

# CHAOS' HEIR

## Chapter 20 - Exchanges

An explosion followed the impact between the fiery vortex and the training dummy. Defensive screens appeared on the edges of the stage and blocked the fuming scraps of metal and flames that flew after the detonation.

A vent promptly appeared on the ceiling and drained the smoke and fire lingering on the stage. Khan and the others soon became able to see the state of the training dummy, and their mouths inevitably opened in surprise.

The training dummy was no more. It initially featured only half of a human torso, but the spell had left it with a small patch of melted metal that hung from a short stick.

'This destructive power is incredible!' Khan shouted in his mind.

Only Luke and a few recruits didn't show any surprise at the scene. They had already seen mages in action thanks to their background, so they knew how powerful spells could be.

"I think you all can understand why becoming a mage is harder and has no shortcuts," Professor Norwell announced. "Spells are far stronger than martial arts, but they have significant drawbacks. Casting these abilities requires more time, and it usually depletes far more mana."

The explanation made sense in everyone's mind. There had to be a higher price to pay for such a mighty ability.

"Let's start with the basics now," Professor Norwell shouted while jumping off the stage. "Divide yourselves into groups of two. We'll go over a few simple moves that usually work for every martial art. Many of you have already received physical training, but it won't hurt to review them."

Luke immediately turned toward Martha, but she touched Khan's shoulder before anyone could approach her.

"Let's see how good you are with proper techniques," Martha smiled when Khan turned, but the latter didn't seem too excited about the matter.

'What do we have to learn if we can't use mana?' Khan wondered as Martha led him to an isolated spot of the hall.

The various couples did the same. They all separated and took ample empty areas for themselves.

Professor Norwell nodded when she saw how swiftly her students took their places. She eventually cleared her throat to claim their attention, and a tall hologram of herself soon appeared at the center of the hall.

"I'll teach you footwork and attacks for the first lessons," Professor Norwell announced. "Keep in mind that these are nothing more than basic moves. Real martial arts might require complicated forms, but it's not bad to have these as your foundation."

Professor Norwell bent her legs before performing a quick movement with her ankle. Her figure seemed to stretch. She left an afterimage as she slid on the floor and performed a quick side-step.

"This is the shadow step executed with advanced proficiency," Professor Norwell explained. "This form is the most basic footwork in the army, but it can match better techniques if performed with higher proficiency."

Professor Norwell then bent her legs again before her waist performed a sharp movement. Her right arm shot forward, and her palm released a low noise when it hit the air.

"This is the palm force executed with advanced proficiency," Professor Norwell announced. "This attack is the same as the shadow step. It's a very basic technique backed with high proficiency."

The tall hologram at the center of the hall began to repeat both techniques, and menus appeared under every couple. Khan briefly played with the various icons and discovered that they could mark where his feet had to be to perform both techniques.

"There are four stages of proficiency for each martial art," Professor Norwell continued. "You are all novices right now since you can't use mana. The higher proficiency levels are competent, advanced, and expert. You can reach them by obtaining mastery over the forms and the correct flow of mana."

'I get it now,' Khan summarized in his mind. 'Memorizing the forms now will give us an easier time once we become able to move mana at will. I can't slack then.'

The excitement that had started to vanish returned stronger than ever. Khan was ready to give his everything.

"Don't hold back," Martha whispered, but she quickly noticed that Khan wasn't listening to her.

His eyes moved between the marks on the floor and Professor Norwell's hologram. He seemed completely absorbed by the training. He even started to test some of the moves while listening to the explanation.

The floor revealed a red color whenever Khan failed to perform the movement correctly. Writings that described his mistakes even appeared among that shade.

Martha revealed a smile when she saw Khan's serious expression, but a tinge of annoyance filled her mind when she realized that he was ignoring her.

"You will alternate between attacking and dodging," Professor Norwell ordered. "Alternate hands and feet according to your companion, and don't hold back. Hit each other! Pain will improve your reflexes and quicken your learning experience. I'll become your training partner if I notice any slacker."

A second of silence followed that order before Professor Norwell gave voice to a loud "begin". Khan raised his head to plan the training with Martha, but a palm suddenly hit his chest and forced him to take a step back.

Martha wore a satisfied expression when Khan raised his head. Instead, Khan had no idea why Martha had attacked him so suddenly.

"Let's start with the right," Martha said before Khan could question her about her previous behavior. "It's your turn to attack."

Khan scratched his head before quickly giving up on the matter. He inspected the hologram while studying the instructions on the floor and taking his position.

"Ready?" Khan asked.

"This training also focuses on enhancing our reflexes," Martha explained.

"Let's not announce our attacks. We should start as soon as our feet reach the intended position."

Khan rotated his waist and stretched his arm as soon as Martha finished speaking. His palm hit her shoulder and made her stumble backward, but the floor still showed a red light.

'What did I do wrong?' Khan wondered while reading the writings on the floor.

'Back foot didn't rotate enough, and my arm didn't follow the waist correctly.'

"You definitely hold grudges," Martha snorted while standing up to resume her position.

"I don't know what you are talking about-," Khan had to interrupt his line to dodge an incoming palm strike.

His body rotated and successfully side-stepped Martha's attack, but the floor still revealed a red light. The same happened for Martha, and both of them lowered their head to understand their mistakes.

'No technique at all?' Khan read from the floor. 'I guess I just tried to dodge the attack without trying to perform the move.'

"I won't ignore you anymore, okay?" Khan laughed when he raised his head.

"You aren't as dense as I thought," Martha commented while revealing a smile. "Sure. Let's focus on the exercise."

Martha and Khan stopped minding each other and focused entirely on their forms. They even gained speed after a few exchanges since they established a proper progression of the moves.

Khan initially had many difficulties, especially when it came to the shadow step. He had trained his instincts in the Slums, so his body automatically tried to dodge Martha's attacks without bothering about the actual technique.

Martha had it easier since she had already received some training. However, her techniques were inaccurate and needed far more practice according to the menus on the floor.

Khan slowly managed to overcome his instincts and focus only on the moves. That approach allowed Martha to hit him many times, but he didn't care about pain as long as his technique improved.

Khan's determination seemed to affect Martha since she also stopped running away from pain and focus on the menus' teachings. Both of them ended up hitting each other many times in the two hours of the lesson.

"Enough!" Professor Norwell eventually shouted, and the floor went dark.

The hologram disappeared while Professor Norwell returned on the stage to pick a cigarette from the pack that she had left on the floor.

"No wonder you are the special class," Professor Norwell explained. "I had to stop after only one hour with the last recruits. All of you have also succeeded in turning the floor green a few times."

Khan and Martha exchanged a glance. He raised his hand to show four fingers while she lifted both of them to reveal six fingers. Martha had surpassed Khan when it came to the number of green lights.

"There's no need to keep track of today's achievements," Professor Norwell continued. "This mandatory lesson will happen every afternoon. Your focus has to be on perfecting your moves in a short time."

Some of the recruits showed ugly expressions. That training was hellish and painful, but Professor Norwell wanted them to do it every day.

"Some of you will already reach twenty percent attunement with mana in the next months," Professor Norwell revealed. "I suggest you use your nights to rest or meditate to keep up with your classmates. The Global Army will leave every slacker behind. You might have families ready to back you up, but I want to remind you that they are useless on a battlefield."

Professor Norwell then waved her hand and pointed toward the exit. "Go now. Don't waste any more of my time."

Martha and Khan sighed and turned toward the exit after Professor Norwell dismissed them. Luke and Bruce quickly reached them, but their eyes widened in surprise when they saw their friends.

"What the hell happened to you?" Luke asked.

Khan and Martha turned toward each other and noticed that their faces were full of bruises. They had also torn their uniforms in various spots during the training.

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