mines were nothing more than the debris of the battle against the Nak. The Second Impact had caught everyone by surprise, so the Global Army didn't have special troops ready for the fight.

The Global Army could only send the soldiers and robots to fight the threat, but common weapons couldn't defeat a Nak. That alien was the embodiment of mana, and only humans able to wield that energy could kill it.

A series of soldiers patrolled the area and handled the lines of workers. They even had a three meters tall two-legged robot that pointed its rifles toward anyone who complained or tried to cause a mess.

"It's the same as ever," An old man in front of Khan commented when he saw the soldiers running toward a group that had started fighting for a spot in the line. "The Global Army sees the Slums as nothing more than a free workforce. They control most of the food, and they teach the ways of the mana only to those who enlist. Is this even life?"

"Shut up, old man," A man nearby whispered. "I'm not losing my position in the line because you felt like complaining this morning."

"We dig their metal in exchange for food," The old man sighed. "We would even clean their garbage if they asked."

Khan ignored those complaints. The first rule of the Slums was to mind your business. They were a peaceful place on the surface, but the soldiers intervened only in case of a real mess. Also, most of them were on the payroll of some of the mobsters of the district anyway.

Khan had learnt how to remain indifferent to the evil that filled those streets. Truth be told, he didn't care about the Slums or the human race in general. He only wanted to make the Nak pay for the last eleven years of nightmares he had to suffer.

He planned to gather enough money until he became sixteen, which was the minimum age to enlist in the Global Army. Once he got his hands on the mana, he would join the platoons looking for the traces of the Nak and take care of that threat forever.

The line moved quickly, and Khan ended up entering the mine in little more than twenty minutes. The familiar pile of debris appeared in his view, and one of the soldiers near the entrance promptly handed him a shovel and a bucket.

"The Global Army isn't responsible for injuries, infections, and any type of-," The soldier announced, but Khan cut his line short.

"I know how it works," Khan said. "I have been doing this for three years already."

The soldier immediately lost interest in Khan and proceeded to focus on the next worker. Khan also stopped caring about the soldier and crossed the narrow entrance that led inside the pile of debris.

Pieces of metal and ground had fused to create a dense alloy. The entrance was nothing more than a solid tunnel surrounded by frail materials.

No one knew how the battle against the Nak had ended, but everyone could see how bloody it had been by the size of those mines. The workers in the Slums had dug through that pile of debris for years already. However, they had yet to reach ground zero. They had yet to uncover the crater that opened during the Second Impact.

Khan had committed the many tunnels to memory. The workers had also drawn many maps throughout the years, and they had affixed them before every new branch.

A series of artificial lights hung from the ceiling. Most of those tunnels were relatively safe since the workers had dug away all the frail materials, but their stability signaled the absence of precious metals to seize.

Khan followed his usual path, ignoring all the workers who tried to use their shovels to pierce the dense alloy. He had found a decent digging spot a few months ago, and he couldn't wait to return there.

His poor luck ended up having the best of him. Khan found three middle aged men who were doing their best to enlarge the tunnel when he reached his usual digging spot.

"This is our spot, kid," One of the men said when he noticed Khan.

"It's big enough for all of us," Khan replied before ignoring the trio and choosing a wall that seemed on the verge of falling apart.

"I think you didn't hear us clearly," A second man added and stopped digging to near Khan with a menacing attitude.

However, Khan promptly lifted his pullover and revealed the blue scar on his chest. The man stopped at that sight, and even his companions remained speechless.

"If we go by right," Khan said, "This mine should belong to the few survivors of the Second Impact."

The men heard Khan, but they remained frozen in place. They didn't dare to move, and they trembled whenever his azure eyes darted among their faces.

"Don't tell me that you believe that crap about the Tainted," Khan sighed while ignoring the trio and starting to work on his wall.

The men shot a few glances in his direction before resuming their work. Yet, they appeared tense since someone who had survived a meeting with a Nak was right behind them.

Khan dug for a few hours, inspecting all the debris captured by his shovel. All the small chunks of metal ended up in his bucket, but the wall fell before Khan could fill it.

Khan and the three men darted backward. Tunnels could crumble whenever the workers affected the overall stability of the mine, and the four workers didn't want to risk their lives.

The four of them knew that the soldiers would never bother to retrieve them if the tunnel were to crumble. Still, they eventually halted their retreat when the tremors went silent.

Khan exchanged a glance with his newfound companions before exploring the crumbled wall. A branch had opened on that spot, and Khan couldn't wait to explore it.

"Hurry up," Khan said while snapping his fingers toward the trio. "Hand me the torch."

The men didn't feel good having a fifteen years old boy ordering them around, but Khan was willing to explore that uncharted area, so they quickly handed him one of the electrical torches hanging from the ceiling.

Khan moved silently, making sure that he didn't move any of the frail materials around him. He had to use his shovel at times, but that tunnel seemed to have a clear path already.

'I must have uncovered another solid layer,' Khan thought while inspecting his surroundings.

He was ready to bet that the frail materials around him hid the dense alloy. It wouldn't make sense for a natural tunnel to form after a wall crumbled otherwise.

The tunnel led Khan into a familiar place. His feet stepped on charred terrain, and a large crater soon unfolded in his vision.

'I found it!' Khan exclaimed in his mind. 'I found the ground zero of the Second Impact!'

A faint azure glow suddenly attracted his attention. Khan carefully crouched to seize a small pearl hidden among the black ground, and his eyes widened when he recognized that item.

'This is a mana core!' Khan exclaimed again. 'I wonder if it belongs to one of the enhanced soldiers or the Nak.'

Humans didn't have the innate ability to handle mana, but the world had found multiple ways to avoid that issue. The most popular approach consisted of the transplant of mana cores to unlock those skills.

The Global Army granted mana cores to all its soldiers, but they had to indebted themselves to obtain them. Khan could solve that issue now that he had found one of them.

A squeaking noise suddenly diverted Khan's attention from the azure pearl in his hand. He quickly moved the torch into the crater and saw a pair of azure eyes staring back at him.

Those eyes didn't belong to a Nak, nor another person. A fifty centimeters tall rat covered in azure fur occupied the center of the crater. Drool came out of the creature's mouth, and a frenzied expression filled its face. The beast appeared hungry beyond reason.

Khan had learnt a lot about the properties of the Nak's mana from his father. He knew that it was easy for animals to mutate under its effects. Those creatures' innate features would go through a complete transformation, but they would also develop intense aggression.

'I need to run,' Khan concluded in less than a second before leaping backward and running through the tunnel.

The rat quickly chased after Khan, but he was pretty nimble. He could reach the three men from before in a few seconds, and he crossed them without giving any warning about the Tainted animal.