

CHAOS' HEIR

Chapter 3 - Threat

Khan didn't feel guilty for his actions. He didn't believe himself to be a bad guy, but he wasn't one of the good ones either. He was only one of the many kids that the environment of the Slums had forced to mature too quickly.

That situation had even been worse for Khan. The inhabitants of the Slums had never fully accepted him since his family came from the wealthy districts of Ylaco.

The Slums rarely rewarded acts of mercy. The lack of food and work forced everyone to learn how to surpass others to survive. The mines were relatively safe due to the soldiers, but that didn't apply in its insides.

Khan ran as fast as he could. His father had taught him a lot about the Tainted, so he knew exactly how dangerous they could be.

Any living being touched by the Nak's mana would mutate. That infection usually led to death when it came to humans, but the animals had a higher chance to survive and develop enhanced abilities.

Moreover, Tainted creatures could infect other living beings. That risk depended on how unstable their mutation was. Of course, Khan wasn't a threat for the others since his father had suppressed the Nak's mana when he was nothing more than a kid.

Many workers turned toward Khan when they heard his faint footsteps. They couldn't guess what had happened to him, but some of them joined him in his escape anyway.

The mines were mostly stable. Many layers of dense alloy ran through the whole structure and limited the number of materials that could fall during a

landslide. Still, they had some dangerous spots, and the workers didn't dare to take risks in those kinds of jobs.

A scream eventually echoed through the tunnels and scared the few miners who had decided to continue their work. They didn't even glance in the direction of those cries before standing up and running toward the exit.

Khan soon found a few dozens of miners running behind him. He had attracted a lot of attention during his escape. Many workers had decided to follow him even before hearing the screams.

'The Army will seal the whole mine if they understand what is happening,' Khan thought. 'I hope they mind their own business.'

Screams echoed through the tunnels from time to time, but Khan didn't let his mind wander. He only wanted to return to his father to show him the mana core.

The group of escaping miners grew as screams filled the mines. Men and women appeared in front of Khan and forced him to slow down since the tunnels were too narrow for all of them.

The light coming from the entrance soon overwhelmed the artificial illumination of the electric torches. Khan and the others were almost outside of the mines, but a scream turned the whole situation upside-down.

"Help! A Tainted animal!" A man from the bottom of the tunnel shouted before screams suppressed his voice.

Khan cursed before trying to make his way through the crowd, but the workers panicked when they understood the nature of the threat.

The workers started to push each other in a desperate attempt to exit the mines. Khan was young and full of life, but there were many grown-up men in that group, and he inevitably fell behind.

"Presence of a Tainted animal confirmed," A mechanical voice suddenly resounded through the mines and made the crowd even more ruthless in their attempts to exit the mines. "Sealing the entrances in three, two, one...."

When the countdown reached zero, the light coming from the outside world stopped shining on the tunnels. Khan and many others gathered in the small hall in front of the entrance and begged the soldiers to open the doors, but no one answered.

Some of the workers even tried to force the doors open, but their shovels couldn't even leave a dent on that tough metal. The soldiers had preferred to imprison them with the Tainted creature rather than risk spreading the infection.

"Damned Global Army! They are always the first to run away."

"They are nothing more than filthy dogs who only care about money."

"They always send the worst ones here. Did they forget that the Slums are also part of Ylaco?"

The workers exploded in loud complaints, but Khan limited himself to crouch on a wall near the entrance. His eyes remained fixed on the end of the main tunnel. He felt that a pair of azure eyes would appear around the corner if he stopped looking.

"Who is the idiot that called for help?"

"One of those who remained behind."

"Are we even sure that there is a Tainted animal back there?"

"I don't know. I only followed the crowd."

"Same for me."

"Run when you see others run. That's my motto."

"I actually followed the kid."

The complaints echoing through the hall ended up startling Khan awake. When he inspected his surroundings, he saw that the other workers had begun to turn toward him.

"It was a Tainted rat," Khan explained before he could fall prey to their fears. "I saw its azure eyes."

The workers fell silent after his revelation, but they quickly took a few steps back when they realized that the animal might have infected Khan.

Khan decided to show his bare chest to the miners when he noticed that some of them were tightening their grasps on their shovels. He feared what that bunch of scared workers could do if they let their panic take control of their actions.

"I can't be infected," Khan said while showing his azure scar. "I'm a victim of the Second Impact, and my infection has stabilized ten years ago. I hope you know that you develop immunity afterward."

That was common knowledge even among the Slums, but Khan wanted to repeat it to calm down the workers. He was actually scared. He couldn't do anything if those miners decided to see him as a threat.

'This is why I need to enlist and get my hands on the damned mana,' Khan cursed in his mind. 'Being so powerless is sickening. I can't even defeat my own nightmares!'

A scream suddenly resounded through the tunnels and diverted the group's attention. Khan and the other workers moved their gazes to the end of the main branch, but nothing appeared there.

"You said it was a rat, right?" One of the burly men in the hall asked.

"Yeah. A really big rat," Khan replied, using his hands to describe the creature's size.

"And you also said that you are immune to the infection, right?" The same man asked, and Khan promptly jumped on his feet when he understood the meaning behind those words.

Khan promptly grabbed one of the shovels near him and wielded it as if it were a mace. Still, his actions didn't manage to scare away the three workers who had slowly started to walk toward him.

"I'm not even sixteen!" Khan complained. "Do you really want to throw me into the tunnel? That's a damned Tainted animal!"

"You either go by yourself," One of the miners threatened, "Or we throw you ourselves."

Khan wanted to complain again. He could see from the desperate look on the miners' eyes that none of them would ever step up to protect him. Those who were nearing him even wore a crazy expression. Words couldn't help him in that situation.

His faint hope that the doors of the mine would open crumbled once the three miners reached him. They were all grown-ups, but they were ready to grab him and throw him into the tunnel if he began to struggle.

"I can walk," Khan sighed before lowering his shovel and stepping toward the tunnel.

Every worker dodged his gaze. They felt too ashamed to look at him in the eyes, but they didn't dare to help him either. His flesh would make them gain some time even if Khan couldn't beat the creature, maybe enough for the soldiers to reopen the mines.

Khan walked slowly, but the trio who had forced him to move soon started to throw their shovels toward his back. Khan had to move quickly to dodge those tools, and he soon found himself at the entrance of the first branch.

'I killed some rats back at home,' Khan thought before entering the new tunnel and crouching next to the wall. 'How strong can this one be? Maybe it simply grew in size without obtaining any physical enhancement. I don't even know for how long it has lived inside the crater.'

Khan didn't dare to move from that spot. The workers couldn't see him anymore, and he was safe from their shovels. He had no reason to take another step into the mines.

Minutes felt like hours. Khan waited in silence, hoping that the soldiers would reopen the mines quickly. A scream resounded from time to time, but no sound filled the mines otherwise.

Then, Khan instinctively glanced toward the end of the tunnel. He couldn't describe what he had felt. He only knew that something was off in that spot.

His intuition turned out to be on point since an azure halo began to illuminate that corner. The Tainted creature was only a tunnel away from him.