

CHAOS' HEIR

Chapter 4 - Shovel

'Come on, stupid brain,' Khan cursed while the azure light intensified. 'You have made me watch the same damned scene for the last ten years. It's your job to get us out of this situation.'

The years spent questioning his father about the Nak flashed in his mind. Bret had always stressed how impossible it was to defeat those aliens without mana, but Khan's opponent was a simple Tainted animal.

'Normal weapons should be able to hurt it,' Khan thought while slowly straightening his position. 'I can only try to gain the initiative since I lack proper weapons.'

Khan slowly walked toward the end of the tunnel, paying extra attention to the noises his movements released in the area. He even tried to make his steps match the crawling sounds coming from behind the corner.

Once Khan reached the corner, he lifted his shovel above his head and prepared. His makeshift weapon was ready to descend as soon as the azure hair entered his vision.

The azure light coming from the other branch intensified. Khan felt almost able to sense the Tainted animal crawling toward the corner, but he didn't let his mind play tricks on him.

His Tainted status didn't give him any additional ability. Khan was a normal human who had developed an immunity to the dangerous properties of the Nak's mana.

A faint tremor ran through his spine, and a chunk of azure hair peeked out of the corner. Khan promptly stepped forward and rotated his body while slamming the shovel on the ground.

The shovel didn't land on the tough alloy. No clanging noise resounded through the tunnel. A screech reached Khan's ears before his eyes could focus on the scene, and his instincts prompted him to slam his weapon again.

Khan raised the shovel and slammed it multiple times. He used all the strength that his body could muster in the attacks, and bright red blood began to flow on the ground.

A tinge of excitement filled Khan's mind. He was doing it. He was killing the Tainted animal!

His excitement fell apart when he slammed the shovel and saw its wooden shaft breaking in half. Only a small piece of metal and wood remained in his hands, and a curse inevitably escaped his mouth.

Khan could focus on his opponent now that the frenzy of the assault had ended. His relentless offensive had torn the rat's head into pieces. He could even see its skull among that gruesome mess.

'Did I kill it?' Khan wondered, but the answer to his question arrived one instant later.

The rat suddenly raised its maimed head and pointed its azure eyes at Khan. The creature leapt toward him before he could even begin to retreat.

The beast headbutted Khan's chest and flung him away. He slammed on the wall behind him, but he managed to protect his head with his free arm.

The rat didn't stop attacking. It jumped as soon as it touched the ground and pushed Khan back on the wall again. However, it remained attached to his chest at that time. Its claws had pierced his skin, and its teeth were digging a hole in his shoulder.

Pain assaulted Khan's mind and made him unable to think properly. He fell to the ground and tried to push the creature away from his chest, but his efforts only enlarged his injuries.

The Tainted rat had no intention to move. It would release its grasp only when Khan's heart stopped.

'Dammit! I can't die here!' Khan shouted in his mind, but only screams came out of his mouth. 'I promised to myself that I would hunt down the Nak! How can I even die against a mere consequence of their power?'

Khan steeled his mind and suppressed the pain that he felt. He gritted his teeth as his free hand grabbed the creature's head and kept it still. Meanwhile, the hand wielding the broken shovel started slamming its pointy side on the exposed skull.

An intense struggle unfolded. Khan fought against time. He had to kill the rat before its teeth and claws dug too deep into his body.

The first impact between the skull and the shovel amounted to nothing. The second broke the sharp wooden tip and made Khan decide to use the metal handle. The third opened a crack on that white bone.

When the shovel landed on the rat's skull for the fourth time, the bone broke, and the creature began to shake. Convulsions filled its body before it stopped moving altogether.

Khan quickly moved that corpse away from his chest. He was having a hard time breathing, and a pool of blood had gathered on his chest. The injury on his left shoulder was even worse off. Khan felt on the verge of fainting.

'I can't close my eyes!' Khan shouted in his mind in a desperate attempt to keep himself awake.

His struggles didn't even manage to delay the inevitable. His vision slowly darkened. Khan was about to lose consciousness, but his fear of ending up in the usual nightmare kept him awake long enough to find the pearl hidden in his pocket.

'This should contain mana, right?' Khan thought as he raised the pearl above his head and quoted his father. 'Mana cores allow humans to take the next evolutionary step. They grant us the chance to control the mana in ways that even the Nak can't imagine. In theory, our peak stands far above that alien species.'

'Do something then!' Khan cursed in his mind, but the mana core didn't react to his desires.

Khan could almost sense that the pearl contained a mysterious form of energy, but he didn't know how to control it. He wasn't even sure that his sensations were real in that situation.

'Some magic items require blood to bind them,' Khan suddenly recalled a line from his father and placed the pearl in the blood accumulated on his chest.

The mana core finally reacted to his presence, but it didn't do much. Its azure halo slightly intensified and shone on Khan, bringing him some warmth.

'That's it?' Khan complained in mind. 'The core item for next evolutionary step of the human species does less than an electric torch? No wonder we survived the First Impact!'

Khan began to sense that something was off while in the middle of his frustration. He should have fainted long ago, but his mind was slowly regaining some clarity.

His free hand wiped some of the blood and uncovered the injuries on his chest. The deep cuts dug by the rat's claws were closing on their own. Khan could watch his skin healing right in front of his eyes.

The same applied to the hole on his shoulder. His condition was improving quickly under the azure halo radiated by the mana core. Some liveness even returned in his limbs once all the wounds closed.

'Maybe you aren't as useless as I initially thought,' Khan sighed happily before glancing at the mana core one last time and putting it back into his pocket.

Khan slowly stood up. A sense of weakness still filled his body, but he didn't want to remain in that place anymore. He wanted to see his father and question him about today's events. He couldn't let himself be unprepared again.

'I guess I will take this with me,' Khan thought while glancing at the Tainted rat's corpse. 'The soldiers would never believe me if I don't show them any proof. They might even reopen the mines immediately.'

Author's notes: I have yet to create a schedule for the novel. I guess I can publish around this hour for the time being. I'll come up with something precise soon.