

Chaos' Heir 231

Chapter 231 - Sir

The mental connection with Snow grew weaker as the spaceship flew toward the space station. The vehicle accelerated before slowing down and causing a series of clunking noises during its landing. Its doors opened and revealed a bright environment filled with white light tainted only by the azure glow of the tubes that ran on its smooth dark surfaces.

Earth's air flowed inside the spaceship and brought relief to the humans' lungs. The soldiers and recruits' bodies recognized their home, but that sensation only filled Khan's mind with sadness. He remained focused on the mental connection with Snow until that portal into the Aduns' thoughts closed and transformed into nothing more than a faint dot. It still existed, but he could easily overlook it if he didn't pay attention.

A series of soldiers stood next to the spaceship and performed military salutes as Lieutenant Kintea and the others stood up. Dark-blue uniforms and white stars flashed in Khan's vision, but he barely committed them to memory. Orders also resounded, but nothing seemed able to enter his ears. His body moved, but his mind was too sore to study all the inputs that reached it.

The clanging noise that resounded after Khan jumped off the spaceship forced Khan to accept how final that moment was.. He had spent a bit more than seven months on Nitis, but everything was over now. He was back in the human world, and his thoughts hid in a dark corner of his mind to delay that realization.

Khan followed Lieutenant Kintea and the other soldiers, but he didn't study his surroundings. His eyes remained firm, but they didn't look at anything. He was a mere body empty of sensations and emotions that walked through bright and warm corridors before stopping inside a large hall. Multiple desks featuring interactive screens filled Khan's vision, but his gaze immediately went on the long glass at the end of the area.

"The interrogations will start soon!" The woman in charge of the team that had picked up the envoys shouted. "We will begin with-."

The woman stopped speaking when she noticed that Lieutenant Kintea had raised a hand, and the latter promptly explained himself. "There is no need to interrogate the others. I'm more than enough to provide a complete report."

The woman inspected Lieutenant Kintea. She didn't know if the soldier wanted to let his underlings off the hook or was simply looking to improve his value, but Khan soon claimed her attention. He had approached the window without caring that all the eyes in the hall had fallen on him.

"It's fine," Lieutenant Kintea reassured before the woman could scold Khan. "We went through a lot on Nitis. Let's deal with the report now."

The woman's gaze returned on Lieutenant Kintea, and she eventually nodded before pointing at one of the corridors connected to the hall. She watched the soldier leave, and a simple order escaped from her mouth as she moved to follow him. "Send the others to their rooms for now."

The soldiers in her team performed a military salute before approaching the envoys. Still, they soon found out that everyone was quite responsive, especially Kelly, Paul, and the two higher-ups.

Rodney had remained inside the spaceship, and someone had probably already brought him into a cell, so only George and Khan didn't move immediately.

George inspected Khan for a few seconds, but he eventually decided to leave with the soldier. He wanted to be with his friend, but his mind was also a mess. He needed some time alone.

Khan inspected the world past the long window. He had initially managed to see Nitis clearly, but the dark planet became hard to notice as the space station left its atmosphere.

His palm went on the window as everything he had loved so hard in the past months grew farther away from him. The glass felt cold, good cold, but it couldn't suppress the dense sadness that was slowly filling his body.

"Your room awaits," A tall man said after waiting for a few minutes that Khan noticed his presence.

Khan ignored the soldier that had approached him from his left. He didn't care enough about the Global Army to lose those last glimpses of Nitis.

"You must come with me," The soldier insisted, but Khan continued to turn a deaf ear to his words.

The space station was fast, too fast for Khan's tastes. Nitis soon disappeared among the blackness of space, but he continued to search for the planet. He hoped that memorizing that dark spot would allow him to find it again in the future.

Khan's blatant disregard for his situation was getting on the soldier's nerves. The latter reached for the boy's shoulder, but he suddenly felt unable to move his arm. His eyes widened when he saw that Khan had grabbed his wrist.

The soldier opened his mouth to complain, but his tongue froze when Khan turned to inspect him. His cold eyes moved slowly and went from the man's face to his shoulders. The latter had a single star on his right. He was a mere first-level warrior.

The soldier had treated Khan as a simple seventeen-year-old boy, but that misconception crumbled when he inspected those cold eyes. Khan's gaze radiated a chilling calmness that sent waves of fear down the man's spine. The latter could only accept to be in front of a warrior who had far more experience than him.

"[Does-]," Khan began to speak, but he closed his eyes when he realized that he was using the Niqols' language. He spent a few seconds in silence before resuming voicing his question. "Does the room have a window?"

The soldier didn't know why he wasn't fighting to escape from Khan's grip. His very instincts were telling him to go along with that situation. He almost failed to realize that an answer had left his mouth. "No, they don't."

"I won't go there then," Khan stated as he let the soldier go. "Does this space station have a training hall?"

"Yes, but-," The soldier tried to explain that the Global Army rarely allowed the use of training halls inside the space stations due to their high consumption of synthetic mana, but Khan didn't let him finish.

"I'll go there," Khan announced. "Lead the way."

Khan began to walk toward the center of the hall, but he soon turned toward the soldier since he didn't know which corridor would lead to the training hall. The man didn't know what to do, but the slight soreness that had spread throughout his hand told him that Khan was strong enough to hurt him. That sensation and the cold eyes fixed on him eventually made him decide to go along with that request.

The two crossed many corridors silently, and the soldier didn't hold back from glancing at Khan whenever his curiosity had the best of him. That walk felt strange. The man was clearly leading that march, but he sensed that Khan was in charge.

"We are here," The soldier announced after stopping in front of a grey metal door. "You only need to-."

"I know how training halls work," Khan interrupted before taking out his phone and placing it next to the door.

The action didn't lead to any result. Khan's phone had died after the weeks spent inside the castles. The envoys had left their chargers somewhere on Nitis, and they didn't need them under the sunlight, but their devices had inevitably turned off after the constant night returned.

Khan heaved a helpless sigh in front of the unresponsiveness of his phone. He moved to his right and pointed at the door, but the soldier found himself in a pickle.

"The hall will use my Credits if I activate it," The soldier explained, hoping that Khan would give up on the matter.

"The Global Army will pay you back," Khan coldly replied.

"You can't know that!" The soldier complained.

"Then call someone," Khan ordered. "Tell them that Khan wants to use the training hall."

Under normal circumstances, the soldier would never bother his superiors over a kid, but the firmness in Khan's words made him pick up his phone. The man sent a message to the woman interrogating Lieutenant Kintea, and her answer left him stunned.

The soldier raised his eyes to stare at Khan in disbelief, but the latter didn't appear surprised to see that reaction. Khan radiated pure confidence, and he even made that aura appear normal on him.

"You are free to use the training hall as long as you want," The soldier uttered before timidly adding another word, "Sir."

Khan decided not to address that topic and waited calmly for the soldier to touch the door with his phone and press a few options. The entrance slid open, and the man performed a military salute when Khan entered the training hall.

The door closed behind Khan as soon as he tapped the metal floor a couple of times. Menus quickly appeared under his feet, but he ignored them to place his phone in the corner of the hall.

The training hall immediately started to charge the device as Khan undressed. He threw the upper part of his robe next to his phone and drew his broken knife before removing the sheathe from his waist. The Niqols had made him leave the cube on Nitis, so he didn't have anything else. Khan even took off his shoes and remained in his loose trousers before approaching the menus.

Khan was no stranger to the training programs in those halls, but everything was different now that he had become a first-level warrior. He needed to activate puppets powered by mana to test the level of his martial arts.

The training hall never stopped Khan. It allowed him to pick all the programs he desired, so he didn't hesitate to choose something suitable for his level. Clanking noises immediately resounded from behind the walls as azure shades seeped into the white light that illuminated the area.

The walls on the opposite side of the hall took a few minutes to open. Khan saw a three meters tall black puppet leaving the tubes and wires that kept it connected to the workshop. Azure lines ran across the dummy's body and revealed the presence of mana in its metal. It felt like a proper first-level warrior when he inspected the sheer amount of energy contained in its body.

Khan closed his eyes as the puppet charged toward him. It was fast, but it felt slow when he inspected it with his senses. He had enough time to muster his mana and shot forward through a simple movement that made him end behind the dummy.

The puppet immediately turned, but its quick movement revealed a diagonal cut on its oval face. Its four red eyes went dark as half of its head separated from the rest of its body and fell to the floor.

"Level four," The training hall announced.

Descriptions of the enhancements resounded in the hall, but Khan ignored them. He focused on the fact that the program had brought him directly to the fourth level, but that felt almost normal since he was far stronger than an ordinary first-level warrior.

The training hall retrieved the puppet and took a few minutes to build the next challenge, but its difficulty ended up disappointing Khan. He shook his head when he saw three dummies coming out of the workshops inside the walls.

'The program is preserving the synthetic mana,' Khan concluded in his mind.

Khan had picked a training program meant for first-level warriors, but the Global Army had set clear limits to the amount of mana that the hall could use. He didn't know if that was limited to the space stations due to their short stashes of energy, but he soon let go of his disappointment.

Facing three opponents almost as strong as first-level warriors wasn't an easy task. Khan's abilities simply happened to counter those challenges. Still, he decided to ignore those issues and focus on falling inside the unique mental state experienced in the muddy valley.

The three puppets charged at Khan. They had different sizes, speeds, and structures, but none of them was as fast as him. The first one to approach him found a vertical cut on its face after failing to catch him. The second dummy suddenly flew toward the third dummy as the metal on its side caved in, but precise kicks soon reduced their heads into a mass of wires, gears, and dark shards.

"Level six," The training hall announced, but Khan didn't hear that.

Khan's mind only paid attention to the mana in his surroundings. He felt able to smell the difference between natural and synthetic energy. Everything seemed so obvious that Khan wondered how he had failed to sense that in the first place.

The training hall soon created five puppets, and Khan moved as soon as he sensed that the flow of mana in his surroundings changed. He ducked, side-stepped, kicked, and waved his weapon without thinking. He didn't even care that his knife lost chunks of its broken blade from time to time.

The training program eventually forced Khan to rely on the [Blood Shield]. He even found himself flying around when he fell in the middle of a trap, but he never suffered severe injuries. A few bruises had appeared on his torso, arms, and mouth when he noticed that the hall wasn't sending dummies anymore.

Khan raised his eyes toward the wall and noticed the words "level ten" shining with a green light. He had completed the training program, and the debris around him only confirmed how fierce the battle had been. However, he still felt full of energy, even if some sweat had appeared on his body and a faint soreness had spread inside him.

'I guess a training program can't compare to an actual war,' Khan thought before browsing the menus to the floor to make some robots clear the hall.

Khan inspected his knife as he walked back to his phone. His weapon had initially featured a long blade, but only a sharp chunk shorter than four centimeters had remained now. He had mostly performed perfect executions of the Divine Reaper during the battle, but that didn't seem to be enough for a cracked item. His only consolation was that he had almost reached the competent proficiency level in his second martial art.

Khan was about to pick his phone, but someone suddenly knocked on the door. He used the menus to open it, and a helpless smile appeared on his face when he saw George crossing the entrance to show a bottle of booze and two glasses.

Chapter 232 - Request

"How did you even find booze up here?" Khan laughed when George walked proudly toward him.

"You should never underestimate the power of a driven man!" George announced before sitting in front of Khan and filling the two glasses.

The two instinctively toasted according to the Niqols' traditions and took a long sip before revealing disgusted expressions. The liquor was different from what they had become used to drinking on Nitis. It had a strong flavor that made their throats burn for a few seconds before spreading warmth in their stomachs.

"I should have asked Doku for some recipes," George complained.

"Knowing how to make booze is the last thing you need," Khan mocked, and the two boys exploded into a loud laugh.

"Hey, I'm heartbroken here," George stated while trying to suppress his laughs. "I need some liquid love to keep going."

"You should be careful," Khan suggested. "You don't have anyone stopping you from becoming an alcoholic now."

"Is it strange that I already miss her slaps?" George asked. "Havaa knew how to hurt without really hurting me. I don't know if that makes sense."

Khan's smile grew helpless as he nodded. He could vaguely understand what he meant, even if his experience with that topic involved Liiza's violent passion.

"We have been the luckiest boys in the entire universe for a few months," George sighed as he picked up his cup and drank a small sip.

"How is it?" Khan asked in front of George's frown.

"It does get better after the first sip," George commented, and Khan didn't hesitate to test that for himself.

The liquor soon filled his throat with its intense flavor again, but it didn't burn with the same intensity as before. Khan even managed to start appreciating that taste.

"Maybe you should stop being a soldier and make your brand," Khan joked.

"Life would definitely be easier," George groaned while inspecting the robots cleaning the debris in the hall. "It looks like you also need a break from all of this."

"I was just blowing off some steam," Khan responded. "I think I frightened the soldier who led me here. The guy even called me sir after leaving me."

"The two of us have more experience than most of the soldiers in this space station," George scoffed. "Our eyes see the world differently, and they can understand that when they look at us."

"They don't know how lucky they are," Khan chuckled.

"They have no idea," George confirmed before refilling both cups.

A few drinks went by as the two boys cracked jokes, but silence eventually fell among them. It felt hard to keep talking when it was just the two of them.

"Did you already think about your next move?" George asked after a few silent minutes went by.

"I have no idea," Khan admitted. "What about you?"

"On this topic," George cleared his throat. "I know that we have joked about this, but I wouldn't mind following you. We make a good team. The Global Army will throw promotions at us if we keep performing so well everywhere we go."

Khan's eyes opened in surprise, but warmth soon replaced that feeling. He could see that George didn't want the two of them to separate, especially after everything they had experienced, but his desire felt slightly forced. Khan believed that his friend was partially suggesting that for him.

"George, have you thought about going back on Earth?" Khan asked with all the affection that he could put in his tone.

"Why would I go back on Earth?" George questioned. "I can already think about the countless political obligations that my family would force me to attend."

Khan heaved a deep sigh as he sorted out his thoughts. He knew George well, and he valued his friendship a lot, but he couldn't let him commit a mistake out of fear of remaining alone.

"George, why did you leave Earth in the first place?" Khan asked.

"Why do you even ask?" George questioned in an annoyed tone. "You know damn well why I left."

"I also know that Professor Supyan has helped you make peace with that reason," Khan continued. "You don't need to be away from Earth anymore. You can go back home and show to your family and the Global Army the kind of man that you have become."

"A young drunkard?" George asked.

"One of the most promising warriors in the entirety of the Global Army," Khan corrected.

"You should have said that I was the most promising warrior if you really wanted to convince me," George laughed.

"Impossible," Khan joined his laugh. "That would be me."

"Success corrupts even the best of us," George sighed, but his laugh ended when he noticed that Khan had started to stare at him with warm eyes.

"Khan, why do you want to remain alone so badly?" George asked. "You have been there for me when I was a mess. Why can't I do the same for you?"

"I can't consider you a friend and use you at the same time," Khan declared while laying the back of his head on the wall. "Love doesn't work like this."

George wanted to correct Khan. He could see that his words involved Liiza and the recent separation, but he still desired to reassure him. Yet, something told him that Khan probably needed to be alone.

"You are helpless," George cursed. "You are strong enough to inspire an entire generation of recruits, but you don't let anyone learn from you."

"No one should be like me," Khan said, and his smile left George speechless.

Istrone and Nitis had filled George with bad memories, but Khan surpassed him in that field. George also knew something affected his friend in ways that he couldn't understand. Mere traumas couldn't forge such a firm, driven, and strong character without other details that he couldn't see.

George believed to be quite close to Khan's mindset. He even felt confident enough to claim that he was one of the few people in the entire universe who could understand him. However, there was a gap that he couldn't fill. George couldn't reach the same depths of Khan's mind that Liiza had managed to touch.

Nevertheless, George trusted Khan deeply. He knew that his friend wasn't a reckless idiot who could fall prey to booze or similar dangerous distractions. Moreover, Khan was smart enough to understand what would benefit George the most and drive him on that path.

"Promise me that you will ask for my help if you ever find yourself in a tough spot," George requested after accepting that he couldn't do anything else for Khan.

"Of course," Khan promised. "You are at the top of my list right now."

George didn't find any lies in that statement, and the event rejoiced him. His worry slowly vanished as he refilled the cups and called for another toast.

The two boys resumed their rounds of jokes, but someone interrupted them by knocking at the hall's doors. George initially panicked due to the liquor, but Khan didn't care about that enough to delay the opening of the entrance.

George widened his eyes when he saw Lieutenant Kintea entering the training hall with a small backpack on his shoulder, but Khan's calm movements calmed him down. Khan stood up and performed a simple military salute before sitting back to the floor, and George imitated him.

Lieutenant Kintea inevitably gazed at the bottle and cups between the two boys, but he pretended not to see them. He cleared his throat and stepped deeper into the training hall before speaking in a polite tone. "George, can you leave us? I need to speak with Khan."

George nodded before standing up again. Yet, he recalled something when he was about to reach the exit, and Lieutenant Kintea had to watch as the boy went back to Khan, filled his drink, and took the bottle with him without forgetting about his cup.

Lieutenant Kintea's patience seemed about to reach its limits during that slow scene, but he didn't say anything. Khan sealed the door after George left, and the soldier took that as the signal to explain the reason behind his visit.

"The Global Army is aware of everything that has happened on Nitis," Lieutenant Kintea explained. "I hope you don't mind that I mentioned your relationship with Ambassador Yeza's daughter."

"It's fine, sir," Khan calmly replied as he picked his cup and laid his back on the wall.

"Excellent," Lieutenant Kintea exclaimed. "I believe you can understand how valuable you have become for the Global Army. Your feats on Istrone and Nitis can grant you access to every destination you desire. I'm sure you can even strive to become a Lieutenant this year. You would only have to apply for the position."

"I'm still unclear about my future, sir," Khan honestly admitted.

"I would like to give you more time," Lieutenant Kintea exclaimed, "But we can't remain on this space station for too long. Besides, your second year has already begun, and you are quite behind in many aspects of your education. That obviously wouldn't be a problem if you were busy elsewhere, but I need you to tell me what you want to do first."

"Do you mean now, sir?" Khan asked.

"I can give you a few hours," Lieutenant Kintea responded. "Why don't you check your phone to find a suitable position? I'm sure that the Global Army has already updated your profile."

Khan nodded, and Lieutenant Kintea revealed a polite smile before leaving his backpack on the floor and approaching the exit. The phone fell in Khan's hand after the door closed behind the soldier, and a series of notifications appeared as soon as he turned the device on.

Nitis was a classified area, so the messages from outside the planet had to go through a briefing. Khan had even left the human camp after a single month, so he didn't gain access to the Global Army's network for a long time.

However, those restrictions didn't apply anymore now that Khan was on the space station. He could see that Luke and Bruce had sent a few messages while he was on Nitis. Most of them tried to check on his situation, while others updated him about Martha's condition.

'She is still in a coma,' Khan understood after reading all the messages.

After loving Liiza so hard, Khan could only see Martha as a dear friend. He missed their casual conversations and her constant support. Her gentle and mature words would be able to alleviate his sadness, but it seemed that her body and mind still needed time to heal.

Khan didn't reply to Luke and Bruce as he checked his profile. A long list of tasks and positions meant for first-level warriors unfolded in his eyes. Most of them wanted him to become a foot soldier in different environments, and those jobs even had a number of Credits written next to them, but Khan couldn't understand whether those sums were good or bad due to his ignorance in the field.

Only a couple of labels involved roles as an apprentice ambassador, but they were on special academies on Earth. They even required Khan to have high grades to pay for his enrollment.

After reading those labels, Khan felt forced to consider Earth as an option, but everything inside him opposed those thoughts. Going back there meant returning to a world where everything he had experienced on Nitis didn't matter. Moreover, he still lacked the knowledge, confidence, and power to face his father.

The crisis on Nitis had broadened Khan's understanding of mana, forcing him to realize how weak he was. Khan was exceptional for his age, but he was still powerless. He couldn't save anyone nor affect the scales of a battle, and that felt unacceptable right now.

The injuries caused by the monster's feathers had long since healed, but Khan still recalled how his best efforts had been pointless. Liiza had lost an arm even if he had jumped in front of an attack for her. The value of his life couldn't be high if he could only achieve so little by putting it on the line.

The desire to improve transformed into a faint need. Khan would have been able to discuss Liiza's situation with the elders if he were stronger. He wouldn't have witnessed so many deaths during the crisis if he had the power to take over entire battles on his own.

Khan then recalled the backpack left by the soldier. He approached it quickly, and a dark-blue military uniform unfolded in his vision when he opened it. The clothes seemed to fit him, but his eyes grew resolute when he saw the single star on the right shoulder. The secrets behind his nightmares, the solar system, and the Nak also required far more than that, and simple academies couldn't make him stronger.

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After two hours, Lieutenant Kintea returned inside the training hall and felt surprised to find Khan deep into a meditative state. Still, his arrival in the area awakened him.

"Did you make up your mind?" Lieutenant Kintea asked when Khan opened his eyes.

"I did," Khan said while picking his phone and throwing it on the military uniform next to him. "I won't join any platoon or academy."

"Why is that?" Lieutenant Kintea questioned. "Those environments are perfect for your growth, especially after everything you have experienced."

Khan shook his head as the resolve in his eyes intensified. He had given his everything, but he had still seen his happiness slip through his fingers. He wanted to get stronger quickly, and only one place could grant him that.

"Send me to the battlefield," Khan firmly requested.

Chapter 233 - Ecoruta

The Global Army wasn't at war, at least politically. Humankind had many interests across the universe, but it didn't have a proper enemy since the Nak already occupied that spot.

Still, battlefields existed on different planets. Most of them were environments devoid of other intelligent species but with Tainted animals and monsters that the Global Army had to suppress to continue harnessing eventual resources. However, others involved complicated interests and aliens that the humans wanted to help to obtain benefits.

Ecoruta was one of those environments. The planet featured two intelligent species constantly at war, and the humans had decided to side with one of them to get a share of the natural resources. Apparently, that world was like Onia since it contained one of the core metals used in the creation of vehicles meant for space.

Khan had learnt something about Ecoruta after the solar wind when he discussed the event in the human camp. Still, Lieutenant Kintea granted him access to classified information that expanded his knowledge about the planet as soon as he decided to send him there.

Ecoruta was similar to Earth in terms of length of the days and temperature, but its fauna and flora were obviously different. Also, the two intelligent species that lived there were rather unique and opposite between them.

The Global Army had sided with the Guko, an extremely intelligent alien species that lacked the physical prowess to defend themselves against their opponents. They were short. Most of them didn't even cross one meter. Two antennae grew from their oval heads, and their skin was green. They all had three big eyes lined up in the upper part of their faces, large mouths, and two cavities where humans typically had noses.

The Guko's incredible intelligence made them pragmatic, a feature that the Global Army had used to establish a cooperation between their two species. Those aliens knew that they didn't have any chance against their opponents, so they didn't hesitate to ally with the humans in exchange for part of the precious metal of their planet.

The opponents called themselves Stal. They were a driven alien species with physical prowess that went beyond both Ef'I and Kred. The reason behind that incredible power came from their peculiar anatomy since they basically hosted two people in the same body.

Almost all the Stal were three meters tall. Their facial features were very human-like, but they had two heads and rough brown skin that resembled dry ground. Moreover, they had four thick arms that they could control freely. Their only issue came from their two brains since they carried two different personalities that affected their overall thinking capabilities.

The Guko and the Stal had shared Ecoruta in peace for a long time. The Stal actually used to protect the Guko from the dangers in the environment. The planet's fauna was between Earth and Nitis when it came to the number of Tainted animals and monsters. Those beasts weren't everywhere, but they existed and made certain areas dangerous.

However, the arrival of the Nak had changed that situation. Ecoruta had experienced something similar to the First Impact a few centuries ago, and the event had transformed its society deeply.

The Stal had always been in charge, and their poor intelligence had never allowed the society to experience industrial breakthroughs. Still, they had found themselves full of Nak's technology after surviving the invasion, which had allowed the Guko's intelligence to shine.

The two species had inevitably grown apart after that point. The Stal couldn't understand much about the Nak's technology, but the Guko had never stopped studying it. Their intelligence had also given them the chance to develop weapons capable of compensating for their weaker bodies.

The two species didn't remember exactly how their actual division happened. They had started living in different areas and developing new habits. The Guko couldn't accept to return to their state of a protected kind, so a clash eventually happened, and the wars spread throughout the planet.

Initially, the Guko suffered incredible losses. They had the wits and the right tools, but the Stal had accumulated battle experience since forever. They knew how to handle a war, and their lower intelligence didn't prevent them from learning how to use their opponents' weapons.

Still, the Guko learnt quickly, and they soon managed to stop the Stal's offensive. Then, when the humans found Ecoruta, the Guko didn't hesitate to seal a deal with them to gain the upper hand in the war and occupy half of the planet.

'The Global Army has experienced a few technological leaps in only fifty years of cooperation with the Guko,' Khan read on his phone from the report that Lieutenant Kintea had sent him. 'Many alien species wish to take our place, but we have kept them at bay by sharing part of our gains with them and showing the Guko that only we can provide the best support.'

Khan turned off the screen of his phone and put it in his pocket. He had memorized everything there was to learn from the report, and the situation was even quite clear in his mind.

Ecoruta didn't need the Nak to obtain mana, but the Stal had never been able to use it properly. They had developed simple martial arts and techniques that enhanced their physical prowess, but their poor intelligence had always been a limit that they couldn't overcome.

The Guko had the chance to develop wonders after the Nak's invasion, but their bodies were too weak to handle martial arts and spells correctly. Their pragmatic mindset had made them focus solely on the technological field, and the humans wanted to reap those fruits.

The Stal couldn't produce the Guko's weapons on their own, but they had stolen many of them during the initial stages of the war, and they kept doing that after every victory. Those tools were

their only chance to fend off their technologically superior opponents, so the Global Army's role was to prevent those thefts and help in specific battlefields.

Khan tried to adjust his clothes, but nothing he did made them feel right. He had donned the military uniform, but it felt too tight after getting used to the comfortable Niqols' robes. Still, he gave up on the matter as he left the training hall and followed a simple map of the space station that Lieutenant Kintea had provided to give him more freedom on the vehicle.

The dirty robe and the empty glass were still on the floor, and Khan ended up staring at them for a few minutes. Those white clothes felt like his last connection to Nitis, but he couldn't carry them with him. He didn't even have a home where to leave them. Khan could only sigh and close his eyes as he turned to leave the training hall without bothering to remove those items.

The space station appeared almost empty when all the soldiers inside it were busy with different tasks. Khan didn't even need to reach specific locations, so he could roam freely and avoid the areas that could feature people.

Khan ended up in the hall with the long window. The area was empty now that the interrogation had ended, so he could spend some time losing himself in the blackness of space. He would depart in less than twenty-four hours, so he couldn't do much while everyone else prepared themselves for their next missions.

Sadness spread inside Khan when he realized that he couldn't find anything that hinted at Nitis' presence. The space station had already gone too far away from the planet. He wasn't even sure the vehicle was still in the same solar system.

The emptiness of space appeased Khan's mental state for a while, but he eventually grew bored of that spectacle. He didn't want to remain alone with his thoughts, and he had already decided to complete his training session later, so he didn't know how to occupy that time now.

An idea eventually appeared in his mind and made him pick up his phone. The network had tests on specific subjects, and their results would end up on his profile, so he quickly found something connected to the Niqols' language.

Khan sat on the floor as he read and answered the various questions that the device showed to him. The test turned out to involve more than the simple Niqols' language. It questioned Khan about their society and Nitis as a whole, using what the humans had learnt over seventy years of cooperation as the subject.

A wave of disappointment filled Khan's mind when he saw a "B" filling the screen. That wasn't a bad score, but he wanted to ace the test. However, after he inspected his wrong answers, he noticed how many aspects of the Niqols society still escaped his knowledge.

That wasn't his fault. The test had tried to question Khan about matters that only his superiors could know. He didn't know much about the information shared by the Global Army or the actual martial arts passed to the aliens. Still, his knowledge of the language and some traditions had allowed him to obtain a positive score anyway.

Khan knew that the list connected to his profile had changed now. He would probably find new roles as an apprentice ambassador if he checked, but he didn't bother to look. The "B" only proved that he needed more experience, and the Ecoruta was the perfect place where to gain it.

The seconds felt endless now that Khan had run out of things to do, so he gave up on his initial plan and went straight for his room. The map allowed him to find it in no time, and he didn't hesitate to dive into his training after sealing its entrance.

Khan performed every exercise he knew, giving more importance to the Niqols' teachings since they progressed better than his spells. He repeated the training until he felt tired enough to sleep.

The nightmare barely affected Khan's sleep. His mind was elsewhere, even during his sleep. He didn't feel anything when the Nak approached him to imprint the image of the solar system in his mind.

An alarm eventually rang in his room and forced him to wake up. Khan noticed on his phone that Lieutenant Kintea had summoned everyone on the hall that contained the teleport, and he didn't hesitate to walk there. Familiar faces unfolded in his vision when he entered the circular area with the priceless device, and he immediately felt that a series of eyes fell on his right shoulder.

"Stop staring!" Lieutenant Kintea shouted. "Let's end this quickly. The space station needs to save synthetic mana, so we will have to teleport twice to reach our destinations. Khan, you go first."

Khan snapped back to reality, but he eventually nodded and stepped forward to approach the teleport. Of course, his departure ended up taking more time than Lieutenant Kintea desired.

"I hope life grants you the happiness you deserve," Kelly announced while stretching her arm forward, and Khan smiled before shaking her hand.

"Don't claim the spotlight too soon," Paul scoffed when Khan shook his hand.

"I thought I didn't have to hold back," Khan joked as a faint smile appeared on his face.

"I'm not saying this for you," Paul announced. "I pity the poor soldiers that will have to compare themselves to you. Show some mercy, and let them believe to be strong for a few days."

"I'll do my best," Khan promised.

"That's exactly what I'm worried about," Paul snorted, but his expression grew warmer when their hands separated. "Don't die."

Khan nodded before falling in George's embrace. The boy squeezed him hard for so long that Lieutenant Kintea had to clear his throat to remind him about the situation.

"Remember that you have a brother on Earth," George stated.

"It would be impossible to forget," Khan smiled before patting George's shoulders. "I'll make sure to visit you once I get back. Don't drink yourself to death until then."

"It won't have the same taste on my own," George sighed. "I think I'll take some time to clear my mind before going back to girls. They are harmless, mostly."

"You really are incredible," Khan laughed, but Lieutenant Kintea cleared his throat, so the two boys hugged each other again before ending their salutations.

Khan stepped on the teleport, and synthetic mana soon filled the area above the oval platform. George smiled at him, and he couldn't help but show the same confident expression, but his vision soon went dark before regaining focus on a different circular hall filled with unknown soldiers.

"The new soldier has arrived," A voice resounded from under Khan.

Khan lowered his eyes and noticed that a short green alien was standing right outside the oval platform. Its antennae waved left and right as its three eyes inspected a screen placed next to the teleport.

"Khan," The Guko said while reading the writings on the screen, "Seventeen years old; Mana core quality: Organic A-tier; Element: Chaos; Attunement: fifty-one percent; Mana capacity: Impossible to estimate due to the mutations experienced during the Second Impact."

The different description of his mana capacity distracted him from his first meeting with that alien species, but a problem soon became evident. Khan noticed that all the soldiers in the circular hall had started to look at him with strange eyes. They couldn't ignore that someone with an Organic A-tier mana core was about to join a battlefield.

Chapter 234 – Trench

The Guko continued to speak. "Martial arts: Lightning-demon style and Divine Reaper; Proficiency level with the said martial arts: Co-."

"Stop right there," Khan interrupted the alien.

Three eyes rose to inspect Khan, but they quickly returned to the screen as the alien resumed its description. "Lightning-demon style: Competent proficiency level; Divine Reaper: Nov-."

"I said stop it!" Khan shouted. "You have no right to reveal private information."

The Guko looked at Khan again. Its eyes carried no emotions, but they weren't cold. The alien simply found no difference between inspecting a screen or Khan.

"Everything listed here is already part of the Global Army's network," The Guko explained in its perfect human accent. "My team can gain access to private information about every new asset that reaches Ecoruta to choose a suitable role. I believe you want us to evaluate your power correctly before sending you to the surface."

Khan wanted to complain, but the situation seemed hopeless. The training halls and the scanners could record every result, so it wasn't a surprise that the Global Army was aware of most of his abilities. Still, it didn't feel good to get exposed so easily, especially when some of the soldiers in the room had shown a clear interest in his mana core.

'Don't tell me that they will try something nasty while I'm down there,' Khan thought as the Guko resumed reading the data on the screen.

The short alien and the familiar air in the room had revealed how Khan had yet to reach Ecoruta, but he dismissed that information to point his cold eyes on the soldiers. The white medical coats hid the shoulders of their uniforms, but he didn't need to see them to understand their level. Khan could sense that the room featured only a couple of humans stronger than him.

"The briefing is complete," The Guko announced after revealing Khan's score on the test about the Niqols. "You will join the thirty-seventh battalion. Lieutenant Amos Pouille will be the leader of your platoon. Do you have something to ask before reaching the surface?"

Khan moved his eyes on the Guko while drawing his cracked knife from his sheath and voicing a simple request. "I need a new first-grade weapon."

"You will visit the armory on the way to the spaceship," The Guko promptly replied. "You can step off the teleport now. Follow Eunice to the hangar."

Khan nodded and stepped off the teleport while inspecting his surroundings. The Guko had already lost interest in him and had reached a shorter console near the wall. The other soldiers in the room had also turned to look at their screens.

A corridor expanded from the hall, so Khan guessed that he had to cross it. He sensed the soldiers peeking at him when he walked past them, but he couldn't do much about that behavior.

A young woman with short curly brown hair, dark skin, and clear eyes became visible once the bright corridor expanded into a rectangular hall. She had a larger version of a phone in her hands, one star on each shoulder, and Khan could read the name "Eunice" written on the tag appointed on the left side of her chest.

"Khan, correct?" Eunice asked when she saw Khan leaving the corridor. "My superiors have warned me about your sudden arrival. I must say that you are more good-looking than I expected."

"How could you expect that?" Khan frowned.

"Oh, you might not know about this," Eunice exclaimed. "Nitis' reports went public right before they informed us about your arrival. We have naturally looked you up on the network afterward."

"What do you mean by us?" Khan asked after heaving a helpless sigh.

"The soldiers on this space station," Eunice revealed before placing a finger on the corner of her mouth. "We have forwarded what we learnt to the soldiers on the surface. I might say that everyone is eager to meet you."

'How much did Lieutenant Kintea even reveal?' Khan cursed in his mind before voicing a question that worried him a little. "Why did you expect me to be good-looking?"

"Well," Eunice announced in a timid voice as her eyes went on the screen to avoid Khan's stern gaze. "Only a good-looking man would have been able to make a Niqols' princess fall for him."

'I fucking knew it!' Khan shouted in his mind before dismissing that statement. "She wasn't a princess. The Niqols don't have that type of society."

"I see," Eunice nodded while showing an awkward smile. "I guess we only read the parts that involved you, and you know how it works with rumors. People tend to hear what they like instead of the truth."

"No, I don't know how they work," Khan stated in an annoyed tone. "Can we go now?"

"Of course!" Eunice exclaimed in front of Khan's evident irritation.

The woman turned and led Khan across the space station. The two crossed a series of empty corridors until they arrived before a door that Eunice unlocked with her device.

A small square room that featured a single console unfolded in Khan's vision when the door slid open. Eunice turned to give him some privacy, and he slowly stepped inside the area.

Only a few steps divided Khan from the console. Its screen showed a series of instructions that told him how to handle the device and gain access to the actual armory.

It turned out that Khan couldn't see the weapons with his own eyes before picking one of them. He had to use the console to choose something fitting to the level of clearance that his phone carried.

Khan didn't know how much his phone would allow him to do, but he nodded after placing it in a small hole next to the screen. His device unlocked most of the first-grade weapons listed on the console, and their price even disappeared.

Khan followed the console's instructions to filter through the list and find knives or short blades that suited the Divine Reaper. It turned out that the armory had many of them available for his clearance level, and detailed descriptions accompanied each label. He could read information about the materials and methods used to produce those weapons together with their features.

The Divine Reaper's training program had given Khan a detailed description of the knife that suited the martial art, so he didn't take long to choose one of them from the list. All the labels went dark at that point, and the console even allowed him to retrieve his phone as clanging noises resounded from behind it.

A spot under the screen soon slid open and revealed the weapon that Khan had requested. It was a simple-looking knife with a slightly soft brown handle and a long, pointy black blade that featured two sharp edges. An azure line ran across both faces of its thick body and connected its tip to the small guard.

Khan wielded the new knife and waved it a few times. His new weapon was heavier than the last, but that didn't affect his movements. Covering it with mana also didn't cause any problem. He felt able to fight with it right away.

'Do you wish to recycle your old weapon?' Khan read on the console before drawing his cracked knife and placing it in the drawer under the screen.

The console closed, and a spinning wheel appeared on its screen, but the words "No value" soon replaced it.

'I guess I won't get my hands on Credits anytime soon,' Khan thought before storing the new knife in the sheath and leaving the armory.

"Lieutenant Pouille's platoon is currently fighting," Eunice revealed as she resumed leading Khan across the space station. "We'll try to drop you near the trench, but it will be up to the pilot to decide how close the spaceship can get to the battle."

"Understood," Khan firmly replied, and the lack of fear in his expression captured Eunice's interest.

"You know," Eunice said while turning toward Khan. "It's rare for soldiers to end up here in the middle of the academic semester. Did you offend someone by dating the Niqols' princess?"

Khan's irritation only grew as Eunice kept mentioning Liiza. Nitis' events were still too close to his mind for him to talk about it with a stranger.

"Why would you think that I offended someone?" Khan asked.

"Someone with your profile would never choose a battlefield on purpose," Eunice explained, "Especially this one."

"Is the situation on the surface that bad?" Khan questioned.

"It's quite messy," Eunice sighed. "The Guko have lost too much during the initial phases of the war, and the Stal aren't dumb when it comes to battles. They never show themselves unless they know how to counter air support. They basically force us to fight on their terms."

Khan limited himself to nod. He didn't only dodge the annoying question. He had even learnt something more about the Stal. It seemed that simple reports couldn't describe all the features of an entire species.

"So, about the Niqols' princess," Eunice reminded as curiosity filled her face.

"I'd rather focus on the mission," Khan interrupted with his cold voice. "You are about to send me in the middle of a battle, right?"

Eunice could only fall silent after that statement. She even hurried across the corridors to reach a large hall containing multiple spaceships, and she promptly pointed at the smallest vehicle in the area.

The vehicle seemed barely able to contain three people. It had a pointy front covered by a glass that revealed the presence of two seats, but its back was large and featured two circular engines.

A soldier was enjoying a cigarette while leaning on the glass. The helmet and dark visor prevented Khan from inspecting his facial features, but he could notice the absence of a beard, and his senses revealed that he was a first-level warrior. Khan could also check his left shoulder from his position, which showed that he was a first-level mage too.

"Jakob, you know that you can't smoke here," Eunice scolded.

"Do you have any idea of how good the filtration system of this space station is?" Jakob groaned as he straightened his position. "So, he is the guy from Nitis. Did you find out what he did wrong to end up here?"

"We don't have time for this," Eunice scoffed while shooting worried glances toward Khan.

"Lieutenant Pouille's platoon is in the middle of a battle. He might need Khan's help."

"How can a single soldier even change the situation in the trenches?" Jakob asked. "He will only waste more synthetic mana."

"Our superiors still have ordered to send him to the surface immediately," Eunice complained.

"Don't worry," Jakob said while patting the spaceship behind him. "This beauty can reach the thirty-seventh battalion in no time."

"Don't take detours when you come back," Eunice ordered. "You have already wasted your monthly share of fuel. I can't hide your trips anymore."

"Nothing turns a woman on more than a nice trip in space," Jakob laughed as he pressed a button on the spaceship that unlocked its glass.

"Please, forgive him," Eunice shook her head in shame. "He is an incredible pilot, but his priorities aren't exactly virtuous."

"She is just mad that I've never used that fuel for her," Jakob laughed as he threw his cigarette away and lifted the glass to jump on the left seat. "Nitis guy, come here. We don't want to keep you from the mess."

"I swear that I'll report you one of these days!" Eunice shouted while Khan left her side and hurried toward the spaceship.

"Jump in," Jakob ordered.

Khan walked around the spaceship before jumping directly toward the seat. Jakob pointed at some belts after he sat down, and the two quickly fastened them.

The glass descended on them after Jakob pressed a series of buttons. Some holograms came out of the various lights that appeared after the pilot turned on the spaceship. The vehicle even began to tremble as the engines started to accumulate power.

The spaceship slowly left the floor and started to approach one of the walls of the hangars as Jakob moved the rectangular steering wheel. Khan wanted to memorize the pilot's actions, but a side of the hall suddenly opened and captured his attention.

A blue planet appeared in Khan's vision. He had seen Ecoruta from the pictures in Lieutenant Kintea's report, but no image could depict the beauty of that scene.

"The acceleration can be tough to handle," Jakob warned as the spaceship slowly left the hangar. "You should lay your head on your seat."

Khan followed those orders before a sudden force fell on his body and pressed him on the seat. The spaceship had accelerated as soon as it left the hangar, and he barely had the time to inspect the blackness of space before the planet filled his vision.

"This feeling is the best, am I right?" Jakob laughed as he led the spaceship inside Ecoruta's atmosphere and dived toward a brown patch of ground that Khan couldn't study from that distance.

"I only have time for a question, so I'll get right to the point," Jakob uttered. "How does it feel to do it with a Niqols? I mean, aren't they cold?"

Khan directly ignored that question as he peeked at the environment past the glass. Details appeared on the surface as the spaceship continued its descent. He soon became able to see a vast plain occupied by a series of unclear figures that stood on opposite sides of the area.

Azure lights flashed in the empty area that divided the two platoons. They resembled spells, but Khan couldn't believe that both sides could launch the same types of attacks.

The lights turned out to belong to weapons. Khan soon became able to notice long rifles that fired masses of energy in the hands of the soldiers taking cover behind a long, short wall. He could finally understand what Jakob meant when he mentioned the trenches. It seemed that both sides were using barriers and long holes to protect themselves from the incoming bullets.

"They will take me down if I slow down," Jakob announced as the spaceship got dangerously close to the surface. "You can look forward to a rough landing. I'd start holding on to your seat if I were you."

Khan didn't hesitate to follow those orders. He adjusted his position before grabbing the sides of his seat. Jakob nodded while moving the entirety of his focus on the scene ahead. The spaceship

seemed on the verge of crashing on the surface, but he abruptly pulled the steering wheel and made the vehicle's tip turn upward.

The scenery seen from the glass rotated, but Khan suddenly lost his foothold. He lowered his eyes in time to notice that he had started to fall at high speed toward the surface. The lower part of the spaceship had opened to release his seat and send him on the battlefield.

Only thirty meters separated Khan from the ground, but his speed was too great. Jakob had made use of the spaceship's momentum to fling him toward the surface. Khan feared that the landing could kill him, but a series of pillows quickly grew from under his seat.

Khan didn't feel anything when his seat hit the ground. He expected a violent impact, but the pillows had managed to absorb all the force generated by the incredible speed. They even prevented the opening of cracks on the surface.

Khan didn't have the time to feel amazed about the event since a series of azure bullets began to fly above his head. They were close enough to worry him, but none of them seemed able to hit him while he remained on the seat.

Everything became clear in his mind at that point. Jakob had to make him perform that abrupt landing to dodge the bullets that filled the battlefield. Moreover, the barriers next to the trench prevented him from ending up in the trajectory of those projectiles made of energy while he continued to sit.

Khan quickly unfastened his belt and half-bent forward as he moved toward the trench. Whooshing noises and orders spoken in the human language reached his ears as he got closer to his platoon. His senses alerted him whenever a bullet flew above his head, and they also allowed him to find the strongest soldier in the group ahead.

The items used to build the barrier were quite unique. They had appeared as a black metallic layer capable of enduring the bullets crashing on their surface when Khan inspected them from the sky. However, they were transparent now that he looked at them. The soldiers had also dug a series of steps on specific spots of the trench to peek past the defenses and fire their weapons from relatively safe areas.

"Lieutenant Pouille!" Khan shouted as he jumped inside the trench to appear before a soldier with two stars on each shoulder. "I'm Kha-."

"I know who you are!" A tall man with short black hair, unkempt beard, dark eyes, and dirt on his face shouted while glaring at Khan. "Those bastards have gone through all this trouble just to send a single soldier to my battlefield. Don't bother wasting time with the introductions. Grab a rifle from one of the corpses lying around and start shooting!"

Lieutenant Pouille seemed to forget about Khan after those orders. He turned to inspect the area past the barrier before glaring at some soldiers to his right. Then, his rough voice resounded inside the trench again. "I can see that you aren't shooting! Drop those cigarettes and fire at some aliens before I throw you over the barrier with my own hands!"

Khan watched Lieutenant Pouille marching toward those underlings for a few seconds before inspecting the trench. Almost everyone was on the steps dug in the ground to fire at the opposing army. The bottom of that long channel only had corpses or injured soldiers. Spots full of mud created by sweat and blood filled the area, and a few rifles eventually appeared in his vision.

Khan stepped forward and jumped over a corpse to land in front of a rifle. It was heavy, but he was strong enough to feel comfortable with that weight. Still, he had no idea how to use it, so his eyes quickly went on the soldiers around him.

Part of the trench in a distant spot in front of Khan suddenly blew up and interrupted his inspection. Something had managed to pierce the barrier and destroy part of the channel, engulfing a series of soldiers in the explosion.

A series of painful cries reached his ears before a shout conveyed clear words that the soldiers echoed throughout the trench. "They have a tank!"

Chapter 235 Tank

t word. He had seen tanks passing through the Slums from time to time, but he found an unfamiliar vehicle when he jumped on the steps next to him and inspected the battlefield from behind the transparent barrier.

Khan couldn't see much from that position. The opposite barrier was nothing more than a black line that hid the enemy trench, but that only made the tank easy to find. The vehicle had a spider-like structure, with four huge legs that featured spiky wheels halfway through their bodies. A simple cubical cabin stood on those thick limbs, and a long fuming barrel came out of it.

The tank had crossed the barrier with two legs to make better use of its height. That exposed it to the enemy fire, but Khan noticed how the bullets that fell on its surfaces didn't leave any mark. The mana spread over the black metal and dispersed most of its power before it actually hit the vehicle.

'Does it repel mana?' Khan wondered before dismissing that thought.

The enemy trench was one hundred meters from his position, so his senses could be slightly unreliable, but the tank contained enough mana to make his inspection accurate. Khan could immediately notice that the mana didn't occupy the actual materials that made the vehicle. Most of it was somewhere inside the cabin.

Khan felt his mind slipping into the mindset experienced in the muddy valley. Mana was everywhere on the battlefield. It had different forms, but he could still sense it clearly. He could even recognize the iconic taste of its synthetic version since the magazines of the rifles and tank relied on it.

The bullets were fast, but they couldn't escape his senses. Khan could listen to the song played by the mana, and his mind inevitably immersed itself inside it.

The tank turned its barrel toward a different spot of the opposite trench before amassing power. Then, it released a giant bullet that blew up part of the barrier and filled the channel with painful cries.

Khan turned to his left to inspect the aftermath of the explosion. The bullet had fallen closer to his position at that time, causing a wave of dust and dirt to engulf the area. Still, he remained able to sense the many projectiles that flew from both sides of the battlefield.

Injured soldiers ran outside the cloud to reach protected areas of the trench. They supported each other during that messy march, but Khan noticed how some of them were already dead. Those troops simply didn't realize that until they lay their companions on the ground.

The scene was gory and merciless. Missing limbs, maimed bodies, large injuries, and blood filled Khan's vision, but he barely felt anything. He almost couldn't believe how used he had become to those images.

Moreover, the situation there was different from Nitis. Khan didn't know any of those soldiers, and the Global Army had decided to join the war between Guko and Stal to pursue personal benefits. In his mind, those deaths were partially their fault.

Khan's eyes flickered when he sensed a bullet flying in a straight line toward the soldier behind him. The latter was peeking past the barrier to fire at the tank, but the incoming projectile would hit him if Khan let things stay as they were.

Khan didn't think. He jumped toward the steps to his right and grabbed the soldier's military uniform to pull him down while he landed on the trench. The young man tried to complain after falling with his back on the ground, but the bullet that crossed his previous position made those words freeze in his mouth. He knew that the projectile would have blown his head if Khan didn't intervene.

"Thank you," The young man muttered, but Khan had already started to ignore him to glance at the battlefield past the barrier.

"Is the tank immune to bullets or something?" Khan asked while moving his eyes on the magazine of the rifle in his right hand. "Is it mana resistant?"

"What?" The soldier said in a confused tone before sorting his thoughts to explain the issue. "The rifles can't do much against the tank because their bullets aren't dense. The idea is to have larger magazines without losing deadliness."

"Spells should still be effective, right?" Khan questioned.

"It depends on the spell," The soldier replied, "But it's hard to find something that can retain its density after flying for so long. No one in this platoon can do it."

'The Divine Reaper should be able to cut through it then,' Khan thought, but a rough voice suddenly resounded inside the trench and forced him to move his focus elsewhere.

"What are you two even doing?!" Lieutenant Pouille shouted while walking toward Khan and the young man. "Jump back on the barrier and shoot down that tank!"

The young soldier quickly stood up and performed a military salute before contesting the order.

"Sir, our rifles can't do anything against that tank, sir. We need air support, sir."

"There won't be any air support," The Lieutenant snorted. "We must hold our position with what we have, so get back on those steps and start firing!"

The young man wanted to say something, but an explosion resounded behind him and dispersed his thoughts. When the soldier turned, he noticed that Khan was already inspecting the area. The tank had fired, and another part of the trench had transformed into a cloud of dust that hid corpses.

The third bullet was even closer than the other two. If that trend continued, it would only take two more projectiles to reach their position. It seemed that the tank had every intention to destroy the trench methodically.

"We can't continue like this, sir," The young soldier complained after turning toward the Lieutenant. "We can only retreat without air support."

"Negative," Lieutenant Pouille declared. "Our orders are to hold this position, and that's exactly what we'll do. Don't make me repeat myself."

Khan glanced at the Lieutenant to inspect the expressions that seeped into his face. The soldier appeared committed and driven. He didn't look like the time willing to ignore orders.

"Did you hear me?" Lieutenant Pouille asked. "Get back on-."

The Lieutenant didn't have the chance to finish his line since another explosion resounded in the trench. The tank had hit an even closer spot now, and soldiers inevitably amassed behind Khan and the young man since they had nowhere else to go.

"Sir, we are getting destroyed!"

"Sir, we can't deal with the tank!"

"Sir, what are our orders?"

The soldiers shouted reports and questions that the Lieutenant didn't know how to address. A crack appeared on his expression when he glanced at the poor state of his underlings. He knew that the situation was hopeless, but that scene forced him to explain his reasons.

"Our superiors are trying to deal with the anti-aircraft gun behind the enemy trench," Lieutenant Pouille explained. "They can't do much until they take it down, and this area is too important to let the Stal have it. We have to buy time for them to find a solution."

"But we won't survive for long, sir," The young soldier next to Khan announced.

"I know," Lieutenant Pouille revealed as a tinge of regret appeared on his face, "But these are our orders, and we have to stick to them."

A wave of helplessness spread among the soldiers gathered behind Khan. The Global Army was basically asking them to die, and they couldn't do anything about that. They had nowhere to go, and they would be charged with treason even if they managed to escape.

"I won't die just because you ask me to," Khan scoffed before throwing the rifle to his right.

"What are you doing, Nitis guy?" Lieutenant Pouille asked when he saw Khan drawing his knife and approaching the barrier. "Our superiors didn't clear us for a frontal charge."

Khan didn't hear those words. He had cut away everything except for the mana on the battlefield. The Lieutenant was stretching his arm to grab him, but his focus remained on the tank. He felt the synthetic energy flowing toward the barrel.

The tank fired, and Khan jumped past the barrier. The massive bullet was fast, but it flew toward a spot to Khan's left, allowing him to sprint past it and run toward the vehicle.

Khan was running on the trajectory crossed by the massive bullet, so no one fired in his direction. The explosion in the trench had also provided him with some cover, so only a few Stal noticed his figure crossing the battlefield quickly. Those aliens tried to aim their rifles at him, but he was too

fast, and the projectiles that tried to fly in his direction only ended up crossing his previous positions.

The symphony played by the mana on the battlefield filled Khan's mind and raised his concentration to insane levels. He found himself in front of the tank in no time, and his knife glowed with azure light as it performed two quick slashes.

Khan stopped right in front of the barrier. Strange growls reached his ears as the aliens inside the trench shouted orders, but they never got the chance to aim their rifles at him since the tank claimed the entirety of their attention.

Half of the tank's barrel separated from its main body and fell to the ground. Sparks also appeared on one of its front legs as it became unable to support the vehicle weight anymore and bent forward. The deep cut that had appeared on the limb made the whole weapon turn to its left until it crashed on the ground.

The event left everyone speechless, but the tank's fall didn't mark its end. A whooshing noise resounded from the cabin as its top and sides opened to reveal a huge two-headed alien that appeared too big for that seat.

The Stal punched its four arms to the ground to jump back to its feet. Khan could now inspect the huge alien in its entirety. It was almost three meters tall, and its dark eyes radiated pure anger as it pointed its two right arms toward him.

Khan inspected the event coldly and prepared for his first clash with a Stal, but a bullet suddenly pierced both heads. The alien fell lifelessly to the ground while Khan glanced at the opposite trench. He couldn't see much from his position, but he noticed golden hair behind the rifle that had fired that bullet.

The nature of his situation forced him to snap back to reality. A series of Stal had peeked out of the barrier to aim their rifles at him, but he moved before bullets could hit his figure. Khan had already found the few aliens that seemed stronger than him, so he charged in the opposite direction to deal with the weaker ones.

Chapter 236 - Tall

The Stal's trench was large, and it lacked the steps next to the barrier since those aliens were tall enough to peek without needing them.

Khan couldn't remain on the other side of the barrier since he had no cover there, so he jumped inside the trench. The Stal in front and behind him fired their rifles, but he sprinted forward to hide behind the aliens.

Dark blood spurted inside the trench as the bullets hit the aliens, and a loud growl followed the event. The Stal lowered their rifles after that order, and Khan used that chance to slash his knife at the alien that blocked his way.

The trench was barely enough to contain the Stal. They were too big, and they could prevent Khan from sprinting past them if they stretched their arms. However, he could duck or jump between their limbs while swinging his knife to carve a path.

The alien in front of Khan saw a deep injury opening at its side while he ducked to sneak between its left leg and arm. That wasn't enough to stop the Stal, but Khan stabbed his knife at the center of its back after crossing it.

That injury also failed to kill the Stal, but it lost control of its leg and arms after Khan retracted his knife. His attack had severed its spine, putting an end to its battle.

'They are too tall,' Khan cursed in his mind while he turned to kick an alien charging at him.

Khan had grown in the last year, but most of the Stal were three meters tall. He would have to jump to reach their heads, but that would make him waste too much time. Khan couldn't allow himself to have that weakness when he was behind the enemy lines, so he aimed his attacks at other vital points. The Stal's anatomy was different from the humans, but they had a few areas in common, especially their spines and joints.

The kick landed on the Stal's waist, but it didn't budge. Khan widened his eyes in surprise when he saw the alien closing its four arms on his raised leg, but he quickly retrieved it.

Realization immediately dawned upon his mind. Khan had miscalculated how strong those aliens actually were. Their physical prowess was insane due to their peculiar features. The Stal in front of him was a first-level warrior, but it counted as two of them thanks to its odd body.

That delay gave enough time for a Stal to approach Khan from behind. He found himself trapped between two aliens. Eight arms stretched toward him and left no path open.

Khan jumped forward and stepped on one of the upper arms. The alien tried to move its other limbs toward him, but a deep vertical cut opened on its right head as he shot ahead.

The alien felt dizzy for a few seconds, but it soon fell forward, hindering the Stal that had tried to approach Khan from behind. The injured Stal tried to restore its balance, but it felt unable to control its huge body with only one head. Its battle and life inside that society were over.

Khan found four arms flying in his direction as soon as he landed. He didn't have enough time to dodge them, but he could reduce the amount of power that would fall on his figure.

Khan sidestepped the right arms before covering his right side with the [Blood Shield]. The blood vessels on his limb and face clotted before two punches landed on them. An immense force followed the event, but Khan mustered the entirety of his physical strength to remain in his position. His feet ended up digging the ground, but he managed to avoid flying away.

The Stal showed a surprised expression when it saw Khan remaining in one piece after its attack. Its free arms tried to swing toward its opponent, but Khan slipped past its limbs to reach its chest and stab his knife.

The weapon pierced the rough brown skin, but that injury didn't stop the Stal. The alien tried to close its arms to trap Khan in a violent embrace, but he jumped while preserving the sharp mana around his knife. The technique ended before he could reach the space between the two heads, but a massive amount of blood spurted on his figure nonetheless.

The alien fell backward, giving Khan the chance to extract the knife and shoot forward. The trench seemed immense, and dozens of Stal occupied it. He had countless opponents to deal with, but his senses suddenly noticed something surprising.

A series of battle cries reached the enemy trench as humans peeked past the barrier and fired at the unaware aliens. Khan had created a disturbance that had claimed most of the Stal's attention, making them unable to notice the arrival of their opponents. Many of them didn't even have the chance to raise their rifles before bullets pierced their chests and heads.

The Stal didn't retreat after that event. Khan saw an alien charging at him, but a precise bullet suddenly pierced its chest and killed it. Khan turned to see that the young soldier saved previously had his rifle pointed at the enemies trying to charge toward him. The man didn't hesitate to fire whenever he had a clear shot.

Khan found himself without anything to do. The entirety of his platoon had reached the enemy trench, and the surprise effect created with his actions had given his allies the upper hand. Even the stronger Stal couldn't do anything when a series of bullets landed on their bodies before they could try to reach their rifles. A slaughter unfolded and ended quickly under his cold gaze.

"Don't stop here!" Lieutenant Pouille shouted. "Cross the trench and reach the damned anti-aircraft gun!"

Khan immediately jumped outside the trench and searched for the weapon mentioned by the Lieutenant. His gaze eventually converged on a tall cannon that had its barrel pointed at the sky. A series of Stal were protecting it, but they began to take steps back as more soldiers climbed out of the trench.

Mana started to cover Khan's knife as he prepared himself to sprint forward. He could reach the cannon far faster than his companions, but Lieutenant Pouille's voice shattered his plans before he even started to deploy them. "Nitis guy, we need that cannon! Don't make it end like the tank!"

Khan wanted to shoot a questioning glance at the Lieutenant, but the Stal next to the cannon started to run away to escape from that battlefield. The soldiers began to cheer at that sight, but an explosion suddenly engulfed the weapon and turned it into nothing more than scraps and fuming metal shards. The aliens had decided to destroy the tall gun instead of leaving it to their opponents.

The event put an end to the cheers, but the soldiers remained rather happy about that outcome anyway. They had turned a potential defeat into an incredible victory, and Khan was the reason behind that success. Their eyes converged on their new companion, but their expressions froze after inspecting his state.

Khan wasn't cheering. His expression remained cold as blood flowed down his face and uniform. The previous alien had covered him in that dense dark liquid, and he didn't bother to wipe it away yet.

The calmness that Khan radiated left the soldiers speechless. Some of them even recalled how unfazed he had been inside the trench. He appeared at ease in that chaotic environment. It seemed that the battlefield was his home.

Those thoughts inevitably saddened some of the most empathetic soldiers. Khan was among the youngest of the platoon. Seeing him so used to the battlefield made many of them wonder about his life. They didn't dare to imagine what he had to go through to reach that mental state.

Even those who had the time to read the reports sent by the team on the space station couldn't imagine how bloody his life had been. Many of those soldiers had only focused on funny aspects like his relationship with Liiza, so they didn't learn about Istrone and the actual battles on Nitis. Yet, they promised to themselves to read everything thoroughly once they found the chance.

"Snap out of it!" Lieutenant Pouille shouted. "Grab their rifles and everything valuable they have left behind. Nitis guy, come with me."

The soldiers immediately diverted their gazes to focus on the trench when Khan turned. They didn't want to meet his cold eyes, but they didn't hesitate to glance at him once he crossed them to reach the Lieutenant.

Lieutenant Pouille had started to walk back toward the allied trench, but Khan reached him quickly. He stepped at his side before adapting to his pace and waiting for words to resound.

Khan had started to learn how the higher-ups thought, and he had even defied a direct order. He expected a scolding to resound soon, but Lieutenant Pouille ended up surprising him.

"What you did was reckless," Lieutenant Pouille stated. "You shouldn't throw away your life just because you have gone through some hard stuff."

"I wasn't in danger, sir," Khan said after dispersing his surprise. "The bullets are faster than me, but I can still dodge them."

"Don't use today to justify your actions," Lieutenant Pouille scolded. "You might not be so lucky the next time, so keep in mind that you aren't alone on the battlefield. You must learn how to trust your companions."

Those words sounded strange when the one speaking them had almost let his entire platoon die to stick to his orders, but Khan didn't disregard them. Still, he didn't need that reminder to know how to behave on the battlefield. He simply couldn't trust strangers so soon.

"Also, try not to break things when you have the chance," Lieutenant Pouille ordered. "The Global Army will spare a lot of synthetic mana if we manage to take weapons directly on Ecoruta instead of receiving them through the teleport."

"Understood," Khan uttered while waiting for more words to come, but the Lieutenant remained silent until the two reached the barrier.

"Stop following me," Lieutenant Pouille scoffed while stepping on the other side of the barrier and jumping inside the trench. "I have official matters to handle. You can join the others. They will show you around."

Khan stopped and watched the Lieutenant approaching a bunker dug in the ground near the end of the trench. His gaze turned on the enemy barrier after the soldier disappeared inside the structure, and he saw many figures crossing the battlefield while carrying multiple rifles.

The soldiers appeared ecstatic to have won the battle. Khan guessed that they were mostly happy about their survival, but his thoughts never went too far in the topic. He only inspected their faces to memorize them. Those men and women would be his companions on Ecoruta in the end.

"Thanks for saving our asses, Nitis guy!" One of the soldiers shouted before throwing three rifles inside the trench.

"They sent a true powerhouse from HQ," Another soldier laughed while also throwing his weapons in the channel past the barrier.

Soldiers slowly gathered around Khan as they launched their weapons and voiced different thanks. They clearly wanted to get to know him, but a patch of golden hair suddenly claimed his attention.

"Hey, you," Khan said, making all the soldiers around him turn toward the woman carrying four rifles. "Thank you for before. That was a nice shot."

The woman appeared in her early twenties. She was short, with a slim figure and a pair of brown eyes. Her uniform had one star on each shoulder, and a long rifle different from the others seen on the battlefield hung from her back through a loose belt.

"You have been dumb to run across the battlefield," The woman said while throwing her weapons into the trench. "We might have gotten the tank and the anti-aircraft gun if you waited for the higher-ups to come up with a solution."

The woman then jumped past the barrier and crossed the trench to walk across the barren plain. Khan stopped looking at her only when he heard that the soldiers around him had started to laugh.

"Don't mind her," The young man that Khan had saved before announced. "Gloria has developed an odd attachment to rulers and orders after her family threw her away."

"What did she do?" Khan asked.

"Nothing much from what I've learnt," The man revealed. "Her family couldn't afford to nurture many descendants, so it sent her here. Honestly, she is the only completely innocent soldier on Ecoruta."

"What do you mean by innocent?" Khan questioned as a frown appeared on his face.

"The mortality rate here is insane for us foot soldiers," The young man explained in a surprised tone. "Only those who have done something wrong would end up in this place."

"What did you even do on Nitis?" Another soldier, a woman, promptly asked. "You should be able to get a nice position in some safe place with your strength."

"I bet it's about the alien girl, right?" A short man exclaimed while voicing a shady laugh. "What did you even do to her to end up in this place?"

Khan noticed that the topic interested the soldiers a lot. Everyone bent forward while waiting for an official statement about that gossip. Khan wanted to lie his way out of that conversation, but he found himself unable to do that when the matter involved Liiza.

"I've loved her," Khan declared in a tone so firm that made the soldiers' faces freeze. Still, he didn't remain on the scene to inspect those expressions.. He turned and crossed the barrier before jumping past the trench and marching in the same direction as the blonde woman.

Chapter 237 - Popular

Hurried steps resounded from behind Khan as he marched across the brown-yellow plain. He didn't know where to go, but he guessed that his platoon would have a base of some sort behind the trench.

Khan could have asked his companions for indications, but he had found himself unable to deal with the questions that involved Liiza. He had teleported on the battlefield to suppress those thoughts, but it seemed that the soldiers wouldn't let him go so easily.

"Nitis guy, wait!" The young man saved before shouted after reaching Khan's side. "I'm sorry for before. They aren't bad. We just got excited after seeing a new face."

Khan finally had the chance to inspect the man. He was taller than him, with short black hair and green eyes. His skin had brown shades, and his uniform featured a single star on his right shoulder.

"My name is Khan," Khan uttered.

"Right, right," The man exclaimed. "I'm Felix. My family has sent me here after I broke a container with synthetic mana meant for me."

"I know," Felix laughed when Khan turned to show his frown. "I'm quite clumsy."

"Is everyone here like this?" Khan sighed. "Did you all cause problems on Earth?"

"Not only Earth," Felix continued to laugh. "You can see Ecoruta as a chance for atonement. The Global Army will clear our profiles of every red spot after serving for a few months here."

"It doesn't seem like the Global Army cares whether you live or die," Khan commented.

"I wouldn't be so hard on Lieutenant Pouille," Felix explained. "He is like us. Rumors say that he offended one of the noble families, so he must stick to his orders to get out of this planet. He's actually quite nice when we aren't busy fighting."

"Where did Lieutenant Kintea even send me?" Khan cursed in his mind before disregarding the issue. He had asked for a battlefield, and Ecoruta fitted those requirements perfectly.

"I thought the Global Army would have elite soldiers here," Khan guessed.

"As far as I know, it has been like when the Global Army first arrived on Ecoruta," Felix announced. "However, the Guko's weapons have turned these battlefields into the trench warfare that you have seen before. The whole planet is basically divided in half, and those damned anti-aircraft guns prevent us from flying directly behind the enemy lines. In short, it's a bloody mess."

"How can an entire planet have anti-aircraft guns?" Khan asked.

"Well, the Guko initially developed weapons meant to oppose a second alien invasion," Felix explained. "Still, the Nak didn't return here, and they started to fight the Stal afterward, so they found themselves with tons of anti-aircraft guns with no purpose. They would have remained in some armory if the humans didn't arrive."

Everything made sense in Khan's mind. He still believed that the Global Army was working with the Guko to deploy troops in unprotected spots, but that didn't seem to be his battalion's role.

"So, how do things work here?" Khan questioned. "Do we just set another trench now?"

"Are you so eager to jump into another fight?" Felix laughed, but Khan's cold expression made him gulp and decide to answer seriously. "We will wait for HQ's orders. We'll probably advance until we arrive in another important area while the Guko and other soldiers set camps and defenses here."

Khan didn't need to question Felix about how Lieutenant Pouille planned to build another trench since a series of structures appeared in his vision. He could see a large square building that featured spiked wheels and a series of vehicles that resembled excavators. It didn't take him long to understand that he had reached the camp.

"Does that thing move?" Khan asked in a surprised tone.

"Incredible, right?" Felix exclaimed. "That's Guko's technology for you. They have built a moving camp capable of containing entire platoons. Though I must say that some features remain short even if they meant this structure for humans."

Khan nodded as he continued to inspect the moving camp. It felt incredible that such a big structure could follow the platoons as they advanced or retreated. He couldn't even begin to list the number of benefits that such habitations could provide. Something like that would have saved the lives of many Niqols in the battle inside the muddy valley.

"The camp is a bit cramped, but you'll get used to it quickly," Felix continued. "It also has a few vehicles in its hanger, but none of us can use them. Food sucks, but we can't do much about it. There isn't much privacy either, but the filtration system keeps everything quite odorless."

"Training halls?" Khan questioned.

"The Guko didn't know where to put it," Felix responded. "They are a pragmatic species, so they sacrificed a few services to prioritize other aspects. We are lucky to have showers at all."

Everything sounded relatively standard for a battlefield, and Khan also noticed how Felix didn't say anything about his mana core. He wasn't sure whether the team on the space station would leak that information later on, but it seemed that no one on the surface knew about that feature for now.

Khan could see the golden-haired woman entering the camp. Its dark metal doors slid open and revealed an environment illuminated by artificial white light, but he couldn't inspect much from his position. Meanwhile, Felix continued to peek at him, and his actions became so blatant that he felt the need to address them.

"What is it?" Khan asked.

"Don't you feel the need to wipe the blood out of your face?" Felix said while pointing at the dark liquid that had dried up by now.

"I'll take a shower once I find a room," Khan revealed.

"You can't take a shower now," Felix declared. "We have precise hours for some activities. The meals happen three times a day and last only thirty minutes, while men can take showers in the morning. The Guko didn't think that would have needed separate bathrooms, so we have to take turns."

"Can I get a new uniform, at least?" Khan questioned while pointing at the vast stain of blood on his chest.

"You'll always find new ones in the rooms," Felix responded. "Laundries are unusually fast here."

The two boys didn't say anything else. They approached the camp and witnessed as the metal doors slid open on their own. Felix then jumped in the corridor and guided Khan across the structure, describing each area and its purposes.

The insides of the moving camp were extremely simple and small. Someone slightly taller than Khan would have trouble crossing the short doors and using the showers. Still, that allowed the structure to feature multiple areas capable of providing the soldiers with everything they needed.

The dining hall and the dormitories were the biggest areas inside the camp. The former featured a series of long metal tables with stools connected to their structure. Instead, a long room had a series of bunk beds on both sides divided by a narrow passage that could contain only two soldiers walking side by side.

The platoon had hung a curtain halfway through the room to create two different areas and allow men and women to sleep separately. The women had the bottom of the hall to give them more privacy and prevent unexpected visits in case of sudden crises or similar events.

Each bed had a clean uniform folded on their pillows. Most had names written on the metal that supported the mattresses, but Khan easily found an empty one. Felix even showed him how to use the laundry, so he could change and put the star on the right shoulder of his clean clothes.

The kitchen was completely automatic and inaccessible for ordinary soldiers. Still, the structure featured an area with praying mats and consoles that the platoon could use to relax and hang out. The hall was too small to contain all the men and women in the moving camp, so they had come up with a schedule to use it. Yet, Felix revealed how everyone usually remained on their beds or left the building in the hope of getting some privacy.

"That's everything for our tour," Felix happily announced after bringing Khan to the dining hall. "Women usually shower before dinner, so it will take another hour for food to arrive, but there isn't anything else to do here, so it's not bad to get good seats this early."

Khan limited himself to nod before summarizing everything he had learnt in his mind and imagining his next months in that environment. Everything appeared rather dull, but that felt fine after Nitis' events. He needed a routine and a stark change from his life on that cold planet, and Ecoruta was perfect for that.

Soldiers had entered the camp while Felix had shown Khan around, but no one had approached them. Their previous interaction with Khan had made things awkward, so they limited themselves to inspect him from afar while they read the reports on their phones. It didn't take much before everyone learnt about the Second Impact, Istrone, and Nitis.

Felix appeared envious of the other soldiers. His eyes continued to fall on his pocket while the duo waited for the dinner to arrive, and Khan eventually decided to address the issue.

"You should read the report," Khan stated as he took his phone. "I should also see it to see what it says about me."

Felix hesitated, but his self-restraint vanished when he saw that Khan had opened Lieutenant Kintea's report on his phone. The soldier didn't hesitate to draw his device and do the same before immersing himself in Nitis' events.

'This is so sloppy,' Khan commented in his mind while reading the report.

Lieutenant Kintea had skipped many details, especially those that could put the Global Army under a bad light, to focus on the few accomplishments of the political mission. Khan ended up being at the center of them since his name appeared whenever the soldier spoke about the relationship with the Niqols.

'Khan has carried out his task as potential ambassador perfectly,' Khan read one of the lines quoting Lieutenant Kintea. 'Even the Niqols have acknowledged his dedication to his species, power, and flexibility. It's not surprising that the alien princess has fallen so hard for him. I found it hard to talk with him due to all the time he spent with her or among other Niqols.'

"Wow," Felix exclaimed after going through the report. "Did you really lose so many troops? Maybe it's for the best that the planet is off-limits for now."

Felix realized that he had said too much when he noticed Khan's glare. He wanted to say something to correct his words, but groups of women suddenly entered the dining hall since they had finished showering. Their arrival claimed the attention of the men in the room, but they didn't seem interested in those gazes.

All the women had their phones in their hands, and gasps often resounded among them. They couldn't even stop sneaking peeks at Khan whenever they read about his feats of relationship. Some even giggled before approaching the stools near him. Felix could barely contain his excitement when he understood that he had become the friend of the most popular soldier in the camp.

Chapter 238 - Settlement

"Oh, you poor thing," The woman who had sat next to Khan said while placing a hand on his shoulder. "It must have been awful to lose your girlfriend after going through so much. Those Niqols must have no understanding of feelings. Luckily you are back among humans now."

"Clara is right," The woman sitting in front of Khan exclaimed. "Interspecies couples rarely last due to the many differences in the customs, but don't worry. You are among friends now."

"A broken heart can be the deadliest of the injuries," Another woman sitting in front of Felix announced. "Maybe talking about it can help. We should go for a walk one of these days. This area is quite barren, but there is a beautiful lake just past the plain."

"Hope, don't bother him already," The second woman scolded. "You can't expect him to forget about the alien so soon."

"Julia, you shouldn't scold others because they have asked what you are too timid to say," Clara scoffed, and Julia lowered her gaze as her cheeks reddened in embarrassment.

'Lieutenant Kintea has just become my archenemy,' Khan cursed in his mind as he tried to ignore the situation. 'Now I understand what George has said about the women in the army.'

The report depicted Khan as a magnificent man. He wasn't only an incredible soldier and a talented ambassador. He was also faithful and capable of deep feelings. His good looks only added positive features to the great image that Lieutenant Kintea had created for him.

Ecoruta was a battlefield where death could arrive abruptly, especially for a platoon made of foot soldiers. That unique situation had made both men and women inside the moving camp disregard normal ideas about decorum to prioritize a straightforward approach.

Every day could be their last, so they had to make the best out of them. Those soldiers' behavior resembled the Niqols for some aspects, but Khan could sense the lack of honesty in their gestures. The women who had approached him didn't know anything about him. They were only going after the image that Lieutenant Kintea had created in the hope of finding a perfect partner.

Of course, those intentions didn't apply to everyone, but it was clear that both men and women in that platoon had developed a deep interest in Khan. After all, the report depicted him as a hero who could love without caring about the physical differences that could afflict two species.

"You can always bring me for a walk," Felix stated in an excited tone before changing his approach when he saw the glares flying in his direction. "Khan needs to know everyone sooner or later. It's only proper to go out as a group."

Felix patted Khan's shoulder in a desperate attempt to show how close he had gotten with him. Still, that gesture didn't prove much since Khan didn't play along and only inspected his surroundings in the hope that the meal would arrive soon.

Khan would usually voice a few smart words and leave in that situation, but he was starving, and the strict schedule inside the moving camp didn't grant him much freedom when it came to meals. He had to endure those ignorant comments about his situation and the Niqols before coming up with a plan to escape.

'I miss Snow,' Khan sighed in his mind when he felt caged in a situation that he couldn't avoid. 'What does Clara even want? She must be at least ten years older than me.'

Everyone in the platoon was relatively young. Most soldiers barely appeared to be past twenty, but a few exceptions existed, and Clara was one of them. She was cute, and her face didn't have any wrinkle, but Khan could feel the age gap in her gestures. She resembled a poor imitation of Yeza, who failed to read the situation and use her beauty correctly.

"The Niqols feel more than humans," Khan eventually explained when he couldn't endure those comments anymore. "They experience life differently and have respect for what's truly important. Humans have a lot to learn from them."

The sudden comment and the meanings that it carried left the four soldiers around Khan and those listening to him stunned. They didn't expect him to defend the Niqols so firmly after what he had gone through on Nitis.

"Well, it's still unfair how they treated you after everything you have done for them," Clara complained, trying to save her face from her last comment.

"They had to take care of their species as a whole," Khan continued to defend the Niqols. "They gave her a choice, and she chose to remain."

Silence fell again among the group. The report didn't mention that detail, but Khan's story only grew sadder after hearing it. Luckily for him, clunking noises started to come out of the table until a spot under him slid open to reveal a tray with food.

"I told you that these seats were goo-," Felix tried to brag, but he fell silent when he saw Khan diving into his food.

Khan had grown used to every kind of food after living in the Slums and on Nitis. He could understand that the quality of the meals on Ecoruta wasn't great, but he had tasted worse in his life, so he devoured everything before the trays stopped coming out of the tables.

No menus appeared on the table after he finished eating his meal. Khan could only accept that the camp wouldn't give him the chance of ordering another round, so he prepared himself to leave. Yet, Clara noticed his dissatisfaction and didn't hesitate to use it.

"You can take part of my rice if you want," Clara declared. "These portions are too big for me anyway."

"You can also have mine," Julia exclaimed. "Have this egg too. I can't really handle it when I can't recognize its species."

"Same here," Hope sighed. "Also, the life in the trenches is often sedentary. I'm afraid I might get fat if I keep eating so much."

Getting fat while carrying heavy guns and practicing with mana was virtually impossible. Khan was also certain that the soldiers in the trenches would often skip meals due to the nature of the conflict, but he didn't mind where that conversation was leading. He lifted his tray and let the three women throw food inside it before resuming his meal.

The four had to watch as Khan wolfed his second meal in no time. They almost remained speechless in front of the amount of food that he could put in his stomach, but they didn't say anything about that until he finished eating.

"You must be in your growing phase to be so hungry," Clara commented.

"That made you sound incredibly old," Hope chuckled.

"Who did you call old?!" Clara almost shouted.

"Ladies, you are all young and beautiful," Felix said while trying to put an end to that argument.

"That sounded creepy," Julia whispered in a timid tone.

Khan ended up revealing a smile at those funny interactions, but he didn't forget the main reason behind his arrival on Ecoruta. He had to get stronger, and that required training. Establishing friendly relationships with women who only cared about his fame wasn't on his list.

"Where are you going?" Felix asked when he saw Khan standing up.

"I'll meditate on my bed," Khan responded without adding other details, and he moved toward the exit of the dining hall without giving anyone the chance to stop him.

A series of gazes followed his departure, but he ignored them. Khan went straight for the dormitory and sat on his bed before immersing himself in the meditative state.

Time moved quickly while Khan forced his mana to intensify its effects on his body. Training after becoming a first-level warrior felt incredibly slow since he had to rely on the passive influence of that energy. Still, Khan had a plan to accelerate the process. The only problem was that he lacked the ability to deploy it.

Figures moved past Khan, and voices reached his ears as the other soldiers filled the dormitory and lay on their beds. Very few of them decided to train. Most directly slept or waited for everyone to fall asleep so that they could reach their partners or leave the room with them.

Everything was silent by the time Khan opened his eyes. It was barely midnight, but the strict schedule in the moving camp had made most soldiers decide to rest. He could hear faint voices echoing through the corridor outside the dormitory, but they were too vague to understand what they said.

Normally, Khan would decide to pull an all-nighter to complete his training schedule, but he didn't know Ecoruta enough to feel confident in getting tired before a possible battle. Lieutenant Pouille could send the platoon on another trench the very next day, and he wanted to be at his peak.

However, a problem appeared after Khan lay down to sleep. Ecoruta's temperature was similar to Earth's, so he could deal with that warmer environment. Still, the dormitory contained almost thirty soldiers, and the cramped space made their presence impossible to miss. The environment inevitably grew hot to the point that he felt unable to sleep.

Khan didn't expect that problem to arrive, especially after living in the Slums for so long, but it seemed that his body rejected those warm temperatures now. He couldn't relax enough to sleep, leading him to give up on his initial plan after spending ten minutes wide awake.

Khan jumped off his bed silently and left the dormitory to approach the camp's exit. He passed in front of the hall with the praying mats, but he only saw a couple flirting in the corner that he didn't hesitate to ignore.

The exit slid open when Khan approached it, and a cold breeze swept him, immediately bringing comfort to his mind. Part of him already decided that he would sleep outside that night, but that only if he completed his training quickly enough.

Ecoruta was similar to Earth at night, except for the two moons high in the dark sky. The lack of artificial illumination in the area also added vibes experienced only on Nitis. Still, he quickly disregarded them when he noticed a group of four soldiers laughing and chatting right past the corner of the moving camp.

Khan initially planned to let the soldiers be, but his gaze inevitably fell on the metal flask that they were passing around while blowing the smoke of their cigarettes. Smoking seemed quite common on Ecoruta, but he barely noticed that at the sight of such a familiar situation.

The four soldiers fixed their gazes on Khan when they saw him walking toward their group. Some frowned as they tried to understand his intentions, but he quickly explained himself through a soft voice. "Do you mind sharing that drink with me?"

The request surprised the soldiers, but they eventually exploded into a laugh that they suppressed as soon as they recalled about the late hour. The woman with the drink then handed the flask to Khan, and he took a short sip before passing it to the man to his left.

"Do you want one?" The man asked while showing the pack of cigarettes, but Khan shook his head as he sat on the ground and laid his back on the camp's spiked wheel.

"I didn't expect you to be the drinking type," The woman commented. "Though I would also drink after having dinner with those three."

"I learnt on Nitis," Khan revealed while accepting the flask handed by the second woman.

"That planet must have been messier than the report said," The second man stated.

"I couldn't help but overhear what you said during dinner," The first woman uttered. "Why did she decide to remain on Nitis?"

"Her species needed her," Khan half-lied to avoid giving more explanations. "Why is everyone so interested in her?"

"We can't do much down here," The first man exclaimed. "Gossips make everything easier to endure."

Khan revealed a smile since those words made him think about Azni, but he suddenly sensed a powerful figure approaching the camp. He turned toward the trench, and the soldiers did the same before seeing Lieutenant Pouille marching forward while muttering vague words.

"You should be sleeping," Lieutenant Pouille scolded as he approached the entrance.

"We'll go soon, sir," The first woman chuckled while showing a radiant smile.

"No, I meant it as an actual suggestion," Lieutenant Pouille replied. "Our victory has created a flaw in the enemy defenses. We have orders to take over a settlement tomorrow."

Chapter 239 – Squad

"We don't have the equipment to take over a settlement!" The first man immediately complained before adding a weak "sir" at the end of his line.

"What do you want me to say?" Lieutenant Pouille sighed. "HQ has seen an opening after our victory, so we must exploit it. We'll have a briefing early in the morning to come up with a plan."

"Do we even know something about this settlement's defenses?" The first woman asked.

"We can't see anything outside the range of the anti-aircraft gun in the settlement," Lieutenant Pouille shook his head. "HQ needs us to go there and inspect the situation."

"Sir," The second girl called in a pleading tone.

"I can't do anything," Lieutenant Pouille explained. "We have already received orders. Nitis guy, don't act on your own next time."

Khan didn't reply. He showed a calm expression even if he felt slightly pissed. The Lieutenant wanted to blame him for the current situation, but he couldn't see how that was his fault. After all, remaining inside the trench against the tank would have led to a bloody defeat. Khan wouldn't regret saving lives.

Lieutenant Pouille left after shaking his head again. The noise caused by the metal door resounded among the silence of the night and created an awkward atmosphere. The four soldiers lowered their heads, sighed, and muttered faint curses, and Khan hesitated a bit before inspecting them.

"It's not your fault," The first woman said as soon as she noticed the hesitation on Khan's face. "I bet that the Lieutenant is as pissed as all of us. He only has a hard time showing it."

"A very hard time," Khan commented while picking the flask that the second man handed him. "How did he even offend the noble families?"

"I have a theory," The first man announced.

"Here he goes again," The second woman chuckled while throwing her cigarette away.

"It fits perfectly," The first man scoffed before clearing his throat. "Lieutenant Pouille was with someone in the noble families, romantically."

"How can a Lieutenant get so close to the noble families?" Khan asked.

"How did you get in the Niqols' princess pant-," The first man began to voice a question, but the first woman interrupted him by punching his shoulder and glaring at him.

"She wasn't a princess," Khan heaved a helpless sigh, "And the Niqols don't use underwear."

"Wait, really?" The second man immediately asked.

"No, I lied," Khan stated, and the two women laughed at the sight of the men's disappointed expressions.

"You shouldn't play with a man's feelings like this," The first man complained. "My dreams shattered before taking form."

"Forgive them," The first woman shook her head. "They are idiots."

"It's fine," Khan smirked as George and Ilman's faces appeared in his mind. "I'm good among idiots."

The soldiers laughed before passing the flask around and lighting more cigarettes. They spent half an hour exchanging jokes and introducing themselves properly, but they eventually went back inside the moving camp to rest and prepare for the next day. Only Khan remained outside to enjoy the cold breeze that filled the night.

'They seem nice,' Khan found himself thinking once silence fell around him.

The first woman, Delia, had short brown hair and dark eyes. She was as tall as Khan, and her figure appeared quite fit. She was a first-level warrior and mage, and the other soldiers seemed to treat her as the leader of that group.

The first man, Ian, was tall and muscular. He had short black hair and dark eyes, and his uniform featured a single star on his right shoulder. He liked to joke around, but Khan could sense the faint maturity hidden by that behavior.

Faith and Milo were siblings, and they shared a few physical features. They had fair skin and golden hair, but Faith liked to keep it a bit long. Their uniforms didn't feature stars, but Khan could sense that they were both close to becoming first-level warriors.

Khan couldn't understand the reason behind their presence on Ecoruta. The short interaction with the four soldiers had only given him a vague idea of their relationship and character.

Delia and Ian were the oldest of the group, and the two siblings had taken them as leaders to follow on the battlefield. The former were aware of that situation, and they had accepted that role, which naturally made them develop some affection toward their younger companions.

Khan had felt familiar feelings during those interactions, but everything had ended now that he was alone again. It wasn't too late, but he didn't know whether he would get the chance to sleep properly even if he went back to his bed. The sole idea of returning to that cramped dormitory made him lose every desire to rest, so he soon closed his eyes and summoned his mana to begin his usual training schedule.

Mana appeared on his hands before he controlled it to move over his body. Khan increased and reduced the amount of energy used during the training until the alarm on his phone rang.

Khan set another alarm before moving to the exercises that involved the manipulation of mana. He joined his hands and summoned his energy as different thoughts and feelings flowed inside it.

The mana changed color and texture depending on what Khan added. Except for a firm sharpness, the effects were faint and unstable. He was improving every day, but he was still far away from Liiza's level. It would take him many months to become able to use the [Blood Vortex] and add power to the [Blood Shield] on his own, but he didn't fret. Being so close was already incredible.

The alarm rang again, and Khan moved to his physical training. He repeated all the techniques he knew and tried to smoothen those that involved both martial arts. He didn't know how long it usually took to reach the advanced proficiency level, but he felt that only constant training could bring him there.

In the end, Khan sat to dive into the exercises for the Wave spell. He didn't forget Liiza's words, but he couldn't attempt something so dangerous when his ability with mana was still lacking. His idea was to succeed through the human methods and study the chaos element for a while before deciding how to proceed, but that moment didn't want to arrive.

His training with the Wave spell didn't involve any physical exercise. His mind had also grown quite resilient after everything he had overcome. His mana was the only variable, but he didn't seem able to run out of it, so his attempts ended up lasting until a siren resounded in the structure behind him.

The morning had arrived, but Khan didn't manage to appreciate the dawn due to his deep concentration. Still, the siren forced him to interrupt his training and approach the entrance of the moving camp.

A series of sleepy soldiers marching through the corridors appeared in his view. The scene told Khan that the men had already taken their shower, but he also noticed how no one seemed to mind yesterday's deaths.

Khan followed his companions while they gathered inside the dining hall. Lieutenant Pouille was already there, and Khan didn't take long to find Felix and the soldiers from the previous night waving at him. The former was with the three women from yesterday, so he joined Delia and the others.

"Let's plan things out before breakfast arrives," Lieutenant Pouille announced as he placed his phone on an opening in the wall behind him to activate a series of holograms.

"I'm sorry, sir," A woman that Khan couldn't see clearly from his position called. "I don't see the reinforcements from the battalion. We lost quite a few soldiers yesterday."

"There won't be any reinforcements," Lieutenant Pouille stated before putting his hands forward to silence the gasps and voices that had resounded after his words. "The Stal are already moving away weapons and provisions from the settlement. It won't take long before another trench appears, so we don't have time to regroup."

Khan saw disappointment spreading among his companions but no sadness. He noticed a few soldiers lowering their heads to hide their dark expressions, but that was it.

It seemed that Ecoruta didn't leave room for grief and similar feelings. The soldiers had probably grown used to losing companions, or they simply didn't establish deep relationships due to the dangerousness of the battlefield.

'Maybe I can notice these differences because I've grown used to the opposite approach,' Khan guessed in his mind as he continued to study his new environment.

Part of Khan felt glad that his new companions had experience in those aspects, but he inevitably felt out of place. He couldn't be like them. He couldn't throw away everything he had learnt on Nitis.

Lieutenant Pouille resumed his explanation while Khan began to accept that he would probably remain alone on Ecoruta. "Our job is to take control of the settlement and salvage all the resources we can find. We won't be able to deploy any tactic since we don't know much about the area. Our attack will be direct and swift."

The holograms on the wall moved until they took the shape of a simple map. Khan could recognize the two trenches from yesterday, a river deeper into the enemy territory, and a black dot that he guessed marked the Stal settlement.

"Can we even take the Stal by surprise?" Khan asked since the map didn't feature any natural barrier.

"They will notice us as soon as we enter the range of the jammed area," Lieutenant Pouille revealed before tinkering with his phone to activate a hologram that depicted a vehicle that resembled a truck. "A small squad will join me inside the ram to attract the Stal's attention and open a path for the others. Do we have volunteers?"

No one answered. Even Khan remained silent in front of that offer. Lieutenant Pouille was basically asking them to jump blindly into enemy territory and fight until the rest of the platoon arrived. That role was almost suicidal.

"I'm not surprised," Lieutenant Pouille announced before tapping on his phone again. "I took the liberty of forming the team on my own."

A list with seven names appeared next to the truck, and Khan cursed in his mind when he saw "Nitis guy" written among them. It seemed that he had already claimed too much attention in the trenches.

"This isn't a punishment," Lieutenant Pouille exclaimed when he saw the dark expressions on the seven mentioned by the list. "This is a chance to prove your value. The Global Army will make sure to note down your names after this mission."

"If we survive," Delia whispered before immersing her hands in her short hair.

"What is HQ even thinking?" Ian cursed while making sure to keep his voice down.

Delia and Ian's names were on the list, and the same went for Clara. Khan could also find the other three soldiers through a quick inspection of everyone's expressions. Lieutenant Pouille had chosen the oldest and strongest assets for the squad.

"Your luck is awful, my friend," Ian sighed.

"It's fine," Khan dismissed those words. "I'm not good with rifles anyway."

"You should learn," Delia whispered while pointing at the golden-haired girl who had killed the Stal riding the tank. "Gloria always manages to be in the backlines thanks to her good aim. I wish I could also handle rifles as well as her."

The tables opened as trays with the breakfast started to arrive. It seemed that the meeting had ended there, but Lieutenant Pouille summoned the seven who would join him in the mission once everyone finished eating.

The Lieutenant didn't give the group the time to introduce themselves. He led everyone in a seemingly empty area of the moving camp before taking out his phone and making the metal wall in front of him slide open to reveal a relatively small hangar.

The area only contained four vehicles. Khan immediately found the truck shown during the meeting, and he felt slightly disappointed to see its actual size. It was nothing more than a small rectangular structure with spiked wheels and a pointy metal front that featured small windows.

The firm material of the windows was dark, so Khan couldn't inspect its insides, but the Lieutenant quickly unlocked the doors at its sides to reveal eight seats. The truck didn't have anything else.

"Take your position," Lieutenant Pouille ordered. "We should arrive near the settlement in a few minutes."

"How fast is the camp?" Khan asked since the soldier's statement conflicted with the map shown just a few minutes ago.

"Oh, right, you can't possibly know it," Lieutenant Pouille said while pointing at the floor. "We have started to move as soon as everyone gathered in the dining hall. You can't feel it because the Guko's technology is incredible."

Chapter 240 - Assault

The stupor only lasted a few seconds. The Guko's technology was clearly incredible, but Khan couldn't think about that after understanding that the battle would arrive soon.

"Get inside," Lieutenant Pouille ordered. "I'll drive the ram behind the enemy lines, but everything will become quite messy once we get out. Our priority is to bring the Stal in the open to expose them to the rest of the platoon."

"Do we have to follow a battle formation?" Clara asked as the squad started to enter the truck.

"We barely have information about the actual settlement," Lieutenant Pouille admitted. "I've chosen you because of your battle experience. We'll have to improvise a lot, so try to remain close to me."

Khan suppressed a curse as he took one of the seats on the right side of the vehicle. It didn't take a genius to understand that similar missions would typically require days spent inspecting the target and preparing suitable battle tactics. However, his group barely knew where the settlement was. Everything felt too abrupt, but he couldn't ignore HQ's direct orders. He had simply ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Lieutenant Pouille took one of the front seats and turned the vehicle on. A series of lights lit up before a few holograms appeared in front of the soldiers. One of them acted as a camera that depicted the truck's surroundings, while the others led to different functions. Khan tried to study what he could, but the map that appeared on the top-right corner of an image attracted the entirety of his attention.

The map depicted the camp's current position. Khan only had to compare that picture to the images seen during the breakfast to understand how long it would take his platoon to reach the Stal's settlement. It seemed that the mission would start in less than five minutes.

"Don't worry too-," Delia began to say while turning toward Khan, but she felt unable to continue after inspecting him.

Khan had already drawn his knife, and his face had grown cold as he kept his eyes fixed on the map. Delia had initially wanted to reassure her young companion, but she realized that her worry had been pointless. Khan appeared tense, but an expert eye would be able to see how he was perfectly calm. His figure expressed pure readiness.

Except for Lieutenant Pouille, the other soldiers in the vehicle noticed Khan's behavior and let it affect their mindset. No one spoke or cracked jokes. Everyone fell silent and prepared themselves for the imminent battle.

The seconds spent inside the truck felt like hours as the group kept their eyes on the dot moving across the map. Only Lieutenant Pouille knew when the vehicle would leave the camp, but the soldiers didn't care about that. The entirety of their focus was on the reinforced doors at their sides.

Someone took a deep breath when the dot on the map crossed the river. Khan didn't know how the camp had overcome that hindrance, but those thoughts lasted in his mind for mere seconds before vanishing. The flow of mana had already taken control of his senses. He was ready to lose himself in a battle.

Lieutenant Pouille eventually pressed one of the labels depicted by the holograms before voicing a calm announcement. "The settlement is less than a minute away. Prepare the rifles and gather in the second hangar. If everything goes well, we'll bring the fight to you."

The Lieutenant closed the channel before pressing other labels. A series of clanging noises managed to echo past the vehicle's thick surfaces as the soldier activated some functions of the camp. Ecoruta's bright morning light began to seep from a side of the metal wall in front of the truck as an unfamiliar entrance started to open.

Then, everything suddenly changed. The wall slid open in a single second, and the truck shot forward. The vehicle was so fast that Khan didn't have the time to inspect the changes in the environment recorded by the cameras. He only saw a series of short metal buildings growing closer.

The Stal's settlement was as simple as possible. The metal buildings were highly similar to the human camp, linking their architecture to the Guko's technology. A few short barriers encircled them and created simple protections for troops armed with rifles or similar weapons. In theory, a frontal attack appeared unfeasible.

Lieutenant Pouille barely touched the menus as the truck approached one of the barriers at high speed. Two-headed figures appeared from behind that defense and began to fire bullets made of mana toward the vehicle, but they appeared as nothing more than azure flashes on the cameras.

"Brace for impact!" Lieutenant Pouille shouted as belts came out of the seats and fastened around the soldiers on their own.

The truck crashed on the barrier a few seconds after the warning, and the soldiers inside it felt it. No technology could make Khan and the others ignore that violent impact, but the belts kept them safe and still.

The barrier couldn't do anything against the vehicle. The truck even ran over a couple of unlucky Stal as it continued to advance inside the settlement. Khan used the cameras to count how many aliens would try to approach him from behind, but a series of cylindric items suddenly appeared on the ground and rolled toward the metal fence before exploding.

Similar scenes appeared on the other areas recorded by the cameras. The truck released bombs on its own and transformed its surroundings into a fiery environment. The Stal that had tried to approach the vehicle directly burnt, but the flames didn't manage to hide the shadows of other tall figures charging from behind them.

The settlement was big enough to contain a couple of platoons, but that according to human standards. The Stal were far too big to fit so many soldiers, so Khan guessed that his group would be only slightly outnumbered. The issue was that eight of them would have to face the aliens on their own for a while.

Lieutenant Pouille pressed on one of the holograms, and the truck changed its course to crash into a building to its right. The violent impact made the building's metal walls cave in, but it didn't pierce them. Yet, the belts suddenly unlocked after the event, and every thought disappeared from Khan's mind when he saw the door next to him sliding open.

"Follow me!" Lieutenant Pouille shouted while jumping out of the truck, and the soldiers followed him.

Waves of mana invaded Khan's senses as the scorching air caused by the many fires around him reached his nostrils. That chaotic environment felt familiar and helped his peculiar mindset. He could immediately locate many Stal approaching his position, but the Lieutenant had no intention to fight there. The soldier charged toward the initial barrier, and his underlings followed him.

Two Stal jumped past the flames to appear in front of Lieutenant Pouille, but the latter promptly bent forward and slammed his palms on the aliens' waists. Khan almost snapped out of his unique mindset when he saw the two huge opponents flying away in different directions and disappearing from his sight.

The Lieutenant's incredible battle prowess couldn't claim the squad's attention for too long since more Stal jumped past the flames and voiced growls to alert the entire settlement about their enemies' location. The aliens didn't even wait for their companions to arrive as they charged ahead and tried to encircle the human group.

The soldiers didn't need orders at that point. Their priority was to reach a spot that the rest of their platoon could target from the safe position outside the settlement. They couldn't waste time in pointless battles that would only worsen their situation.

Two Stal charged toward Khan, but he ignored them since Lieutenant Pouille sent his opponent flying away again. He wouldn't fight when he had the chance to continue that tactical retreat.

The other soldiers shared his thoughts, but those in the backlines couldn't avoid the Stal. Ian and the man standing next to him raised their arms to defend against the incoming punches of the aliens, but the impact made them slam into their companions.

Ian crashed on Khan's back, but the event didn't take the latter by surprise. Khan had sensed the arrival of his companion, so he had bent forward to improve his balance. He even grabbed Ian and made sure that he landed properly after sliding off his back.

The other man wasn't as lucky as Ian. He fell on Delia's back, but the woman required the entirety of her concentration to remain on her feet. She couldn't spare seconds tending to her companion's situation, so the soldier ended up falling on the ground. He straightened his position in no time, but that short delay was enough to make him fall prey to the Stal behind the group.

The flames began to disperse in those seconds since they didn't have anything to burn. Tall figures appeared behind them and continued to charge at the escaping group. Still, Khan disregarded them as the entirety of his focus went on the two Stal standing in front of Lieutenant Pouille. He could sense that they were both as strong as his superior.

Lieutenant Pouille tried to deliver the same palm strikes that had sent the previous Stal flying, but his two opponents managed to cross their arms before the attack could hit their torsos. Khan sensed a massive amount of mana exploding in front of the soldier's palms and engulfing the aliens, but the latter only took a few steps back before charging ahead again.

The underlings couldn't advance when their superior was stuck in a battle, and that delay in their escape allowed many Stal to gather around them. Ian, Delia, Clara, Khan, and the other two soldiers saw a barrage of punches and thick arms filling their vision. The aliens didn't hesitate to attack, but their reactions were equally fast.

Khan ducked to dodge the four punches flying in his direction. He had the chance to slide between his opponent's legs in that position, but he decided to straighten himself after going past those thick arms to cut the alien's belly open. A torrent of blood spurted out of the long vertical injury inflicted with his glowing knife, but he didn't allow himself to relax since the Stal mustered its remaining strength to close its limbs in a tight embrace.

The Stal's physical prowess was scary. Khan's opponent wasn't a first-level warrior yet, but its level was only a half-step away from that realm. Khan didn't dare to try his luck in that situation, so he ducked again before kicking one of the alien's legs.

The alien lost its balance and began to fall forward, but Khan's jumped to his right to approach the Stal busy fighting Ian. He had no intention to enter another battle, but he needed a foothold to dodge the tall figure that was about to hinder his path.

Khan kicked as soon as his foot touched one of the alien's arms to push himself over his first opponent. His action ended up creating an opening for Ian, who used his right elbow to deliver a rising blow capable of expressing the entirety of his physical strength. The impact lifted the Stal from the ground and made dark blood spit out of its mouth.

Khan landed on the ground only to notice that the two companions in front of him were busy with other battles. He had the chance to help them, but more Stal were approaching him from the group's sides. Dealing with those opponents wouldn't get them out of that troublesome situation unless they took care of the main issue.

Khan didn't have the time to establish deep relationships on Ecoruta. He didn't know how his companions would react to an eventual order coming out of his mouth. He wouldn't even be surprised if those soldiers decided to ignore his idea to attack the two powerful Stal together, so he took the matter into his own hands.

Lieutenant Pouille had been impeccable during those seconds. His opponents were as strong as four second-level warriors, but he could compensate his inferior physical strength with his spells. The soldier could release shockwaves with every part of his body and enhance them through specific moves that usually involved palm strikes.

Four arms flew toward the Lieutenant's left side, but he pushed his left hand forward slowly. A massive amount of mana came out of his palm and hindered the incoming blows so much that they didn't inflict any injury when they landed on his shoulder and torso.

Instead, the other Stal had joined his hands to deliver two descending blows that seemed to carry enough power to shatter the reinforced metal of the truck. However, Lieutenant Pouille used his free arm to punch the first attack and created a shockwave that pushed the alien back.

That scene was incredible. Lieutenant Pouille appeared in complete control of his battle, but his right arm didn't come out unscathed from the exchange. His tight sleeve had exploded, and bruises had appeared on his skin since he had to endure part of the force discharged during the impact.

The Lieutenant knew that he couldn't last long against such powerful opponents, and every second wasted in that situation only made more Stal gather around his group. Mana started to accumulate right below his skin as he prepared to use one of his trump cards, but a peculiar scene forced him to interrupt his actions.

The Stal on the left had lifted its arms to deliver four descending blows that made use of its scary size, but an azure light suddenly ran behind it and made it arc its back in pain. Lieutenant Pouille immediately seized that chance to place his palm on the alien's exposed torso and launch a shockwave that made some of its internal organs explode.