

Chaos' Heir 21

Chapter 21 - Two Faces

"Did you try to kill each other?" Bruce asked when he noticed Khan and Martha's state.

"It's just training," Khan replied while inspecting the two boys. "What about you? Did you even try to perform the moves?"

A faint laugh escaped Martha's mouth at that comment. Luke and Bruce had a few spots on their uniforms, but they were perfectly fine otherwise.

"These are only basic techniques," Luke snorted. "It's almost pointless to learn them since our future martial arts will most likely ask us to modify our habits."

"He is right," Bruce added. "Our families have already purchased martial arts suitable for our physique, and I bet that Martha also has something similar. Learning these low-level moves is quite pointless."

Khan turned toward Martha, and the latter nodded while revealing a helpless expression.

"My situation is a bit different," Martha explained. "My family has a few martial arts, but they don't really suit my height. I plan to change it here."

"Height?" Khan asked.

"I learnt how to use hammers!" Martha released a helpless sigh. "Both men and women in my family are usually tall and burly, so those weapons are fine for them. However, I need to match it with a martial art that has exceptional footwork to use it properly."

Martha was shorter than Khan. She was among the shortest in the special class. Hammers usually didn't have a good range, so her height could be an issue in a battle.

'I see,' Khan commented in his mind. 'She is preparing her body for the new martial art.'

"Where can I get one of those?" Khan asked. "I've never seen a martial art. I don't even know what it should look like."

"Martial arts usually are a series of moves that culminate into special techniques," Martha explained while the group began to leave the building. "The Global Army will provide you with a low-level one for free once your attunement with mana reaches the intended level."

"I suggest you avoid them," Luke quickly contradicted Martha. "You will only develop bad habits. It's better to start directly with a high-level martial art. You won't have to force your body to forget most of your training in that way."

"How can I even put my hands on high-level martial arts?" Khan asked.

"There are a few ways," Martha explained. "You can purchase them from the army through Credits or merits, find masters willing to take you under their wing, or-."

"Or you can ask me," Luke interrupted Martha. "My family has a large collection of martial arts. You should come to Ylaco with me when the semester ends. I'm sure I can find something suitable. You can even ask me for a loan and go in specialized shops otherwise."

Martha pretended not to see that interaction, and Bruce also let his gaze wander through his surroundings. Khan didn't miss their behavior, but he still pretended to be completely overwhelmed with gratefulness.

"That would be so great!" Khan exclaimed while wearing one of his brightest smiles. "I'll definitely rely on you then. Don't you dare to go back on your words."

Khan and Luke laughed after that exchange of words. They both felt satisfied with that interaction.

Luke ended up believing that Khan was already in his pocket, while the latter managed to keep that door open without establishing any deal.

"I'll return to my flat now," Luke announced. "We have a long day tomorrow, and I'm sure that Professor Norwell's lessons will only get harsher."

"I'll come with you," Bruce replied. "My flat is in the same direction anyway."

Khan maintained his smile and waved his hand as his friends turned, but Luke seemed to recall something at the last second.

"You should both visit the medical bay," Luke said. "Our bodies might be resilient, but it's better to deal with your bruises before tomorrow's physical lesson."

Luke and Bruce left after that reminder, and Martha and Khan waited for them to disappear around a corner before exchanging a glance. The duo ended up exploding into a laugh, but they still decided to follow that advice.

Martha and Khan chitchatted during the walk to the medical bay. It was already quite late, so they tried to hurry. Luckily for them, they found many free nurses inside the building, and they quickly applied a few cold lotions on their bruises.

Khan didn't get the chance to visit Doctor Ian Parket. He had a few questions about the attunement with mana, but he gave up on the matter after learning that the man had already left.

Martha waited for Khan outside of the medical bay, which slightly surprised him. He didn't expect her to refuse the chance to hit the bed sooner.

"You didn't have to wait for me," Khan laughed. "It's already nine pm. You can't go to the canteen anymore now."

"Only you would think about your stomach at this hour," Martha snorted.

"I don't need to," Khan replied while wearing a proud expression. "I already have a stash of food in my room."

"You are helpless!" Martha shouted, but she ended up exploding into a laugh in front of Khan's funny expression.

'I have enough time to eat, meditate, and sleep,' Khan thought while looking in the direction of his dormitory.

Thinking about his bed worsened Khan's mood. His day had been fantastic, but his reoccurring nightmare would inevitably ruin it.

Martha noticed the sharp change in Khan's expression. The event left her slightly dumbfounded, especially since they were both laughing and joking just a second ago.

"How much of you is an act?" Martha said, but she quickly covered her mouth and tried to justify her words. "I didn't mean to do that. That had to remain in my head."

"What do you mean?" Khan snapped back to reality and revealed a fake smile. "I'm always myself."

Martha and Khan had yet to have a deep conversation. They had known each other for a mere week, and they had interacted for less than a day. Their friendship had barely begun.

"I'm too blunt at times," Martha tried to dodge that topic. "You don't have to think too much about my words."

"You are my sparring partner," Khan laughed. "I think I need to know a bit to trust you."

Martha frowned. Khan had basically said that he didn't trust her. She stopped caring about the politeness of her words at that point and began to speak her mind.

"You have two faces," Martha explained. "You often are the simple boy from the Slums who can't take anything seriously. Yet, you turn into a completely different guy whenever we talk about mana or aliens."

"I'm just curious," Khan laughed while trying to lie his way out of that topic. "You all know so much, and that's even normal for you. How can I not pay attention when you disclose some of your knowledge?"

Martha's eyes sharpened. She inspected Khan, paying special attention to his gestures. She couldn't find anything off in his behavior, but her instincts told her that something was off.

"I've been your sparring partner," Martha announced. "I have seen how you handle pain. You don't run away from it. You coldly accept it when it's necessary."

"Isn't that normal?" Khan laughed again.

"What did you even experience in the Slums?" Martha sighed. "I hope you'll trust me enough to tell me one day."

Khan wished to say something, but Martha raised her hand while shaking her head. She didn't want more lies. The girl even began to walk in the direction of her dormitory without caring if Khan was following her.

'Women are so sharp,' Khan sighed in his mind as he watched Martha's figure disappearing in the distance. 'I should just tell her about the Second Impact. That might keep her satisfied for a while.'

Martha was right, and Khan knew that. Part of him had broken after spending every night of the last eleven years dreaming about the worst day of his life.

His determination to learn how to use mana came from his desperation. Khan wanted to put an end to those dreams, but he was out of options. He had to meet the minimum requirements for the missions in the foreign planets and search for the remaining Nak.

That alien species was also incredibly strong, so Khan needed the power to hunt them. Working hard to obtain it seemed completely normal in his mind since his sanity was on the line.

'I'll try to find the right chance to reveal my Tainted status,' Khan decided in his mind.

Khan didn't feel any shame about his Tainted status, but he preferred to avoid disclosing that news. The recruits were different from the citizens of the Slums, but they would still treat him differently after learning about his role in the Second Impact.

'I guess I only want to feel normal,' Khan laughed in his mind. 'A normal sixteen years old boy who has survived the attack of a Nak and dreams about it every night.'

Khan ended up revealing a weak smile while starting to walk toward his dormitory. He didn't even know how to explain his nightmares to his peers. His mind went to war every night, and he always lost.

Chapter 22 - Attunement

The lotions eased Khan's bruises in a single night. He could barely see them when he inspected himself after his usual morning shower.

The scar and the azure strands in his hair had remained the same. Khan could let go of the matter and leave the room to hit the canteen before the classes.

It was still early in the morning, so Khan didn't meet any of his friends. He could go to his familiar corner in the park near the main building while he waited for the lessons to start.

Martha didn't interrupt his meditation at that time, but he found her, Luke, and Bruce inside the first class. She had left a chair next to her empty even after the small discussion from the other day, and Khan could only smile at that sight.

"Don't think too much about yesterday," Martha whispered once Khan sat. "I always end up ignoring my friends' feelings when I get angry."

"Will you vent during the physical lesson?" Khan asked while revealing an honest smile.

"Definitely," Martha replied while showing her tongue, and the duo soon had to stop talking to focus on the lesson.

Professor Conche resumed his lesson about the history of mana. He went over a few interesting topics that the documentaries often ignored. He explained how the first wealthy families came to be.

"The Global Army had yet to establish political boundaries back then," Professor Conche explained. "It didn't have proper backers. It was just a name that humankind had created after the First Impact."

Luke and Bruce cracked some jokes about Professor Conche's belly, but Khan couldn't hear them through the headphones. Instead, Martha glared at them since she didn't want to end up in trouble.

"Ten large companies had survived the First Impact," Professor Conche continued. "Earth was nothing more than a wasteland back then, and those corporations held almost all the wealth available on the planet. The Global Army developed through them, and the world slowly returned to its previous splendor."

Professor Conche picked a pen from a drawer under him before snapping his fingers. The item flew across the vast hall and hit Luke at the center of his forehead.

"I don't care that the Cobsend family has ties with the ten noble families," Professor Conche grunted. "You will be silent during my class."

A wave of laughter spread through the room, and Luke hid his face in shame. Instead, Khan reevaluated Professor Conche after that throw. The soldier was only a first-level warrior and mage, but his power was far from human.

'Reaching the first level must feel great,' Khan commented in his mind while the lesson resumed.

"The world had transformed after the First Impact," Professor Conche explained. "The mana had changed the human society to its very core. The ten companies also had to wear a new face, so they became families. They obtained the "noble" title only after more families appeared on the planet."

The lesson quickly ended after that topic, but Professor Conche remained in the hall to prepare for his next class.

The second lesson covered the mana cores again, and Khan could add new information to his mind. Professor Conche went over specific details about the organic and synthetic cores, and he even showed stats that explained other important matters.

'Wow,' Khan exclaimed in his mind when he inspected the graph on his desk. 'Synthetic cores last ten years at best, but organic cores have a thirty percent chance to leave long-lasting injuries during an upgrade.'

Those numbers worsened when it came to multiple transplants. A soldier who wanted to get the second upgrade of an organic core would have a fifty percent chance to remain severely injured.

'No wonder the army tries to push everyone toward the synthetic cores,' Khan noted in his mind. 'The surgery is safer since they never completely fuse with the nape. The only problem is their cost and the slower pace in attuning a body with mana. Also, only the best A-tier can last for ten entire years.'

In theory, Khan didn't have to worry about mana cores. He already had the best on the market. However, it didn't hurt to improve his knowledge in that field, especially since he could lose his mana core during battles.

The second lesson eventually ended, and Bruce returned to his flat to take his usual nap. Luke imitated him while Martha and Khan hit the park near the main building and entered a meditative state without wasting time.

The duo moved to Professor Norwell's lesson once their alarms rang. The soldier made her class repeat the same exercise as the last time, and Khan and Martha ended up full of bruises again.

"You two are incredible," Luke commented after the end of the lesson when he noticed Khan and Martha's state.

"You didn't even sweat," Martha snorted. "I can't wait to see how you perform during our first mission."

"We'll already have access to mana by then," Luke laughed. "Everything will be different. Training so hard will make more sense."

"What's your attunement level anyway?" Bruce asked. "I have been sitting at seven percent for an entire week. I guess I'm not working hard enough."

Khan's eyes lit up at those words. He couldn't wait to hear what his friends had to say about that stat.

"Eight percent," Luke revealed proudly. "My professor back in Ylaco says that my growth has slowed down the attunement, but it should pick up speed now. I should hit twenty percent in a little more than a month."

"Ten," Martha revealed while wearing a taunting smile. "I checked it in the medical bay yesterday. I gained two whole points in a week."

Luke and Bruce showed surprised expressions, and Khan didn't forget to imitate them. Yet, various thoughts surged in his mind as he reviewed that conversation.

"Having an organic core sure sounds nice," Luke commented. "It even causes fewer problems since it develops with your body."

"Sounds like we are all going to gain access to mana in a bit more than a month." Bruce laughed. "I wonder how our classmates are. Maybe we should socialize a bit more."

"How did you even check your attunement yesterday?" Khan asked while interrupting that conversation and moving the attention on himself. "I thought Doctor Parket wasn't in the medical bay."

The trio wore helpless expressions when they heard those words. Luke even shook his head and heaved a loud sigh to express his feelings.

"You don't need the Doctor to check that," Martha decided to explain. "Any nurse can handle the scanner. It takes less than a minute."

"Please, Martha, help this poor boy," Bruce said in a poetic tone. "Show him the wonders of technology. You are going to the medical bay anyway, right?"

"I'll lead the way," Martha sighed before leaving toward the medical bay, and Khan followed her while waving his hand toward his friends.

"I'll ignore the fact that you switched topic before revealing your attunement with mana," Martha said after the duo remained alone.

"I don't know what you are talking about," Khan laughed. "You forgot about me. Your fault."

"I was actually waiting for that," Martha smirked. "I don't even know the quality of your mana core."

"My pride doesn't allow me to give up so easily," Khan sighed while placing a hand on his chest. "You hurt my little heart by ignoring me earlier."

"I'm starting to hate you," Martha snorted. "You know that we'll see the nurse together, right?"

Khan's expression froze for a second, and Martha laughed at that sight.

"What about privacy?" Khan asked.

"They literally scan you in a corridor," Martha continued to laugh.

"I'm ashamed of my body," Khan continued.

"You don't have to remove your clothes," Martha could barely spell words among her laughs.

"This is definitely abuse," Khan snorted while picking his phone. "Harassment in the Global Army is a serious matter. I can read the punishments if you want."

"What do you even have to hide?" Martha asked while taking deep breaths to suppress her laughs.

"You should have a decent attunement even if your core is weak. You always meditate!"

'That's the issue,' Khan said in his mind.

Even Doctor Parket had remained surprised by his stats. Khan didn't dare to imagine what Martha would say when she saw them. He could sense that she was still pissed at him for keeping secrets and that feeling would only intensify if his attunement turned out to be too high.

"Just, promise me that you won't reveal the results to anyone," Khan said in an honest tone. "I have no backing, and Luke is already trying to recruit me in his future platoon. I want to keep some secrets until I know who I can trust."

That burst of honesty left Martha stunned. She didn't know how to react when Khan was serious. It was easy to talk with him when he acted like a sixteen-year-old boy, but she felt overwhelmed by his maturity during his stern moments.

"Does it mean that you trust me now?" Martha asked.

"I have confirmed that you don't have hidden intentions toward me," Khan laughed and reverted to his previous act.

Martha felt slightly disappointed that boy-Khan had returned, but she nodded to express her compliance. The duo remained silent during the walk toward the medical bay, and Martha quickly summoned a nurse to perform the scan once they arrived.

Khan felt slightly anxious even if he had no real reason to hide his talent. Still, the Slums had taught him that wealthy people with no protections were easy targets, and he felt like that inside the Global Army.

Khan didn't have money, but he was a valuable asset. Also, his nape hid an A-tier organic core. The training camp seemed peaceful, but he didn't know if some families would try to obtain it through illegal methods.

Truth be told, Khan knew almost nothing about Ylaco's political environment. The camp seemed the complete opposite of the Slums, but human nature didn't change according to the environment.

Bad men could exist everywhere, and Khan was all alone. His father couldn't do much in his position, so he preferred to remain careful about his interactions with the other wealthy kids. The scuffle on the first day had been a mistake that he didn't want to repeat.

"There must be a problem with this device," The nurse said while reading the scanner in her hand.

"I'll take a new one and perform the scan again."

Khan's anxiety increased after that announcement, but Martha remained clueless about the whole situation. She simply waited for the result while wearing a curious expression.

The nurse eventually returned and performed the scan again. She moved her device across Khan's back, and a beeping noise finally came out of it.

"Oh," The nurse exclaimed while reading the device, but she remained silent afterward.

"What is it?" Martha asked as her curiosity was about to burst.

"It says here that his attunement is already past fifteen percent," The nurse explained. "It should reach sixteen tomorrow at this pace."

Chapter 23 - Revelations

"There must be some kind of mistake," The nurse said while inspecting the scanner. "You are too young for this attunement level."

Khan could see that the scanner displayed many details about his body, including his age. He was among the youngest inside the training camp, so his numbers were off the charts.

The attunement with mana depended on the development of the body. Khan didn't learn about that from the lessons. He had reached those conclusions after talking with Luke and the others.

It made sense for a body to require more time attuning with mana when it was still growing. Yet, Khan understood to be an exception after the scan, and his mind quickly generated a lie to calm down the nurse.

"My body has stopped growing since I was fifteen," Khan explained while wearing an honest smile. "I could start training with mana far sooner than my peers. I'm actually behind if I consider the time spent with my mana core."

The nurse stared at Khan for a while, but she eventually fell for his lie. Her worries mostly concerned an illness related to mana, but Doctor Parket wouldn't have missed something like that.

"We'll take our leave now," Khan said while placing a hand on Martha's shoulder and pushing her toward the exit of the medical bay. "The curfew is almost up. We have to return to our dormitories. Anyway, thank you for your time."

The nurse wanted to say something, but Khan dragged Martha away before she could give voice to any word. The duo exited the medical bay in a blink and continued to walk until they reached an isolated spot.

The training camp still had many recruits walking through its streets. It was impossible to force boys and girls to return to their dormitories so soon, even if the curfew was approaching.

Most of them would mostly make a run for their flat to avoid punishments. Some would even decide to sneak out and hang with their friends inside the fence that encircled the buildings.

Khan knew about all of that because he could hear noises coming outside of his flat every night. His eyes revealed a tinge of sadness whenever a group of recruits entered his vision. Part of him wanted to have a normal life, but his desperation never allowed him to rest.

"Are you ready to talk?" Khan asked when a group of recruits disappeared in the distance.

"Are you ready to tell the truth?" Martha asked after snapping out of her astonishment.

"Partially," Khan laughed.

"I'll take the partial truth then," Martha sighed before walking outside of the street and sitting on the ground.

"There is a bench just over there," Khan commented.

"But you prefer to be in the park," Martha replied, and Khan fell silent.

'She actually understood that after only two days,' Khan sighed in his mind before sitting in front of Martha.

Silence fell among the two. Martha didn't speak, and Khan waited for her questions. Still, various thoughts appeared in his mind due to the recent increase of his attunement with mana.

'Fifteen percent!' Khan exclaimed in his mind. 'I gained almost six points in a mere week! Increasing the attunement with mana should become harder, but I think I can manage to reach twenty percent by the end of the week at this pace.'

Reaching an attunement of twenty percent would unlock what Khan had desired even before his enrollment. He would become able to deploy mana for martial arts and spells. His journey as a soldier would finally begin at that point.

"What was your starting point?" Martha eventually broke the silence. "How much did you gain in this week?"

Martha was staring deep into Khan's eyes. She didn't want to lose the slightest change in his expression. She desired to learn the difference between boy-Khan and man-Khan.

Khan tried to reveal an honest expression, but his smile slowly faded under Martha's inspection. She had started to learn how to see through him. Simple lies and a few jokes wouldn't get him out of that situation.

"Ten percent," Khan revealed as a helpless sigh escaped his mouth. "I think I'm quite talented, but I know nothing about Ylaco's political environment. I don't want to put myself into a mess."

"Why would your talent even cause problems for you?" Martha asked. "It would open countless possibilities at best! This isn't a matter of Luke anymore. You might become a special soldier inside the Global Army and avoid all the families altogether."

"Are you implying that Ylaco can't be dangerous for a boy without backing?" Khan asked.

Martha wanted to reply right away, but she bit her lower lip before giving false hopes to her friend. After all, she was a promising member of a poor family. Many young boys had tried to approach her romantically to establish political relationships.

"You still shouldn't have anything worthy of illegal activities!" Martha tried to console Khan. "The rich families aren't completely decent, but they usually respect the soldiers and the Global Army as a whole."

Khan felt that the conversation had hit a wall. He wouldn't learn anything else unless he revealed part of his secrets. He couldn't even confirm his worries at that point.

Khan heaved a deep sigh and began massaging the corner of his eyes. Martha continued to inspect him, but she couldn't understand the reason behind that behavior.

Khan's internal struggle eventually culminated with a question. "How much can I trust you? I've understood that you don't have ill intentions in these two days, but I can't see a reason to believe in you right away."

Martha frowned, but she decided to suppress her annoyance. Khan seemed on the verge of lowering his barriers, and she wanted to find a way to gain his trust.

Her desire had no hidden intentions. She was just a girl talking with her first friend in the Global Army. Khan was even her sparring partner, and their backgrounds shared many aspects.

"I can't prove anything," Martha explained while deciding to change her approach. "It takes time to gain trust, and we'll probably get there after the first missions. I understand that you can't open yourself completely, but you should consider an important aspect of our friendship."

"Which is?" Khan quickly asked.

"I'm your best bet," Martha explained while shrugging her shoulders. "You don't know anything about planets, aliens, and soldiers. The Global Army will eventually fill those blank spots, but you need someone to help you with those matters in the meantime."

Khan couldn't help but widen his eyes at those words. Martha was completely right. There was a limit to how much he could learn through lies and pretenses, and his only connection with the army had limitations that prevented him from revealing important information.

Luke and Bruce were untrustworthy since they had hidden intentions. Their actions usually had political meanings, and Khan couldn't bother to deal with that until he learnt more about the world.

Martha really seemed his best option. She was direct, honest, and she didn't belong to wealthy families. She could still betray him, but only by selling his personal information to others.

The benefits of having a trustworthy friend who was aware of his situation and the various families far outweighed the risks. Martha could truly help Khan, and he only had to give up on his fears to accept her.

"You actually relied on tricks to make us reach this point," Khan laughed.

"What tricks?" Martha replied while wearing a proud smile. "I've only understood that I couldn't get through you with normal methods. I had to show real benefits."

"What do you even find in me?" Khan honestly asked. "I understand trying to avoid Luke and Bruce, but there must be a better friend than me out there."

"You make me laugh," Martha revealed. "And you make me train harder. I'm using you to become a better soldier."

"You are a bad liar," Khan smirked.

"I'm sure I'll learn to do that if I stick around you," Martha scoffed.

Silence fell between the two. Khan shot a glance at his watch to see how much time they had before the curfew.

Khan then inspected his surroundings. There didn't seem to be anyone around them except for a small group in the distance. Still, those boys and girls seemed too focused on flirting to notice them.

"Come closer," Khan whispered while pointing his knees on the ground and bending toward Martha.

Martha didn't know how to react to that sudden gesture. Khan was moving his chest toward her face, and his hand was even lowering his collar. She couldn't help but blush at that sight, and she instinctively began to retreat.

However, her gaze sharpened when she saw the first trace of the azure scar appearing behind Khan's uniform. It was pretty dark outside, but she could immediately understand the meaning behind that color.

Chapter 24 - Week

Khan ended up revealing a few aspects of his life to Martha. She learnt about his tainted status and his role in the Second Impact. Khan also disclosed that he had a good organic mana core, but he didn't say anything about its quality.

Martha could understand part of Khan's story by herself. She knew that he had lied to the nurse, so his mana core had to be quite good. She felt sure that her organ was inferior, but she never gave voice to those thoughts to maintain some secrecy.

Martha didn't speak anymore after those revelations, and the curfew arrived before the duo could chat some more. Still, Khan could understand that her previous annoyance toward his unclear behavior had disappeared.

'I hope she doesn't change,' Khan sighed while entering inside his flat and preparing himself for a training session. 'I don't want her to treat me as a victim.'

Samuel was already sleeping. It seemed that the harsh physical training had disrupted his usual routine. Khan had also learnt that it was hard to wake him up. He basically had the room for himself all the time.

'Fifteen percent,' Khan thought as excitement built in his mind.

Khan was so excited about his attunement with mana that he didn't bother to change his dirty clothes before sitting on his bed and entering a meditative state.

He couldn't wait to reach the point when he could deploy mana. That would mark his transition from a normal human to an actual mage and warrior. Khan didn't expect that moment to come so soon, but he gladly accepted that surprise.

'I wonder if I reached sixteen percent already,' Khan thought when he exited the meditative state.

The clock on his phone signaled two am. His meditation had lasted longer than usual since his excitement didn't allow him to stop training.

Khan noticed his dirty bed at that point, but he ignored it and lay down to sleep. He had been in far worse places during his life. Those small patches of ground on his sheets wouldn't disturb him at all.

His phone rang as soon as his head hit the pillow. Khan picked the device and saw that Martha had sent him a message.

'I forgive your lies,' Khan read on his phone. 'That girl sure knows how to hold a grudge. Don't tell me that she has been awake until now thinking about my story.'

Another message from Martha suddenly arrived on the phone. The text read "I didn't stay awake because of you", and Khan couldn't help but smirk when he read it.

'She sure is something,' Khan thought before sending a simple "goodnight" and wearing a helpless expression. It was time to sleep. His nightmare was about to begin.

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Khan happily noticed that Martha didn't change her behavior toward him the following day. The duo met before Professor Conche's lessons and spent an hour meditating before walking together toward the class.

Luke and Bruce were already inside, but Khan and Martha quickly noticed that something was off. Their two friends weren't alone. A boy and a girl from the special class were sitting next to them.

"Meet April and Jacob," Luke explained when Martha and Khan climbed the steps to reach the back lines. "They are from the Rotston family."

"You sure didn't waste time," Martha commented. "I knew you wanted to know more recruits from the special class, but I didn't expect you to be so fast."

"Having good social skills is mandatory for me," Luke laughed. "I actually had a few professors about this subject in Ylaco."

"Why am I not surprised?" Martha whispered before glancing at Khan.

Khan understood the meaning behind her gesture and sat next to Bruce, allowing Martha to have her left side on the stairs that led to the back lines. Yet, he didn't fail to inspect the unfamiliar recruits in the process.

April and Jacob both had red hair and green eyes. Their facial features were quite soft and shared many similarities. Khan could quickly understand that they were brother and sister or cousins.

Jacob was slightly chubby. He wasn't fat, but he didn't have a slim physique either. April was the same, but she seemed to care about that feature more than her brother since she buttoned the belt of her uniform quite tight.

'How can she even breathe?' Khan wondered before ignoring the matter and drawing the headphones from the desk.

"Is he for real?" Jacob asked when he saw Khan's action.

"Meet Martha Weesso and Khan," Luke explained. "They are the most workaholic soldiers in the entire camp. I'm surprised they didn't kill each other during Professor Norwell's lessons."

Luke, Bruce, Jacob, and April continued to talk while Martha and Khan paid attention to the lesson.

Professor Conche didn't talk about anything interesting. His first lesson covered the financial evolution of human society after the creation of the ten noble families. Even Khan struggled to remain focused on those topics.

The second lesson ended up being worse than the first. Khan didn't believe that the mana cores could become a boring topic, but Professor Conche left him speechless.

Professor Conche threw countless numbers toward his class. He talked about many data gathered throughout the years. His explanation involved risks and benefits of the cores, differences among their qualities, and data concerning injured soldiers.

The lesson would have been interesting if it weren't a mere pile of graphs. Khan did his best to study them, but it was hard to commit so many numbers to memory. He limited himself to save them on his phone to read them whenever he needed something.

"How can he even spend two hours like that?" Luke complained once the lesson ended and the group hit the canteen. "No one cares that the new synthetic cores have gained half of a point of attunement speed. They are still inferior to the organic."

"He has to fill those two hours with something," Bruce commented. "Endure for this week. The next lessons should become more interesting."

The group quickly moved toward the basement after they finished their lunch. Professor Norwell's lesson proceeded as usual, and Khan and Martha ended up revisiting the medical bay once it ended.

The schedule for the first week never changed. Khan soon became used to that routine, and every day began to resemble the previous one.

The only differences in his days were the different topics in Professor Conche's lessons and his conversations with Martha. Luke and Bruce managed to bring new friends from the special class from time to time, but Khan didn't care much about socializing during that week.

Even some of Professor Conche's interesting topics couldn't distract Khan from his excitement. He would probably gain access to mana after the end of that week, and his mind didn't manage to think about anything else.

Sunday eventually arrived. The camp wouldn't have any lesson that day, but the medical bay would function as usual. Khan had even questioned the nurses beforehand, so he knew that Doctor Parket would be in the building during the morning.

Martha decided to accompany Khan to the medical bay that day, but she remained outside of Doctor Parket's office. Khan could be alone with him, and the latter didn't hesitate to express his confusion.

"I don't understand why you asked for a visit," Doctor Parket announced. "I visited you two weeks ago. You didn't learn enough about mana to worry about specific issues connected to your status."

"It's about my attunement with mana, sir," Khan politely replied. "I think it's better if you check it."

"Any nurse can do that job," Doctor Parket complained.

"But I don't know if the nurses respect my father enough to take care of his son, sir," Khan explained, and Doctor Parket remained speechless for a second.

Doctor Parket scratched his beard and adjusted his small glasses before heaving a helpless sigh and standing up from his chair. He grabbed a scanner from a desk in the corner of his room and proceeded to scan Khan's attunement.

A faint gasp resounded behind Khan. He turned to see Doctor Parket staring at the scanner with wide eyes. He didn't seem able to believe the number displayed on the item.

"Did it reach twenty percent?" Khan asked, and a second wave of surprise engulfed Doctor Parket.

"Were you aware of your development?" Doctor Parket asked.

"I found out about that only recently," Khan explained. "I figured that you could tell me how to handle my situation."

Doctor Parket inspected Khan's fake innocent face before heaving a deep sigh. He sat back on his desk while placing the scanner in Khan's direction. The latter could clearly read that his attunement with mana had reached twenty percent.

"A Tainted boy with an A-tier organic core that belonged to a Nak," Doctor Parket sighed. "I shouldn't even feel surprised about this. You are also a survivor of the Second Impact. I bet that you meditated like a madman in these weeks."

Khan didn't answer. The Doctor wasn't really asking him anything.

"Your improvements will slow down from now on," Doctor Parket explained. "Your body has finally accepted mana as part of yourself, but the process will be harsher now. The mana has to become predominant, and that can lead to painful training sessions."

"I don't fear pain," Khan replied in a steady tone.

"I bet you don't," Doctor Parket said. "Still, your body will try to fight the mana. It will consider it like cancer taking over your flesh."

"Can I use the same training method as before?" Khan asked.

"Yes, but the effects will be different," Doctor Parket explained. "You probably have yet to learn about this, but your attunement has to reach fifty percent to become a first-level warrior. The process won't be easy, and I don't think you should rely on synthetic mana either."

"Why is that?" Khan asked, putting in the back of his mind all the other information disclosed by the Doctor. "I heard that it has no negative effects at its best quality."

"It would be a waste in your case," Doctor Parket explained. "Your body has the chance to hold the purest mana among the army. You might end up rejecting the synthetic mana since it doesn't match your standards."

Khan didn't know what to do with those explanations for now. They definitely broadened his understanding of mana, but they didn't tell him much about his current situation.

"What should I do now, in your opinion?" Khan asked, hoping that Doctor Parket's respect for Bret would force him to recommend something.

"The Global Army will give you a martial art if you prove that your attunement has reached the intended level," Doctor Parket explained, "But I think you should avoid that for now. I'm not asking you to put your training on hold either."

"So?" Khan continued.

"Do you know of a man named Carl Dyester?" Doctor Parket asked. "He handles the prison of the camp."

Chapter 25 - Istrone

Khan came out of Doctor Parket's office with many unanswered questions in his mind. He had learnt quite a lot from that conversation, but he still felt like a foreigner to the world of mana.

'That was a lot,' Khan summarized in his mind. 'The attunement must reach fifty percent to become first-level warriors, I should avoid synthetic mana, and the meditations might become painful from now on.'

Doctor Parket didn't say anything about mages, but he sent Khan away before the conversation could reach that topic. Still, he had also revealed a path that didn't involve the Global Army.

'Did he ask me to avoid the Global Army due to the weak martial arts?' Khan wondered while Martha waved at him from the other end of the corridor. 'Or is there something else?'

Khan didn't have the answers to his doubts, but he didn't let those thoughts distract him from his next task. He had to visit the prison of the camp, but he needed a plan first.

'Carl Dyester might give me the chance to learn a good martial art,' Khan thought as the memories of his short interaction with the soldier appeared in his mind.

Khan wasn't completely aware of that, but he had developed a keen instinct in judging people after spending years in the Slums. He had a few theories about Carl, and none of them depicted a favorable situation.

'He has definitely suffered a terrible loss on Istrone,' Khan thought. 'He even seems to despise normal recruits. I don't know if he hates their wealth or their inexperience, but my money is on both.'

A plan slowly developed in Khan's mind, and he sighed when he understood that no lies would work. Carl seemed the type of soldier who would respect a direct approach, but Khan had to go past that to become his disciple. He had to create a connection between their traumatic experiences.

"Can you hear me?" Martha shouted while waving her hand in front of Khan's face.

"I was thinking," Khan explained after snapping back to reality. "I need to go to the prison of the camp. That might be my best chance to avoid the bad martial arts of the army."

"Sure," Martha shrugged her shoulders. "Let's go."

Martha began to walk toward the exit of the medical bay, but Khan promptly grabbed her arm to stop her. The girl turned to show a confused expression, and an explanation soon reached her ears.

"I need to see Carl Dyester," Khan whispered. "He was a Major on Istrone. That's where your grandfather died, right? I don't think you should be there."

Martha froze for an instant when those words reached her ears. Khan was asking her to remain behind due to her connection with Carl. He had the chance to exploit their friendship for his benefit, but he had decided to warn her instead.

"One more reason for me to come, right?" Martha snorted while freeing herself from Khans' grasp and turning toward the exit. "He might get all sentimental if I'm there."

Khan scratched his head when he saw the girl walking toward the exit. Martha sounded pissed for some reason, even if he had done the right thing. He felt unable to understand her feelings in that situation.

Martha made sure that her back faced Khan on purpose. The sudden burst of worry of her friend had made her blush, and she didn't want him to notice that.

"Wait for me," Khan eventually said before running after her.

The duo walked toward the peripheral areas of the camp. Martha used her phone to check the path, but Khan recalled where the prisons were. It took them half an hour to reach a seemingly empty spot with perfectly kept lawn grass.

"Are we sure it's here?" Martha asked in front of the empty area.

"It goes underground," Khan explained while knocking on the ground. "Is anybody here? Lieutenant Dyester? I have a question for you."

"How do you know these things?" Martha asked as puzzlement appeared on her face.

"I came here on the first day," Khan revealed. "Nothing serious. I got into a fight."

"How can you even get imprisoned on the first day?" Martha laughed.

"It wasn't my fault!" Khan snorted. "Some bullies wanted to pick on me because I was from the Slums. Don't worry. I busted their balls."

Martha gave voice to another laugh, unaware that Khan had been literal with his words. Meanwhile, the boy continued to knock and call for the Lieutenant.

"Are you sure that he is here?" Martha asked after the duo spent more than five minutes in that condition. "Maybe it's his day off."

"He doesn't seem the type to take breaks," Khan explained before straightening his position and starting to stomp his feet on the ground. "He's probably sleeping."

"And you think that waking him up is a good idea?" Martha laughed, but she went silent when she noticed that Khan had worn his man-Khan expression.

Martha didn't think that the matter would be so important for Khan. After all, he would eventually manage to get his hands on a good martial art with his talent. She couldn't understand how desperate he was to start his journey as a soldier.

Khan continued to stomp his feet until a mechanical noise resounded from under him. He quickly jumped backward, and a trapdoor slowly opened in his previous spot.

"Just blame me if something goes wrong," Khan announced before crouching to lift the trapdoor and descend a short staircase.

Martha wore an annoyed expression before following him inside the dark basement. Curiosity soon filled her face, but her eyes eventually fell on a tall man sitting on a table at the end of the staircase.

"What do you want, kid?" Lieutenant Dyester asked while scratching the corner of his eyes. "Why would you even come here on purpose?"

Khan took those words as a good sign. He had clearly woken up the Lieutenant, but the latter didn't sound pissed about it.

"My attunement with mana has reached twenty percent," Khan went straight to the point. "I have no backing, but I don't want to waste years training in an inferior martial art. You are strong, right? Can you teach me something?"

"I can teach you to respect your superiors," Lieutenant Dyester snorted. "These matters usually involve money or other benefits. What do I have to gain from teaching you? Why would I even accept?"

"Because you like me very much?" Khan asked as a broad smile appeared on his face.

"I definitely liked watching you beating those wealthy kids," Lieutenant Dyester chuckled, "But that's not enough."

"What can be enough?" Khan asked.

"A million of Credits for each lesson," Lieutenant Dyester announced before exploding into a laugh.

Lieutenant Dyester then raised his head to look at Khan and enjoy his expression, but the latter disappointed him. The soldier only wanted to scare him away, but Khan's reaction left him speechless.

"Is that a lot?" Khan whispered while turning toward Martha, and the latter shot a helpless glance toward him before nodding.

"How poor are you?" Lieutenant Dyester asked as disbelief filled his tone.

"Completely broke!" Khan laughed. "I don't even recall how Credits look like. Food was the only currency in the Slums, so...."

Khan shrugged his shoulders, and Martha covered her eyes in shame. Her friend was completely hopeless.

"Credits don't have a form," Martha explained while keeping her voice down. "They are a digital currency accepted by all the planets connected to the Global Army. Even aliens know about this."

"The aliens should try to live in the Slums," Khan snorted. "You can buy a house with twenty food cans, but you are better off stealing an empty one while the owners are working."

Both Lieutenant Dyester and Martha didn't know what to say. The Slums didn't even seem to belong to their same world.

"My answer is still no," Lieutenant Dyester eventually broke the silence. "Disciples and underlings can only cause trouble, and my days are full. I barely have free time."

Khan and Martha turned toward the cells. They were all empty. Lieutenant Dyester could sleep all day since he didn't have cases to review.

"I really have no one else," Khan honestly replied while nearing the table. "My mother died during the Second Impact, and my father had to lose everything to save me. He couldn't even teach me what he knew about the Global Army. I'll only end up as a tool of the wealthy family if you leave me on my own."

Khan had dropped all the acts and lies at that point. He had revealed information that even Martha ignored, and a pensive expression eventually fell on her face.

Khan had undeniably suffered a lot. The trauma of the Second Impact alone was enough to ruin his entire life. Living in the Slums had also been hellish, but he still had the ability to smile.

Lieutenant Dyester could see all those features in Khan's face. Part of him even began to pity the boy, which led him to be completely honest with the next answer.

"I'm only a shadow of myself, kid," Lieutenant Dyester replied. "There's only death and war in space. I can take joy in the fact that my refusal might force you to choose safe destinations in the future."

"He won't," Martha raised her head and joined the conversation. "The missions on the safe planets don't award many merits, so he won't go there. It doesn't matter if his power doesn't suit the dangerous places."

"Who are you?" Lieutenant Dyester asked while expressing his confusion.

"I'm Martha Weesso," Martha revealed. "My grandfather has fought on Istrone with you."

Chapter 26 - Favor

Lieutenant Dyester inspected Martha for a few seconds before taking a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. He drew one of them and lit it up with his forefinger before falling silent.

Martha and Khan respected that silent moment. It was evident that the soldier was reviewing some emotional memories. Lieutenant Dyester didn't seem able to move his eyes away from the girl, and his expression grew darker as the seconds passed.

"Captain Abe Weesso was a good man," Lieutenant Dyester eventually said. "He followed me until the end. He even saved my life a few times. I had to hold his hand when he died."

Khan and Martha continued to remain silent. Martha's identity had clearly broken through Carl's mental barrier, but they had yet to understand where that situation would lead.

"His granddaughter is in the Global Army now," Lieutenant Dyester scoffed. "Every kid in the world can't wait to jump in this cycle of death. You come here thinking that war is a game."

Lieutenant Dyester's leg began to tap on the floor. The memories of Istrone had made him nervous, and his cigarette didn't manage to calm him down.

"I can still hear the screams," Khan decided to speak. "I can still recall the suffocating scent of charred flesh and the revolting images of the corpses. Don't use your pain to insult me."

Martha and Lieutenant Dyester shot a surprised glance toward Khan. Martha tried to pull his uniform to remind him of the reason behind that meeting, but the soldier ended up feeling ashamed when he inspected Khan's face.

Lieutenant Dyester could see the same pain that afflicted him in Khan's eyes. Those azure irises didn't belong to a boy. They created the gaze of a man who knew loss, sorrow, and death.

"Forgive my words," Lieutenant Dyester suddenly said, and his behavior ended up stunning Martha. "I often forget that I'm not the only one in pain. It wasn't my intention to insult you."

Khan sighed before sitting on the steps behind him. His eyes continued to inspect Lieutenant Dyester, and the latter didn't move his gaze away from him either.

Martha felt out of place. She was unfamiliar with the tension that had fallen on the basement. Part of her understood that she was the only kid in the room.

"Weesso girl," Lieutenant Dyester eventually broke the silence. "Your relationship with Abe can force me to grant you any favor. Are you sure that you want to waste it for this kid?"

Khan didn't turn toward Martha. He didn't want to beg her nor ask for any favor. Martha had to decide that on her own.

Martha looked down toward Khan's hair. Her eyes went past his physical features and tried to sense the immense struggles he had to overcome to reach his current state.

The Weesoo family was poor, but it was still inside Ylaco. Martha was incredibly rich compared to every citizen inside the Slums. She only had to overcome minor political issues throughout her life, but she had never experienced actual pain.

"Do it," Martha announced. "Use this favor for him. Take him under your wing."

"Are you really sure about this?" Lieutenant Dyester replied. "You won't be able to take it back once the training starts."

"He is right," Khan asked while turning toward his friend. "I can always find another way, but this is about your family. You don't have to use it for me."

"What are you even saying?" Martha's face broke into a smile. "I'm only passing his favor to you. You'll owe me a big one from now on."

Martha then turned toward Lieutenant Dyester and continued. "He is a tricky one. Don't ever let him talk if you want to remain safe from his ploys."

"I'll make him regret this decision a few times," Lieutenant Dyester smiled.

"Good," Martha said before turning toward Khan again. "Make sure to get as strong as him, at least. I don't want to lose value on this investment."

Khan didn't know how to thank Martha for that chance, so he limited himself to say a silent "thank you" with his lips. The girl's smile broadened as she nodded and climbed the staircase back to the surface.

The trap door opened and let Martha out of the basement before closing again. Only Khan and the Lieutenant remained in the room, and they studied each other in silence for a while before exchanging a few words.

"You got a nice girlfriend," Lieutenant Dyester said. "Being young sure is fun."

"She's only my sparring partner and a friend," Khan explained. "Also, I plan to respect her words. I'll become stronger than you and repay this favor."

"You have been in the camp for only two weeks," The Lieutenant laughed. "I bet you know nothing about warriors and mages. You would have more respect for me otherwise."

"I'll try not to use my mocking tone when I call you Master," Khan smirked.

"And I'll start to call you kid once you become a human being in my eyes," Lieutenant Dyester snorted. "You have a mere twenty percent attunement with mana. Even roaches can reach it, so that will be your new name until you improve."

Khan didn't reply. He didn't care about names or titles. He continued to sit on the step, but his legs began to shake in excitement.

"Did they teach you some moves already, Roach?" The Lieutenant asked.

"The shadow step and the palm force," Khan explained.

"No wonder you wanted to avoid the martial arts of the army," Lieutenant Dyester scoffed. "Did you try using them while deploying mana?"

"I discovered my attunement only an hour ago," Khan replied.

"Stand up then," Lieutenant Dyester said while stretching his legs on the table and tilting his chair. "Perform the palm force on the metal bars. The real training will start once you manage to bend them."

Khan remained speechless. He didn't even know how to deploy the mana, but Lieutenant Dyester had ordered him to bend metal bars meant to hold soldiers.

"Go on," Lieutenant Dyester hurried Khan. "It's still early, but the curfew will eventually arrive, and I'm giving you only one week to succeed in this task. It will be pointless to teach you anything if you can't pull it off during this period."

"But I have to attend my lessons on the other days!" Khan complained.

"Better to start right away then," Lieutenant Dyester laughed while throwing his cigarette away.

Khan found the request unreasonable, but he didn't dare to complain again. He stood up and walked toward the nearest cell before visualizing the move he had practiced during the past week.

'I still can't use the right moves every time,' Khan thought while bending his legs and preparing the attack. 'I can only do a perfect execution half of the time. I bet it will be even less now.'

Khan took a deep breath before attacking. His waist rotated, and his arm followed that movement before landing directly on one of the metal bars.

A sharp pain spread from his palm, but Khan didn't budge. He limited himself to inspect the metal bar before repeating the technique.

"You aren't even trying to use mana," Lieutenant Dyester shouted at some point. "That energy won't magically come out. You need to move it alongside the technique."

Khan took another deep break before focusing on his nape. He didn't enter the meditative state, but he still managed to see the azure energy flowing through that spot. Moreover, he noticed that a few parts of his body now featured small azure lumps.

Khan disregarded that detail to focus on the exercise. He had never tried to move the mana in a specific direction, but that seemed necessary to perform the attack.

His mana flow started to increase as he opened his eyes and performed the palm force. His hand hit the metal bar again, but a sharp pain spread from his shoulder at that time.

"Your arm moved too quickly," Lieutenant Dyester commented. "The mana didn't manage to reach your palm, so it released its power in your shoulder."

'Mana is dangerous,' Khan thought before closing his eyes again.

Khan tried to test the speed of his mana. He checked how fast it could go before reopening his eyes and focusing on the palm force.

His control over mana was still lacking. Khan understood that he couldn't make it match the palm force's speed. That was simply impossible at his current level.

'I need to make a slower version of the attack,' Khan decided before taking his position and executing his move.

His focus split between his body and the energy flowing from his nape. Khan moved slowly, trying to make the mana follow his waist and arm.

A faint low noise came out of his palm when it hit the metal bar, and a tingling sensation spread through his entire arm. He had successfully fused the flow of the mana with his technique, but his target didn't show any damage.

"You still need to perform the actual technique to bend the metal bar," Lieutenant Dyester explained. "A flawless execution is useless if it lacks power."

Khan smiled when he heard those words. The Lieutenant had called his previous execution "flawless". He had basically revealed that Khan was on the right path.

'I only need to make it faster now!' Khan exclaimed in his mind, and the world around him disappeared as his entire focus went on the exercise.

Hours inevitably passed. A drone brought the lunch to Lieutenant Dyester, and the latter ate while Khan continued to practice.

The afternoon went by, but Khan was still there. His hunger didn't make him flinch. He had never stopped trying to deploy the correct palm force, and his speed was slowly reaching the intended level.

'His mana capacity is top tier,' Lieutenant Dyester thought while checking his phone. 'He has been at it for more than ten hours, but he still has mana to waste.'

The phone marked eight fifty pm. Khan needed almost an hour to return to his dormitory at a normal pace. It was nearly time for him to stop training, and Lieutenant Dyester had also decided to send him away in the next minutes.

However, a distinct low noise eventually spread through the basement and startled Lieutenant Dyester. The soldier saw Khan crouching on the floor and gasping for air, but he didn't miss the smile on his face.

Lieutenant Dyester moved his eyes to the cell at that point. A tinge of disbelief spread on his face when he noticed that one of the metal bars had slightly bent.

Chapter 27 - Words

Lieutenant Dyester stood up and neared the cell. One of the metal bars had clearly caved in. He couldn't find any excuse to reprimand Khan about his technique.

"You might actually have some talent for this," Lieutenant Dyester announced while turning toward the boy crouching under him.

Khan gasped for breath. He felt exhausted, and his whole body was in pain. His palms had also started bleeding due to the repeated clashes with the metal bar.

Khan wore a satisfied smile, but conflicting thoughts occupied his mind. On one side, he felt ecstatic about his recent success. On the other, he knew that his last execution of the palm force wasn't ready for a real battle.

'It's still too slow,' Khan thought while replaying the scenes of his last attack in his mind. 'The mana has compensated for the lack of speed and strength, but the technique is far from complete. I even committed countless mistakes during the last hours. Only one out of four executions ended up being decent.'

Khan had to perform a slower version of the palm force to move the mana alongside his body. His last attack had generated enough power to bend the metal bar, but a proper execution would have released far more energy.

'I'm better off throwing punches at my current level,' Khan concluded. 'I still can't deploy this technique in a fight.'

"There are four levels of proficiency to each martial art," Lieutenant Dyester suddenly began to explain. "You are a novice now, the lowest level. You must become able to perform a technique without ever committing mistakes to reach the competent level. Of course, you have to do it with mana."

'So much only to become competent with one martial art,' Khan sighed in his mind.

The process felt hellish. Khan believed that moving mana would become easier in the future, but learning the various moves required by each martial art would remain hard.

'I bet a soldier won't commit more than three martial arts to memory,' Khan thought. 'There simply isn't enough time to master more techniques.'

"Hey, Rat," Lieutenant Dyester called. "What's your element?"

Khan arched his eyebrow when he noticed that the Lieutenant had already changed his name. He steadied his breath and coughed a few times before giving a short answer. "Chaos."

Lieutenant Dyester whistled while expressing evident surprise with his face. Khan inspected that reaction and confirmed that Doctor Paret had been honest with him. The chaos element wasn't common among humans.

"I can't teach you magic then," Lieutenant Dyester explained. "Different elements require different thoughts to activate their power. My knowledge can't help you there."

"What's your element?" Khan asked slowly.

"Fire," Lieutenant Dyester laughed before drawing the pack of cigarettes from his pocket. "Why do you think I smoke these? Most fire masters force new mages to light them up as their first exercise. You'll find many fire mages with this addiction."

'Who would force kids to smoke?' Khan scoffed in his mind before putting that matter aside.

"So, can you teach me anything about magic?" Khan asked. "I like martial arts and everything, but spells are cooler."

"I'll teach you a few mental exercises tomorrow," Lieutenant Dyester said while lighting up a cigarette. "I'll also think about a suitable martial art. You are strong but not too tall. I'll see what I can find."

Khan's eyes lit up at those words. He had been afraid that Lieutenant Dyester wouldn't have taken the training seriously, but he felt glad to discover that the soldier wasn't holding back on his connections.

"Come here once your daily lessons are over," Lieutenant Dyester continued. "I'll make sure to check on you and correct your moves. Hopefully you can start earning something after the first missions if you get strong enough."

A wave of gratefulness filled Khan. Lieutenant Dyester was perfect, and he had Martha to thank for that chance.

"Go now," Lieutenant Dyester ordered. "Try to end up here only by choice."

Khan nodded and quickly straightened his position. He felt tired, but he had to hurry to avoid breaking the curfew. He immediately moved toward the staircase and left the basement to begin the run for his dormitory.

'The chaos element for humans,' Lieutenant Dyester thought while resuming his position on the table. 'He needs an excellent martial art to compensate for this weakness. I wonder if the higher-ups still remember their debt.'

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Khan returned to his dormitory in a hurry. He had managed to avoid breaking the curfew by mere minutes, and sweat filled his face by the time he entered his flat.

Samuel was sleeping as usual. Khan had the room for himself, but he felt drained beyond reason. His body begged him to hit the bed, but Khan wanted to try one last thing before going back to his nightmares.

Khan didn't bother changing nor taking a shower. He didn't even take out his shoes before sitting on the bed and entering a meditative state.

Azure lights shone inside his body. He still had mana available, so he could perform his usual training and try to increase his attunement.

The mana flowing out of his nape accelerated and spread toward his mind and body, but a sharp pain suddenly appeared and forced Khan out of his meditative state.

His back had started to scream in pain as soon as the mana had tried to expand there. His flesh had rejected that energy and had pushed it back into the nape.

'That's more painful than I expected,' Khan commented while standing up and stretching his sore spot. 'No wonder soldiers prefer to use synthetic mana. I would also try to avoid this process.'

Khan gave voice to a helpless laugh when he thought that. Doctor Parket had been clear. The synthetic mana could be toxic for his body since he had extremely high standards.

'I guess I can't get benefits without accepting drawbacks,' Khan thought. 'I'm lucky enough to have reached this level and have found a master so soon. I shouldn't complain.'

Thinking about Lieutenant Dyester reminded Khan about Martha. He quickly took his phone and sent her a simple message. He thanked her again and confirmed that the soldier had been good to him.

"I'm glad," Martha immediately replied through a message. "See you tomorrow."

Khan set the alarm and put the phone back in his pocket before lying on the bed. His body couldn't resist anymore. He had to sleep and recover enough for tomorrow's training.

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The next morning, Khan tried to meditate again, but the same pain spread from his back when the mana expanded in that spot. However, he gritted his teeth and continued to force the energy to flow.

The pain forced Khan to go in and out of his meditative state. His training was far harsher than before, but he believed that he would eventually learn how to handle those hindrances.

The new issues with his meditations made him decide to reach the canteen later than usual. He didn't want to train outside of his room and have sudden pains while surrounded by recruits.

Khan found Martha, Luke, and Bruce in the canteen. A few recruits from the special class were with them, but Khan didn't bother to learn their names.

The second week would feature new lessons. The Global Army used the first semester to show all the available courses so that the recruits could consider which ones to pursue during the second part of the year.

Khan had already decided to ignore "history of mana", and he had yet to make up his mind about "basics of mana cores". His main issue with those courses was Professor Conche since the soldier was incredibly dull to follow.

The second week had interesting courses taught by a different professor. Her name was Carol Thogett, and she was a first-level warrior and mage.

Professor Thogett had the appearance of a middle-aged woman with long brown hair and dark eyes. She was short but slender, and she wore a pair of large glasses that featured thick lenses.

Her subjects were "technology and mana" and "xenolinguistics", but they didn't manage to appeal to Khan's interest since his mind could only think about Lieutenant Dyester.

Khan still tried to pay attention to those lessons, but the first one seemed quite pointless in a world of mages and warriors. Even Professor Thogett repeated multiple times that technology could only support the soldiers but never replace them.

Instead, the second lesson was quite intriguing. Professor Thogett knew many alien languages, including the Nak's.

"The Nak don't have real words in their language," Professor Thogett explained. "Even their voice is mana, so they don't need grammar and other rules. They limit themselves to fuse their thoughts with any random sound that comes out of their mouths."

Professor Thogett opened her mouth, and an azure light flowed from her head to her throat. She then gave voice to a simple sound that the mana intensified and spread through the room.

"Who can guess what I've said?" Professor Thogett asked.

'It felt trivial,' Khan thought. 'Maybe "pay attention" or something along the line.'

"No one?" Professor Thogett asked before chuckling. "You don't have to think in terms of words. The Nak's language is mostly related to emotions. I have thought about you paying attention and used mana to transmit it."

Chapter 28 - Disk

Khan didn't want to delude himself. His sensitivity to mana was good even before reaching twenty percent attunement, but that alone couldn't explain his recent feat.

'Was it a mixture of luck and sensitivity to mana?' Khan wondered as his expression grew severe. 'Did I understand her words due to my similarities with the Nak?'

Khan didn't have the answer to his doubts, but xenolinguistics had instantly reached the top of his list after that event. The lesson was almost over now, but he promised himself to pay far more attention from that day onward.

After the end of the morning lessons, the group hit the canteen, and Khan and Martha eventually remained alone during the break before Professor Norwell's course.

"You should talk with Professor Norwell once you get your martial art," Martha explained after Khan described his interaction with Lieutenant Dyester. "It's pointless to train in those techniques if you have better ones at hand."

"Isn't the lesson mandatory?" Khan asked.

"Not really," Martha continued. "The Global Army can't force you to attend useless classes. Professor Norwell only has to confirm your attunement and your new martial art to exempt you from her lessons."

"I will have more time to train with Lieutenant Dyester then!" Khan exclaimed.

"And I will lose my sparring partner," Martha snorted. "I guess I have to search for a new one. Maybe I should pick a girl and make new friends."

"I'm sure you'll be fine," Khan laughed. "Things should change once a few recruits hit the right attunement level anyway."

"You have no idea!" Martha scoffed. "Girls only talk about marrying guys and other political idiocies. They even have a ranking of the boys in our class."

"Where am I at?" Khan quickly asked. "I shouldn't be too low."

"You aren't on the list," Martha snorted. "Why would anyone go after the boy from the Slums?"

"My poor heart will never recover from this," Khan replied while wearing a sad expression.

"You won't lose your mind, at least!" Martha shouted. "This is so annoying. I should get my attunement to twenty percent as soon as possible."

"What will happen once a few of us reach that point?" Khan asked.

"It depends," Martha explained. "Those without martial arts will get one from the Global Army and continue to train under Professor Norwell's supervision. The others will probably rent a training room and practice there. Their Masters might also come from Ylaco and manage their exercises."

"I bet the training rooms cost a lot," Khan sighed.

"The price depends on the quality," Martha replied. "You can have simple reinforced rooms or large halls with animated training dummies. It's pointless for you to think about them anyway. You have no Credits at all."

"You are always so nice to me," Khan said while wearing a wide smile.

"Shut up," Martha snorted. "I have to spend the next weeks with a bunch of annoying girls, and it's your fault. Don't you dare to slack with Lieutenant Dyester."

"You know I won't," Khan replied honestly, and Martha heaved a helpless sigh when she saw the man-Khan face.

"By the way," Khan eventually continued, "When can we get access to spells?"

"The Global Army should still provide some basic training for each element," Martha explained while wearing a pensive expression. "They will probably happen on holoscreens and similar devices, but most of the wealthy kids will summon Masters right away."

"Do you have a Master for your element?" Khan asked.

"The Weesso family is poor," Martha said before wearing a proud smile, "But we always get the same two elements. We already have masters ready. I even ended up with earth like my grandfather, so I can use his notes."

'I need to find a way to get Credits then,' Khan thought. 'I can't fall behind in my training as a mage.'

Khan had revealed his problems connected to the meditations to Martha, so the duo had chosen an even more isolated spot during the break.

They began to meditate once their conversation was over, and the process ended up being far from smooth for Khan. Still, he was slowly getting the hang of it.

Enduring pain wasn't an issue for him. The main problem was getting in and out of the meditative state. Khan had to learn how to suppress his instincts and continue to control mana without interrupting his training, and only time could give him that expertise.

Khan and Martha eventually attended Professor Norwell's lesson and ended up in their usual messy state. However, Khan didn't follow Martha to the medical bay at that time. He went straight for the prisons of the camp to see his Master.

The trapdoor of the prisons opened as soon as Khan stepped on the lawn. He quickly noticed that Lieutenant Dyester wasn't in his usual sleepy mode. The soldier had a satisfied expression as he stood near the end of the staircase.

"I can surprise myself at times," Lieutenant Dyester announced while gesturing to Khan to enter the basement.

The trapdoor closed behind Khan, but he didn't notice that noise. His eyes remained fixed on the Lieutenant. He could barely hold back his excitement now that his martial art was so close.

"I had to pull some strings to get it," Lieutenant Dyester explained. "The crisis on Istrone has been a mess. I could have asked the army for the world, but I chose a demotion instead. The higher-ups were obviously happy that they didn't have to spend Credits on me, so they didn't hesitate to satisfy my request now that I've reappeared."

"Did you get a good martial art for me?" Khan asked as his figure began to tremble in excitement.

"I should explain the division among martial arts first," Lieutenant Dyester announced before clearing his throat. "Martial arts can have many labels, which mostly describe their qualities. However, they all have a set potential and a quite clear value depending on their moves."

Khan nodded, but his body began to move alongside his head. He had basically started to jump on the same spot during the explanation.

"The army has studied each martial art and has given them a score," Lieutenant Dyester continued. "The ranking goes from one to one hundred. Generally speaking, anything under forty points is a low-level martial art."

"How many points does mine have?" Khan promptly asked.

"Seventy-eight!" Lieutenant Dyester revealed before exploding into a proud laugh. "It's only two points away from being a high-level martial art. I bet that even some of the wealthy kids here won't get something this good."

Lieutenant seemed to take some joy from Khan's impatient expression, and he didn't miss the chance to brag.

"You sure are a lucky rat," Lieutenant Dyester announced. "I checked your background, and, oh boy, you wouldn't have gotten anywhere on your own. Instead, you get to learn a good martial art and have one of the strongest soldiers in this camp as your master."

"I'm dying here, Master," Khan begged the Lieutenant with a weak voice, and the latter eventually suppressed his laugh to hand a small circular item.

Khan picked the item and inspected it. Visible confusion filled his face. It resembled a tiny white disk that he could hide with a single finger.

Lieutenant Dyester waited for his deserved praises, but Khan remained silent. The soldier then looked toward the boy again and noticed that he had begun to smell the disk.

"What are you doing?" Lieutenant Dyester asked.

"I don't know what this is," Khan honestly replied, and the Lieutenant covered his face to suppress the helplessness that he felt.

"You are a lost cause," Lieutenant Dyester sighed. "Bind the disk before inserting it in your phone."

"Binding?" Khan asked while picking his phone. "Does this thing have an opening?"

Lieutenant Dyester had to sit to handle the emotions running through his mind, but he still mustered enough energy to explain how to use the item. "Make a drop of blood fall on the disk to bind it. Then, place it on your screen. The phone will do the rest."

Khan's eyes lit up, and he quickly looked around the basement. Lieutenant Dyester handed him a small knife while heaving another helpless sigh, and Khan even forgot to thank him.

Khan opened a small cut on his forefinger before pressing it on the disk. A red glow suddenly covered the item, but the light vanished in a matter of seconds.

Then, Khan placed the disk on the phone, and the item began to fuse with the smooth screen. It only took a few seconds to disappear completely.

Khan glanced toward Lieutenant Dyester in fear, and the latter shook his head before pointing at the phone. Khan unlocked the screen to inspect the menus, and his eyes quickly fell on a new label.

'Connected magic devices?' Khan read the label before pressing it.

The menu opened, and a long blank list unfolded in Khan's vision. Only the first spot had something written on it.

'Lightning-demon style,' Khan read on the phone before pressing on the writing.

A series of images immediately came out of the phone. His device created interactive holograms that depicted a short old man with a long white beard.

The man was bald, and wrinkles filled his face. However, he had a single big star on both shoulders of his military uniform.

Chapter 29 - Holograms

The hologram had a few options. Khan could start the first lesson immediately or watch a catalog of each different move separately. He could even use the phone to scan himself during the training to find eventual mistakes in the executions.

The disk contained a program that went over every aspect of the Lightning-demon style. It had everything Khan could think of. It even contained information about the old man and the martial art as a whole.

"You shouldn't activate these training programs in the open," Lieutenant Dyester explained and forced Khan out of his amazement. "These magical items are expensive, and they require genetic authorization. In theory, no one can access what you have on your phone unless you allow it."

"Isn't it dangerous to have the martial art on my phone?" Khan asked. "Doesn't it work on the network of the Global Army? The higher-ups should have access to that."

"Magic isn't the same as technology," Lieutenant Dyester reassured. "The higher-ups might be able to enter your phone, but they won't be able to activate the magical devices connected. Mana works

past your idea of technology. That's why the Global Army focuses on training soldiers instead of investing in weapons."

Khan felt still an outsider in the world of mana. He almost couldn't believe that the energy could affect programs and similar digital assets.

"What if someone uses mana to hack the phone?" Khan asked. "Is it possible to go past the protections of the disk like that?"

"In theory, yes," Lieutenant Dyester revealed. "However, mages with an element able to affect digital protections are rare, and the disk usually wipes itself clean whenever it senses a breach in its defenses."

"Magical items sound interesting," Khan couldn't help but exclaim.

"They are a unique branch of the Global Army," Lieutenant Dyester explained. "They go past the simple fusion of technology and mana. They use mana to create special effects from almost nothing. It's a marvelous subject, but it requires many years of study and perfect control over your power."

'There is so much to learn about the army,' Khan thought while closing the holograms and the training program.

"How should I train from now on?" Khan asked.

His excitement about the new martial art was far from gone, but he wanted to hear Lieutenant Dyester's opinion before diving into the holograms.

"I actually can't have a say on this matter," Lieutenant Dyester revealed. "It's up to you to decide how much you want to involve me in your training."

Lieutenant Dyester continued when he noticed Khan's confused expression. "Our physiques are quite different, so I decided to find you a different martial art. I would have taught you my techniques and followed your training if the higher-ups were to fail me, but you have many options now."

"Why would I not involve you in my training?" Khan asked. "I don't even know how most of this technology works."

"Well," Lieutenant Dyester hesitated before explaining his worries. "I would gain access to this martial art for free if you do. It's fine now since it's me, but you shouldn't do that all the time. Even some of the older soldiers won't miss the chance to learn something this valuable."

'I only need to watch my back then,' Khan summarized in his mind.

"I wouldn't have gotten this martial art without your help," Khan eventually announced. "I even need a place where to train. I definitely need you involved."

Lieutenant Dyester scratched his head before nodding. He only wanted Khan to understand how dangerous it could be to share such valuable items with strangers. The soldier had no interest in the martial art.

Khan activated the training program again when he saw Lieutenant Dyester's reaction. The interactive holograms came out of his phone, and he quickly tried to start the first lesson.

"Read the general overview of the martial art first," Lieutenant Dyester sighed. "Don't jump blindly on the moves."

"And you wanted me to do this on my own," Khan snorted.

"You are lucky that your Master has no ill intentions," Lieutenant Dyester complained. "I hope you won't trust hired professors and similar figures so easily in the future."

"I hope to have enough Credits to hire them in the future," Khan laughed before clicking the label that led toward the overview of the martial art.

"Lightning-demon style," A mechanical voice suddenly came out of the phone. "Martial art created and explained by Dean Ulluw, an evolved soldier who has opted for a secluded life."

"Evolved?" Khan asked while turning toward Lieutenant Dyester.

"It's when you go past one hundred percent attunement," The lieutenant explained before the mechanical voice resumed its explanation.

"The forms of the Lightning-demon style rely on speed and precision," The mechanical voice announced. "Ideal for shorter soldiers who don't shine in raw physical strength. Nevertheless, being strong can help bring out the true potential of the martial art since it features overall complete techniques."

"Most high-level martial art requires all the relevant physical features," Lieutenant Dyester added. "The program is saying that the techniques focus on speed out of choice rather than necessity."

"The speed generated by the techniques and the precision required during their execution will force the human body to endure a lot of pressure," The program continued. "Frail physiques should avoid this style. The same goes for soldiers with poor control over their bodies."

The overview ended after those lines. Khan felt slightly disappointed that the program didn't tell him anything else, but it was hard to ruin his mood with the various lessons listed on the other side of the hologram.

"I guess you don't care about Dean Ulluw," Lieutenant Dyester commented, and Khan showed a shameless smile before skipping the description of the evolved soldier and starting the first lesson.

The old man at the center of the hologram suddenly began to move, and a raspy voice came out of the phone as it followed his lips. "I bet that those idiots in the army told you that you only need speed and precision for this style."

Khan and Lieutenant Dyester exchanged a glance. They didn't know why the Global Army had decided to leave that description after such a specific introduction.

"Okay, they might be partially right," Dean Ulluw continued. "You can perform this style by relying only on speed and precision, but that would be a waste."

The area depicted by the hologram began to enlarge. The program's point of view retreated until it managed to represent both Dean and a humanoid training dummy in the scene.

"This is what you can do with only speed and precision," Dean announced before shooting toward the dummy and delivering a precise kick to its throat.

Dean's speed had been incredible. Khan barely managed to follow his movements. The hologram kept track of the stats connected to the technique, so he could read that the soldier had covered ten meters in less than a second.

Moreover, the precise kick had ended up cutting the dummy's head. The power generated by Dean's momentum had transformed his movement into a threatening attack capable of severing metal.

"Every mage and soldier would die against this attack," Dean explained while walking back to his previous spot. "You would be too fast for them to react, and defenses can't do much against a blow backed with such speed. However, humankind has aliens as enemies."

Something that the holograms didn't depict replaced the broken dummy with a new one. Dean then took a deep breath before disappearing from his spot.

A loud noise came out of the phone. Dean reappeared next to the training dummy, with one foot raised toward its chest. Yet, the puppet was no more. The attack had destroyed its back and insides, leaving only a thin layer of metal intact.

"Mana gives us the chance to overcome our physical limits," Dean explained while turning toward Khan. "In theory, I can push my speed further indefinitely. I only need to be strong enough to endure the physical strain. More power equals to more speed, which equals to even more power if deployed accurately."

Khan quickly stopped the recording to play with the buttons on the hologram for a few seconds and learn the various functions of the program. He could zoom, go forward, rewind, and save scenes at any time. He could even hide or show the different stats.

The first and second executions seemed different techniques, but the program contradicted Khan's opinion. Dean had performed the same move, something that the training would teach later on, but he had used different amounts of power.

The program also kept track of the mana depleted during the activation of the technique. Khan remained speechless when he saw that Dean had used the same amount of energy in both executions. The difference between their effects came from the sheer physical strength deployed.

Khan glanced toward Lieutenant Dyester, who had a hand under his chin while he inspected those stats. He didn't appear as amazed as Khan, but the technique had definitely caught his interest.

"I guess this martial art has the potential to enter the high level," Lieutenant Dyester explained. "Everything depends on how much you and your body can endure without lowering your accuracy. Some techniques might even require special training, but I'll make sure to warn you about them."

Chapter 30 - Hesitation

Khan and Lieutenant Dyester reviewed the first lessons of the Lightning-demon style together. Both wanted to gain a general idea of the martial art before starting the actual training, and a feature eventually stood out.

The Lightning-demon style heavily focused on footwork. The initial moves featured different techniques that only involved legs, ankles, and waist. They weren't even attacks. Khan had to learn all the different types of sprints and sudden accelerations before moving to the actual abilities.

'They are all so different from the shadow step,' Khan thought after that inspection. 'No wonder Luke and Bruce didn't want to learn it. Some of these moves go against that basic technique.'

The Lightning-demon style's footwork wasn't only entirely different from the theory behind the shadow step. It also featured far more complicated moves that involved specific flows of mana.

One of the first sprints wanted Khan to reinforce his knees and ankles with mana while part of his remaining energy had to flow in opposite directions depending on the dominant leg.

The palm force had required a straightforward flow of mana, and executing a weaker version of the technique had taken Khan an entire day. Instead, the Lightning-demon style wanted him to make the mana do three different things at the same time.

"How long did it take you to go past novice with your first martial art?" Khan asked as helplessness filled his mind.

"One year of constant training," Lieutenant Dyester revealed. "I started with a medium-level martial art. I guess you wanted to know that."

Khan nodded while his dreams of deploying a few techniques in the next weeks shattered.

'I have been too arrogant,' Khan sighed in his mind. 'The path is harsh for everyone, and my advantage only consists of a few weeks over my peers. Yet, they will most likely rely on synthetic mana and surpass me in no time.'

Khan felt slightly disheartened when he thought about the long journey and the environment around him, but Lieutenant Dyester soon placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Talent is useless without training," Lieutenant Dyester announced. "You won't be able to use training rooms like the other kids, so you need to work harder than them."

"Don't forget about the specific Masters," Khan reminded the Lieutenant. "They will also have experts suitable for their elements. Can I even keep up with them?"

"That depends on you," Lieutenant Dyester explained while going to his chair and lighting a cigarette. "I won't blame you if you decide to give up now. I have already cleared my debt in the end."

Lieutenant Dyester gave voice to a loud laugh while stretching his legs on the table.

"Trust me when I say that remaining on Earth is the best," Lieutenant Dyester continued. "You can bully everyone even if you have little to no power."

"And remain trapped in an eternal nightmare," Khan sighed, but Lieutenant Dyester ignored the real meaning behind his words.

The soldier believed that Khan didn't want to remain on Earth due to the bad memories connected to the Second Impact, and he was partially correct. Yet, he couldn't even begin to imagine the real drive behind Khan's action.

"I'm quite strict as a Master," Lieutenant Dyester eventually added. "I will never allow you to slack if you decide to step on this path. You will wake up in pain for the next months, and you won't have the time nor the energy to take care of your girlfriend."

Khan didn't react to that joke. He continued to inspect the instructions behind the footstep of the Lightning-demon style. Those difficult teachings made him desire to give up, but the images of his nightmare appeared in his vision whenever his determination started to flicker.

'Why do I even pretend to have a choice?' Khan sighed in his mind. 'Giving up because the path is hard is lame. Also, how much can those wealthy kids even endure?'

Khan had seen how Luke and the others trained during Professor Norwell's lessons. They had no interest in those weak techniques, but that alone didn't manage to hide their laziness.

Instead, Khan could continue to perform the same exercise until his palm bled. His determination wasn't something that the simple desire to learn better techniques could generate.

The life in the Slums, the Second Impact, and his nightmares had imprinted that determination inside him. His desperation had given birth to an ability that his peers couldn't imitate.

"You said one year," Khan eventually broke his silence. "Can I succeed sooner?"

"The Lightning-demon style is definitely complicated," Lieutenant Dyester explained. "It's more difficult than my initial martial art. Yet, you succeeded in performing a decent execution of the palm force in one day. Who knows? You might surprise me."

Lieutenant Dyester didn't fully believe in his words. He valued Khan a lot, but there was a limit to how quickly a body could adapt to those moves. His lines only wanted to create a challenge for his disciple.

"Fine then," Khan announced while weakly slapping his cheeks to disperse his hesitation. "Let's begin right away. Teach me the mental training that you mentioned yesterday too. I want to learn it now that my body still holds."

Lieutenant Dyester couldn't help but smile at that sight. It was normal to hesitate in front of a painful process that could take more than a year to give its first rewards, but Khan had made up his mind in a matter of minutes.

'His mindset is his best quality,' Lieutenant Dyester thought before pointing at the writing on the hologram that marked the first lesson.

It was time to start the actual training, and they had to hurry since the curfew would give them only a few hours together.

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Returning to the dormitory ended up being extremely hard. Khan's ankles felt sore, but his expression showed only determination.

Lieutenant Dyester had managed to teach the mental training to Khan before the latter had to begin his exercises with the Lightning-demon style.

Khan had initially struggled. He didn't try to use mana on that night, but he still had to spend some time to forget the habits obtained after training into the shadow step for an entire week.

'I need to notify Professor Norwell tomorrow,' Khan thought as he limped inside his flat. 'I can't keep training in those techniques. One week has almost rendered a whole night of exercises useless.'

Luke and Bruce had been right since the beginning, but Khan couldn't blame himself. He couldn't predict that he would have found a Master so quickly.

Samuel was already sleeping, and Khan decided to eat a food can before throwing himself in bed. Still, he didn't immediately try to rest. Lieutenant Dyester had taught him something that he had to test before returning to his nightmare.

'All the spells require control over the mana stored in my head,' Khan repeated Lieutenant Dyester's words in his mind. 'This training should theoretically improve my ability to cast spells.'

Khan entered his meditative state, but he didn't focus on his nape at that time. His attention went on the small azure lights in his head before he tried to execute Lieutenant Dyester's teachings.

'Up and down,' Khan thought as his concentration intensified, 'Left and right, and circles in the end. I need to do it without losing control over the mana before moving to a harsher exercise.'

Khan chose one of the small azure lumps and tried to move it upward. He wasn't trying to raise his attunement, so the process didn't hurt. Yet, he still failed to retain control over that small amount of energy.

Khan didn't give up and tried multiple times to move that lump of mana in a specific direction. Controlling the energy inside his brain felt different compared to when he executed his techniques. That ability seemed to depend on other factors that he had yet to understand fully.

'My thoughts should influence the process,' Khan exclaimed in his mind. 'Go up! I want you to go up!'

Lieutenant Dyester had tried to explain to Khan how to handle that training, but everything had sounded too vague. The former had even stated that every mind reacted differently, so part of the teaching might not work for him.

Only one detail was universal when it came to the mana inside the brain. The first time was the hardest. Khan would be able to memorize the sensation generated by the movement of that energy and try to replicate it until he mastered the procedure.

'Come on,' Khan continued to shout in his mind. 'Do it at least once. I only need you to move up a single time.'

The mana didn't listen to him. His thoughts ended up affecting the energy released by his nape instead.

Khan had set the alarm before beginning that training. Disappointment inevitably filled his mind when his phone rang, but he had yet to succeed in the exercise.

'I'll try again tomorrow,' Khan sighed before setting another alarm and going back to the meditative state.

Khan couldn't ignore part of his training to focus on his martial arts and mental exercises. Doctor Parket had already destroyed his hopes toward the synthetic mana, so he had to work hard on his attunement too.

'I waste twelve hours between sleep and morning lessons,' Khan thought after stopping the second alarm and checking the hour. 'I need to divide the other twelve among the Lightning-demon style, the mental exercises, and the meditations. I can't leave Martha completely alone either.'