

Chaos' Heir 281

Chapter 281 - Rematch

"Is this happening again?" Khan whispered while wearing a fake smile at the sight of the approaching Ef'i.

"I have no control over this," Lieutenant Unchai said in an apologetic tone before spreading his arms and raising his voice. "[Teco]!"

"[It's not a case that the kid won the last time]," Teco exclaimed before turning toward Khan to speak in a bad human accent. "I'm glad to meet you again."

"[Honor are mine]," Khan said as best as he could.

Teco didn't hide his surprise to see Khan speaking his language. Khan's performance was poor at best, but he still managed to make the Ef'i understand what he meant.

Meanwhile, Khan simply felt glad to understand the Ef'i's language. He needed to replay the words in his head at times, but he confirmed that he wouldn't remain in the dark when conversations happened near him.

"Khan," Someone spoke from the center of the group. The Ef'i opened a path, and Khan soon could see Eztli stepping forward to stand at Teco's side.

Eztli had grown taller during that year. More muscles had also appeared on his slender figure and the tight yellow tank top that he wore only highlighted them.

"I think a rematch is mandatory before the tournament starts," Teco said in a bad human accent. "I hope your candidate doesn't mind."

"Khan was born ready!" Lieutenant Unchai proudly announced while patting Khan's shoulder.

Khan rolled his eyes before stepping forward. He knew that escaping that situation was impossible, and part of him even wanted to test his strength against the Ef'i. Besides, that fight could work as a preparation for the tournament.

Eztli also stepped forward and revealed a confident grin. His tail slammed on the ground as his nails stretched and his muscles bulged. Khan could sense the mana moving inside the alien's body to create a defensive layer that fused with his pale-brown skin.

Khan caressed the sheath to his left before closing his hand into a punch. Piercing that defense through the Divine Reaper would be easy, but he couldn't use his weapon during the tournament, so it was pointless to wield it now.

'I wonder if that can work this time,' Khan thought before bending forward and waiting for the two leaders to give the order.

"Fight!" Lieutenant Unchai shouted as soon as both fighters appeared ready.

"[Fight]!" Eztli followed, and Khan promptly shot forward.

Eztli had become a first-level warrior during that year, but his limbs remained unable to follow Khan. However, the same didn't apply to his tail.

Khan saw the Ef'i's pointy limb shooting toward him as soon as he entered his range. The attack would have made Khan change direction one year ago. Yet, he had gone through countless battles during that period. His experience went far beyond his age.

Khan bent forward even further. The tail touched the upper side of his head before sliding past it. A cut opened under the relatively short hair, but that wasn't enough to make him stop.

The ground seemed incredibly close as Khan kicked with both feet to launch himself forward. His torso went back as his legs moved forward and bent. Eztli didn't even have the time to cross his arms before Khan's knees slammed on his abdomen.

Khan's airborne attacks carried the entirety of his weight and momentum. They were final blows in the Lightning-demon style. His last technique didn't express his peak battle prowess due to the lack of rotations, but it remained among his strongest moves.

The Ef'i were above the humans in terms of pure physical prowess. They didn't reach the Stal's insane levels, but they compensated that through spells and martial arts.

Eztli slid on the terrain for two meters. His toenails dug the ground to interrupt his momentum, and his tank top shattered due to the impact.

The tail slid over Khan's head for a second before Eztli decided to retract it. The attack didn't break the alien's posture, but Khan had every intention to continue with his offensive. However, a peculiar sight appeared in his view and made him stop. The piece of Eztli's tanktop that had fallen had revealed a foot-shaped scar.

Eztli understood the reason behind Khan's surprise and decided to stop too. He smirked as he glanced at his scar. His sharp nails went on his tank top and tore it apart before he slammed his palms on his chest.

Khan also smiled but for very different reasons. He had actually read something about that in one of the books obtained on Ecoruta. The Ef'i weren't bad in the medical field, but they often decided to retain their scars to remind themselves of their defeats.

Instead, Khan's smile carried a bit of longing. The scar had reminded him of who he was when he first came to Onia. He recalled the fear toward his own power and aggression and compared it to his current confidence and coldness.

"[Stop holding back]," Eztli said while Khan was busy inspecting the scar.

Khan raised his head to glance at Eztli's four eyes. He could see pure happiness on the alien's face. The latter approached battles in ways that Khan had never considered. Eztli was having fun exchanging blows with an opponent at his level.

Khan had learnt to lose himself during his battles, but that new approach tempted him. His thoughts started to disappear as he tried to enjoy the fight without minding all its negative aspects. His mind began to cut away everything to leave a simple desire behind. Khan wanted to win for the sole sake of bathing in a victory.

'I guess it's pointless to test him any further,' Khan thought as his sensations started to fill his mind. 'He can defend against my kicks, so I have to rely on my mana.'

Khan shot forward again. Eztli threw his tail toward Khan, but he dodged it completely at that time. The relatively ample movement prevented him from reaching the alien before he could remove the openings in his guards. Still, Khan wasn't aiming to exploit his speed to land clean blows now.

A fast rotating kick landed on Eztli's right arm. The alien had used it to protect his side, and the lower power contained in the attack also allowed him to remain in his position. Yet, red-purple energy came out of Khan's shin right after the impact.

Eztli felt that something was off, but his arm worked fine, and nothing seemed broken, so he proceeded to wave his left arm at Khan. His tail also rose above his head as it waited for Khan to dodge.

Khan instinctively pushed himself forward while bringing his raised foot to the ground. Eztli couldn't reach him even if he rotated his body to follow those movements. However, that only applied to his arm.

Eztli's tail didn't have his arm's limitations. It descended at high speed and managed to land on the side of Khan's right shoulder. Still, he continued to move around the alien, so the limb ended up leaving a deep cut that reached his tattoo before coming out of his body.

Khan had sensed the arrival of the tail. He had the chance to use the [Blood Shield], but he decided to avoid revealing his abilities before the tournament.

After the tail came out of Khan's body, he rotated on himself to deliver a powerful kick on Eztli's waist. His mana flew out of his foot and entered the alien's body, but nothing significant happened.

Eztli swung his tail toward Khan, but he raised his arm to block it. The alien started to rotate toward him, but another kick landed on his waist and hindered his movements.

The tail rose, and Khan sprinted around Eztli again. The alien couldn't see his precise location now, so he waited for an attack to arrive. Khan didn't make him wait long. He threw a kick as soon as he stopped on Eztli's side before jumping back to avoid the descending pointy limb.

Khan took a few steps back after landing on the ground. He didn't need to check his injury to know its state. His eyes could remain fixed on his opponent, and his senses made sure to tell him everything that was happening inside the alien's body.

Something was definitely changing. Khan had already kicked Eztli four times, and his mana had entered his body during those attacks. The alien's arm had blocked the first blow, but the other three had landed directly on his waist and abdomen, which allowed Khan to notice some reactions.

The layer of mana that had fused with Eztli's skin had remained mostly intact, but the energy flowing inside his body had begun to find hindrances, especially when it passed through his waist and right arm. Those issues were still too faint to make the alien notice them, but they were definitely happening.

'It can work then,' Khan thought before falling back into his unique mental state.

The chaos element had destructive features, but they were too faint when Khan didn't use his mana for spells or specific martial arts. However, he had learnt how to change the nature of his energy on Nitis, so he could also enhance its iconic abilities.

The problems obviously resided in Khan's ability to enhance those features during his attacks. He had to add another process to his martial art, which already went beyond what the Niqols did. He wouldn't feel confident in succeeding with the Divine Reaper. Yet, the issue didn't appear impossible when it came to the Lightning-demon style.

Khan dived deeper into his special mental state and took deep breaths as he focused on his mana. He had to perform his kick correctly before enhancing the nature of his energy and releasing it. He also needed to use his movement to push it inside his opponent to make sure that it reached decent depths.

Eztli waited for Khan to move. He knew that he wasn't as fast as his opponent, so he had to adopt a defensive approach.

Khan didn't make him wait long. He sprinted forward when he felt ready to test that new approach. The pointy tail soon filled his view, but he ducked to continue his charge under it. Eztli's waist quickly entered his range, and his foot soon slammed on that area.

Eztli tried to close his arms around Khan while retracting his tail to block his escape path. Yet, Khan placed his raised foot on one of the incoming forearms and used it as a foothold to jump.

Khan slipped past the incoming arms and tail while flying above Eztli. His figure began to rotate before a heel descended toward the alien's head. Still, Eztli managed to put his tail in the kick's trajectory and block most of the attack.

Khan used the tail as a foothold to push himself outside Eztli's range. He flew backward and performed a backflip before landing on the ground and shooting forward again. His new approach required multiple attacks, and he had every intention to deliver them.

Soldiers began to gather around Khan and Eztli as their battle continued. The same happened to some Ef'i who happened to be nearby and notice the fight.

Similar scenes happened relatively often inside camps with both humans and Ef'i. The Ef'i liked to test their strength, even outside training areas, and the soldiers had adapted to those habits.

Moreover, Khan's battle was quite scenic. He danced around and above Eztli while the latter waved his arms and tail in the hope of inflicting severe injuries.

The two's endurance was incredible. Eztli endured kick after kick without showing any reaction, while Khan ended up suffering injuries from time to time. They were mostly superficial cuts caused by the restrained dodges meant to keep the alien in his kick's range. Still, Eztli also managed to stab his tail deeply whenever Khan decided that he could gain from that.

The long battle eventually tore Khan's uniform apart. He had to leave his defensive gear on Ecoruta, so all the attacks that landed on his body created bloody cuts or holes that gave a gruesome appearance to his torso. He made sure to keep his legs safe, but he sacrificed everything else as he continued to release kicks.

Lieutenant Unchai began to worry at some point. Khan never slowed down, but the injuries accumulated on his body were reaching a concerning number. He was losing a lot of blood, and even his complexion started to grow pale.

The only detail that stopped Lieutenant Unchai from putting an end to the battle was Khan's confident expression. Khan smiled during his relentless offensive, and his eyes never lost their focus. His face said that everything was going according to his plan.

The Ef'i couldn't help but approve of Khan's resilience. They had heard about him and did their research after his nomination for the tournament, but they could confirm his value now. He was a brave warrior who didn't fear pain, which the Ef'i respected with their whole selves.

Nevertheless, everyone expected Khan to lose. Eztli had yet to suffer visible injuries, while Khan's torso was covered in blood. He even appeared on the verge of fainting.

Then, during one of the usual exchanges, Khan slammed his foot at the center of Eztli's chest and used the impact to push himself away. He even took a few steps back and interrupted his offensive as he kept his eyes on his opponent.. Everyone believed that he was about to surrender, but Eztli suddenly spat a mouthful of blood and fell unconscious on the ground.

Chapter 282 - Three Weeks

No one expected that outcome. After all, Eztli had looked fine until the moment before collapsing. Still, it was impossible to deny that surprising scene. Everyone remained dumbfounded as green blood continued to come out from the Ef'i's mouth and created a large puddle.

Teco immediately shot forward to check on Eztli. The surprise on his face intensified after he placed his hand on the alien's back and studied his condition. Teco couldn't help but raise his four eyes toward Khan, who was doing his best to keep his back straight.

Khan knew exactly what had happened. He had been the only one among the crowd who had kept track of Eztli's condition during the fight. He had sensed how his kicks had continued to destabilize his opponent's insides until his body couldn't endure them anymore.

The breaking point had led to a chain reaction that had involved different organs. Entire parts of Eztli's insides had shut down due to the chaos that Khan had planted with his kicks. The Ef'i tissues, mana, and blood had basically turned on their owner after Khan's influence had become too intense to suppress.

'It works,' Khan thought as he did his best to stabilize his ragged breath.

Dizziness filled his mind, and the desperate desire to faint almost made him sit down, but he suppressed those feelings to remain on his feet. Khan had something to prove to that battle race. He had to show the Ef'i that he was a threat worthy of their respect.

The soldiers and Ef'i on the scene experienced multiple emotions when their gazes fell on Khan. They could see the many injuries that filled his shoulders, head, back, and chest, but they also noticed how he didn't appear fazed by them.

Khan was a gory mess, but he was still on his feet. Besides, his azure eyes had remained wide open even after Eztli had fallen on the ground. He appeared ready to keep fighting even if he had demonstrated his awareness of Eztli's conditions.

"[Did you hold back?]" Teco eventually asked before gesturing to his underlings to grab Eztli.

"[Yes]," Khan honestly admitted in his bad accent.

"[Good]," Teco stated while standing up. "[You wouldn't have survived in the tournament otherwise]."

Khan kept his poker face, but questions inevitably appeared in his mind. He wanted to know the true meaning behind those words, but that wasn't the right time.

"I told you that he was ready!" Lieutenant Unchai laughed while stepping forward and placing a hand on Khan's back while making sure that he didn't touch any injury.

"I'm fine," Khan whispered when he understood that the Lieutenant was trying to support him.

"I'll bring Khan to the medical bay now," Lieutenant Unchai announced while retracting his hand and wiping the blood on his uniform. "Unless you want him to fight someone else."

"I can't wait to see him at the tournament," Teco replied while wearing an odd smile. "He can beat [Eztli], but our candidates are far stronger."

Khan understood the meaning of Teco's previous words after that statement. Eztli wouldn't join the tournaments because he wasn't strong enough to be there.

The news tried to break Khan's poker face, but he managed to suppress any flicker. He could do far better, but he had still tested his real offensive power against Eztli. Stronger opponents would be hard to defeat if he didn't improve.

"How long do I have until the tournament?" Khan whispered as the Ef'i nodded at him and started to leave the scene.

"Three weeks," Lieutenant Unchai revealed.

"I hope this camp has a training hall," Khan added.

"The Global Army has already given its approval," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "You can destroy as many training dummies as you want as long as you bring the faswite home."

"The faswite is already home," Khan commented. "I need the training hall to avoid killing anyone."

"That's an arrogant claim," Lieutenant Unchai responded. "The Ef'i in the tournament won't be weak. Don't underestimate them."

Khan limited himself to nod, but a different answer rang in his mind. He could see that he was different. The Ef'i from before and most soldiers in the audience had never been part of a war, and Khan felt able to notice that. He was a proper soldier, while most of the warriors inside the camp had never actually killed anybody.

The level of his resolve was in a different realm. The Ef'i worshiped battle prowess, but Khan had already proven himself on an actual battlefield. His mind touched thoughts that those in his surroundings didn't have, which was his greatest advantage in the incoming tournament.

"Let's hit the medical bay," Lieutenant Unchai eventually announced before stepping forward.

Khan followed his superior across the vast camp while many eyes fell on him. It was easy for those soldiers and Ef'i to recognize foreigners, and his bloodied state didn't help him go unnoticed.

Multiple buildings appeared and disappeared in Khan's vision. Most of them were habitations, but many belonged to specific branches. Ylaco's training camp had wider diversity, but Onia's settlement had structures that involved advanced subjects, especially when it came to the creation of synthetic mana cores.

It turned out that the camp had three medical bays, with two of them in the outskirts of the settlement. The duo could reach one of them rather quickly, and a series of nurses dealt with Khan's injuries as soon as he entered an empty room.

The nurses applied lotions and bandages before forcing Khan to sleep. They ordered him to sleep for the rest of the day, but he limited himself to a short nap that used only a few hours. Lieutenant Unchai was still waiting for him by the time he got out of the structure.

"I will show you your habitation now," Lieutenant Unchai exclaimed as the two began to walk.

"There's no need for that," Khan responded. "I'll probably spend these weeks in the training hall. Just have someone bring a pillow."

"No mattress?" Lieutenant Unchai joked before sending a series of messages on his phone.

The Lieutenant changed direction after exchanging those words. He led Khan into a different part of the camp's outskirts to reach a giant dark building that contained various training halls. Khan could use the most advanced areas due to his status as a chaos wielder.

"Someone will bring you food three times a day," Lieutenant Unchai explained after the two stopped in front of one of the last sliding doors. "We have masters in the camp, but I'm afraid they won't be able to help you with your element. You can still request for someone to look after you when it comes to your martial arts, but something tells me that you'll refuse this offer."

"I only need you to remind me when the day of the tournament is approaching," Khan stated while unlocking the door with his phone and inspecting the dark hall.

The training hall was almost entirely empty, but spots on the floor lit up with a white light whenever Khan's feet touched them. He could find the hole where to put his phone in no time, and he even noticed the small bed in the corner.

"You can contact me through the training hall," Lieutenant Unchai announced. "Other than that, I'll try to keep your stay here as peaceful as possible. I know it's a loss for your goals, but the Global Army values the faswite far more than a potential ambassador."

"Don't worry, I understand," Khan said before nodding at Lieutenant Unchai and sealing the training hall.

Three weeks on Onia and the actual tournament could give Khan the time to establish meaningful relationships with the Ef'i or other soldiers in the camp. However, winning the faswite was more important in the Global Army's eyes, so the training hall had to be his primary concern.

'Now,' Khan thought as he plugged his phone into the training hall and began to skim through the various menus.

His idea for the tournament was quite simple. The Niqols could transform slaps into punches and hands into swords through their ability to manipulate mana. Khan wanted to apply the same theory to the Lightning-demon style, but his goal didn't involve a sharp change in his energy's nature.

The chaos element already carried destructive properties. They weren't powerful when Khan limited himself to launch his energy forward, but he could change that by applying the Niqols' teachings.

The process didn't require deep emotions or thoughts connected to images that depicted destruction. Khan had to work on his foundation to improve his attacks. His ability to manipulate mana had to grow past its current level to become threatening.

Khan didn't need to test his current proficiency level. He was competent in both his martial arts, so his training dummies had to meet a simple requirement. They needed to be resistant to internal damage.

'Three weeks,' Khan thought as the hall's workshops started to release noises. 'I can't do much in this short time, but I might be able to reach a decent level if I focus everything on a single nature.'

Khan wanted to reach Liiza's level when it came to the manipulation field, but he didn't need that right now. The tournament's rules went against him, but he could put his everything on learning how to enhance the chaos element's innate features. In short, he had to shorten the number of kicks required to knock down his opponent.

The prospect of the tournament's battles was clear in his mind. Khan could guess what would be waiting for him during the event when he used Eztli as a starting point. His opponents would be complete warriors who didn't have limitations on their spells. He would have to deal with Ef'i ready to express the peak of their power when he had to hold back his best attacks.

Eztli had almost managed to bring Khan to his limit. He could use the [Blood Shield] to protect himself from deeper injuries, but he couldn't abuse that technique. He also had access to his version of the Divine Reaper, but it was better to keep that as a secret technique for harsher battles. In short, Khan had to rely on his kicks, but he had to bring them to a decent level before the tournament.

One of the hall's walls eventually opened, and a slightly fat puppet walked out of it. Khan could sense the synthetic mana running inside its body, but he failed to keep track of the energy's movements when it crossed its chest, legs, and joints.

'Does it have reinforced areas?' Khan wondered before shooting forward and throwing a kick at the center of the puppet's chest.

Khan didn't focus on enhancing the chaos element's properties during his attack. His attention was on the mana sent inside the puppet. He made sure to follow it with his senses to understand if the training dummy met his requirements.

Sadly for Khan, the puppet's chest caved in after the kick. Its insides remained intact, but the rest wasn't as sturdy as he wished. The dummy tried to swing a punch at him after he retracted his leg, but he promptly raised his hand to launch a spell.

A red-purple light came out of his palm as violent energy shot forward. The mana expanded in a conical area and enveloped the puppet. The spell didn't affect the movement's speed, but the arm approaching Khan's face shattered before it could reach him.

Similar scenes happened to other parts of the puppet. Its chest, face, and the front part of its legs crumbled into a rain of dust and metal shards. When the spell ended, the dummy had lost most of its body, and only its back had remained entirely intact.

Khan had the chance to study the puppet's insides during his kick and after the Wave spell completed its destruction. The training hall couldn't come up with harder wires and tubes for the dummy's insides, but it could add layers to its metallic surfaces to increase its resistance. Its sensitive parts would be able to survive internal attacks like that, but Khan needed more from his opponents.

The floor lit up again, and Khan tinkered with the menus to change the stats of his opponents. He didn't want the training hall to sacrifice external defense for internal resilience. He needed the puppets to have both features off the charts to mimic the struggles that the tournament would put in front of him.

After the training hall pulled the old back, a new puppet came out of the wall. The new dummy was even fatter, but it was also taller than the previous, and its limbs were larger to contain the additional gears required to move that heavier body.

Khan didn't hesitate to shoot toward his new opponent and throw a kick aimed at its chest. The puppet endured the attack, and its metal didn't cave in after the impact. Khan also lost sight of his mana right after it entered the dummy's body, which made him smile in satisfaction.

The puppet tried to use that chance to wrap its arms around Khan, but he stepped back before falling prey to that slow hug. The dummy clearly couldn't match his speed, but he didn't need to test himself in that situation. He required something that could endure his kicks without falling apart too soon.

Chapter 283 - Confidence

Khan forgot that he was on Onia. The training hall became his entire world, and he didn't mind losing himself in his training. His new project was necessary, and he liked how it made him feel closer to the Niqols.

Khan had to put part of his exercises aside to focus entirely on his ability to manipulate mana. His training dug deep into the nature of his energy and continued the process started on Ecoruta.

The chaos element was free, violent, and powerful. It didn't necessarily want to destroy, but it liked expressing its might without bothering about what stood in its path. It was a selfish form of energy, but it brought waves of relief whenever Khan unleashed it without limiting its nature.

Khan ended up finding differences between his personality and his element as his training continued. The Slums had taught him to be selfish, but he could be extremely selfless when it came to people that he considered dear.

Something told Khan that he could find similarities in that difference, but he preferred to focus on accepting those features for now. His introspection eventually brought him to a simple conclusion. Part of his selflessness was toxic since it came from his high resistance to pain.

Khan could sacrifice himself easily due to how used he was to suffering. Liiza and others had complained about that, and the time inside the training hall made him acknowledge that issue properly.

The matter didn't involve a lack of self-esteem. Khan knew his value, and he desired happiness, but he was also ready to pay a steep price to achieve it.

That wasn't inherently a problem. Khan's current superiority came from his resolve and ruthlessness. Still, he couldn't let that feature remain an instinctive part of his personality since it often ended up hurting those who cared about him.

Khan needed to learn how to desire without sacrificing himself. That step felt necessary for his training. His character and the nature of his mana had to find common ground where they could both grow.

Many battles happened in-between those introspections. Khan didn't forget that he had to apply his growth to his kicks, and the training dummies allowed him to keep track of his improvements.

Days went by between long meditations and harsh battles against unbeatable puppets. Khan didn't talk, think, or waste time. He never interacted with the outside world, and the door of his training hall opened only when he needed to pick up his meals.

The four dark walls of the training hall became his everything, but he didn't feel trapped. Actually, that unrestrained cycle of battles and deep introspection made Khan experience complete freedom. He was in a simple room, but he was traveling farther than he had ever done through his mind.

Khan felt surprised about his own improvements. The isolation had forced him to face his problems without any external interference. The politics, his goals, traumas, and experiences didn't matter anymore in that small environment. For once, he managed to put himself at the center of his universe and study his true shape.

The three weeks went by in no time. Khan had learnt to ignore the outside world so deeply that he forgot his phone and the many messages that appeared on the training hall's dark walls. His concentration was scary. He didn't realize that something outside him existed. He had fully lost himself, which brought freedom that no one could disrupt.

The entrance of the training room eventually opened, and an anxious Lieutenant Unchai stormed in with every intention of scolding Khan. Yet, the sight that unfolded in his vision left him speechless for a few seconds.

Khan was sitting at the very center of the training hall. A dim light illuminated the area and revealed many cracks on the various surfaces. The floor, walls, and ceiling had holes and lacked large chunks of their fabric in certain spots. Metal shards and pieces of broken dummies also filled his surroundings, and a strange vibe enveloped the scene.

Lieutenant Unchai didn't know how to describe the scene. The training hall was damaged in many spots, and the scraps that filled the floor only enhanced the messy vibe that enveloped the area. Yet, he also sensed a deep calmness that seemed to lack an actual source.

"What time is it?" Khan said without opening his eyes.

"The tournament starts tomorrow," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "You have less than eight hours to prepare."

"It's fine," Khan stated while interrupting his meditation and straightening his position. "I'm ready."

Lieutenant Unchai didn't say anything after that statement. His eyes often fell on Khan, but he decided to remain silent. Something had changed in his expression, and the soldier didn't know how to explain that event. Khan's face brimmed with resolve, and Lieutenant Unchai didn't want to ruin it with useless questions or jokes.

The Lieutenant led Khan toward the center of the camp. Everyone appeared busy, but both soldiers and Ef'i halted their duties when the duo walked near them. They wanted to take a good look at the candidate, especially after hearing what had happened three weeks ago.

Khan felt all the gazes that fell on him, but his mind ignored most of them. He was allowing the world back into his senses, but he forced the process to be slow out of fear of losing the mental state achieved during his isolation.

Only Khan knew how much he had grown in the last three weeks, but the soldiers and Ef'i seemed able to understand something during their quick inspection. Khan didn't actually change, but the resolve that filled his face revealed part of his new mental state.

The center of the camp featured a vast hole that stretched deeply into Onia's underground world. Multiple rectangular structures that worked as elevators stood at the gorge's edges and connected the surface with the bottom of the area.

Lieutenant Unchai led Khan toward one of the elevators and activated its functions. The two descended into the hole, and a glowing spectacle soon unfolded in their vision.

Onia's surface was barren. The two suns gave the planet two mere hours of darkness, and the hot temperatures prevented the appearance of vegetation. However, the underground world featured a far different environment.

Plants and multicolored flowers started to appear as the darkness of the hole replaced took control of the area. Onia revealed its rich flora as Khan and Lieutenant Unchai dived into its underground world. The sight was mesmerizing, but Khan seemed unable to focus on those details.

The elevator stopped when it reached a vast underground hall with consoles, screens, and a series of metal pillars meant to reinforce the structure. Multiple large tunnels expanded from the area, and a series of artificial lights illuminated them with their dim light. Flowers and plants also thrived on the rocky walls and ceilings, and Khan could even feel many presences in the distance.

"You will have to remain locked in a room until the tournament starts," Lieutenant Unchai explained while leading Khan into one of the tunnels. "I have texted you the rules of the tournament. Did you take a look at them?"

"No," Khan honestly admitted as he inspected his surroundings without moving his eyes from the path ahead.

"Are you okay?" Lieutenant Unchai asked as worry started to amass in his mind. "You seem off."

"I am off," Khan responded. "I have never been more off in my entire life."

"What?!" Lieutenant Unchai exclaimed, but confusion soon arrived when he heard Khan's chuckle.

"Don't worry," Khan stated. "I won't lose. I don't think I can."

Lieutenant Unchai didn't know what to say, but something in Khan's voice appeased his worries. Moreover, the cave where Khan would have to stay had appeared in his view, which put an end to his ability to influence the situation.

"Go inside," Lieutenant Unchai exclaimed after reaching the cave's entrance. "The room will seal itself once you enter it. This is your last chance to voice requests."

Khan remained silent as he stepped inside the room and watched two walls sliding out of the openings behind him. The room was about to close, and he took that chance to voice one simple line. "I expect a promotion after I win the tournament."

Lieutenant Unchai didn't have the chance to reply. The cave closed before he could say anything, but he still voiced a deep sigh as he stared at the dark walls that divided him from the room's insides.

Khan didn't need to inspect the cave to understand its layout. He could sense synthetic mana flowing inside tubes hidden behind those rocky surfaces. Onia's underground world resembled a giant machine filled with life.

The cave was as simple as possible. It was small and featured a single bed in the corner. It also had a tiny corner with a hole that Khan quickly connected to a bathroom.

Khan sat on the bed and closed his eyes. The world continued to fill parts of his mind as he allowed it to enter and occupy spots that he had previously reserved solely for himself.

Khan didn't want to lose what he had achieved during his isolation, but he couldn't close himself to his surroundings either. As the hours passed, he made sure to find a stability that satisfied him. Then, he decided to sleep to bring his condition to its peak.

The sound of sliding doors cut his nightmare short. Khan opened his eyes and sat on the bed as his cave opened and revealed Lieutenant Unchai's stern figure. The soldier had a clean military uniform in his hands, and his expression showed his intense anxiety.

Khan didn't say a word. He took the new uniform and changed before following Lieutenant Unchai across the tunnels. The synthetic mana flowing inside the rocky walls tried to hinder Khan's senses, but he remained able to notice countless presences drawing close as he marched through the underground structure.

The tunnel eventually ended, and a giant underground hall unfolded past it. Khan could see a circular area filled with soldiers and Ef'i sitting on platforms dug into the tall walls. Multiple artificial lights also shone on the ceiling and focused their glow on the large stages at the center of the scene.

The area contained hundreds of powerful warriors. Their presences fused to create a heavy atmosphere that threatened to suffocate Khan. He had never seen such a dense gathering of mana. Most of the humans and Ef'i in the area were stronger than him, and some even reached levels that filled his mind with fear.

"The Global Army has sent a Colonel to oversee the tournament," Lieutenant Unchai whispered while accompanying Khan down a staircase that led at the bottom of the area.

Khan limited himself to nod as he grew used to the pressure generated by the many stares that had converged on him. By the time he reached the bottom of the area, he could ignore everything that surrounded him and focus on the other Ef'i and soldiers that had gathered near the stages.

Only a dozen warriors stood at the bottom of the area. Khan exchanged gazes with the Ef'i and soldiers and noticed the various emotions that filled their eyes. He saw anxiety, confidence, fear, and resolve. No one was in the mood to talk, and he was fine with that.

The rules of the tournament were quite simple. The Ef'i would gamble multiple mines that day, and winning would grant the warriors the chance to fight for the best ones. Needless to say, the last battle was the most important event, but Khan would have to defeat three opponents in a row to reach it.

The glow of the artificial lights intensified after the last members of the audience exited the many tunnels connected to the hall and took their seats. Silence filled the area as the warriors at the center of the area led their respective underlings toward the stages that would host their battles.

Lieutenant Unchai led Khan toward one of the rings to his right. The platform was large and had short staircases connected to its surface. He could jump directly on the stage, but something told him to use the steps.

Lieutenant Unchai followed Khan on the ring before moving toward the two Ef'i that had climbed the opposite staircase. One of the aliens also started to walk forward and reached Khan in a few seconds.

Khan had read about that procedure. He spread his arms and let the Ef'i check him. The alien took away his phone and knife before nodding at him and returning toward his tall underling. Lieutenant Unchai did the same as he carried a series of metal rings taken from the Ef'i's tail.

Lieutenant Unchai and the older Ef'i then descended the staircases and took their place on opposite sides of the ring. Similar scenes happened in the other stages, but Khan didn't move his eyes from his opponent during that procedure. The alien was more than two meters tall, and big layers of muscles covered his body. Seriousness filled his face, and faint tremors ran down his tails.

The lights began to change color as each ring became ready to fight. Their white glow gained yellow shades, and countdowns appeared under the contestants' feet. Sounds even resounded from the stages to mark the passage of time. Khan glanced at the numbers written in two different languages approaching zero without making any move. It was forbidden to summon mana before the battle actually started.

Then, when the numbers disappeared and a green light filled the stage, Khan shot forward. His opponent filled his tail with mana and swung it toward him to create an ethereal yellow slash that carried sharp properties.

Khan cut to his left to dodge the slash, but the Ef'i didn't hesitate to launch two more of them. The two attacks created an ethereal cross that forced him to change direction again.

More ethereal slashes flew toward Khan and prevented him from approaching his opponent. The alien began to perform the same spell with his arms, which generated a rain of attacks that ended up blocking Khan's paths. He couldn't advance, and the storm of blows threatened to push him away.

Khan kept track of the Ef'i's condition during his evasive maneuvers. The alien wouldn't get tired anytime soon, so he couldn't remain in that situation. Coldness flashed in his eyes as he interrupted his dodges and shot forward toward three ethereal slashes flying in his direction.

A red-purple wave of energy came out of Khan's figure before the slashes could reach him. The Wave spell destroyed the attacks and opened a path, but the Ef'i promptly launched more ethereal abilities.

Khan watched the slashes growing close to his position and decided to jump. Gasps resounded among the audience in front of that reckless action, but he didn't hear them. The Ef'i mustered mana to prepare more ethereal attacks that could exploit Khan's airborne state, but the latter had no intention to remain without a foothold.

Khan lowered his legs when he was right above the slashes. His feet seemed to carry no weight as they touched the ethereal attacks and used them to push him forward.

The Ef'i remained dumbfounded when he saw Khan shooting forward and landing under him. His clawed hands and tail tried to cover his torso, but a kick reached his abdomen before they could complete their movement.

Khan's foot released a wave of red-purple mana while it unleashed the entirety of his momentum. The Ef'i tried to stab its toenails into the floor to stabilize his position, but he suddenly lost control of his body and fell prey to the enemy attack.

The Ef'i flew away and ended up outside the ring. His figure rolled on the ground a few times before he could stop himself and stand up again. The alien quickly tried to approach the stage again, but surprise suddenly filled his expression.. He tried to cover his mouth, but green blood spurted out of it anyway and forced him to crouch.

Chapter 284 - Second Round

The Ef'i tried his best to stand up, but more blood came out of his mouth whenever he tensed his abdomen. Something had broken, but he still wanted to get back on the ring to continue the fight. However, his body didn't listen to his commands, and his superior eventually shook his head before crossing his arms above him.

Khan didn't know the meaning behind that gesture, but the ecstasy that filled Lieutenant Unchai's face told him that the battle was over. The older Ef'i had announced his underling's surrender.

The other rings were still hosting battles, but the audience voiced surprised gasps anyway after witnessing the outcome of Khan's fight. Many even clapped their hands to announce their approval, and that gesture didn't come only from the humans.

Khan didn't let the victory ruin his concentration. His eyes moved to a wave of mana to his right. His hand rose in an attempt to catch it, but the energy escaped his grasp. He didn't even feel it on his skin.

'Too thin,' Khan thought as his mind played the sensations experienced during his previous sprint.

Khan had used the Ef'i's slashes as a foothold before, but he had never managed to pull off something similar in the past. The mana unleashed by the alien had been dense enough to create a platform that his feet could use to push himself forward.

The action gave Khan insights into the superior proficiency levels of the Lightning-demon style. His recent move had been almost instinctive. He didn't think before jumping on the slashes. He had merely felt that they could work as a foothold, so he had gone for that.

The success in that new move opened a whole world in front of Khan. His sensitivity to mana allowed him to see the waves of energy in his surroundings. It was actually hard to find spots that didn't have mana floating around.

Of course, that mana was thin. A faint gale was enough to disperse it. Khan couldn't even begin to conceive the proficiency level he would need to reach to use that energy as a foothold. Yet, the same didn't apply to eventual spells. Even the bullets seemed suitable to become footholds now that he thought about it.

The battle offered more insights, especially regarding Khan's ability to enhance the chaos element's natural properties. His opponent didn't resort to any defensive technique, but a single kick would have normally failed to defeat a first-level warrior with a superior physique. Yet, the internal damage inflicted through his energy had been enough to put him out of combat.

The outcome would have been different if the Ef'i had a defensive technique or had managed to block the kick. Still, neither had happened, so the battle had ended in a single attack.

'They are strong,' Khan thought after reviewing the battle.

The Ef'i had forced Khan to use his spell and best sprints to win. Having access to the knife wouldn't have changed the situation either. The aliens in the tournament were strong, and those in the next rounds would only be harsher to defeat.

'I might really have to kill someone,' Khan sighed as that realization solidified inside his mind.

Lieutenant Unchai didn't share Khan's worries. The soldier was happy beyond reason in front of that victory. Thanks to Khan, the Global Army had already gained a minor mine, which was enough to improve his mood.

Moreover, Khan had proven himself to be worthy of that nomination. He had struggled during the initial phases of the battle, but he had won without suffering any injury. That alone filled the Lieutenant with hope.

Khan approached the staircase and began to leave the ring, but a wave of strange mana suddenly landed at his side and made him turn toward the audience. His eyes ended up on one of the platforms that held both humans and Ef'i, and a surprised smirk eventually claimed his attention.

Almost everyone in the audience had stopped caring about Khan to focus on the other battles, but a smiling man had his gaze fixed on him. The soldier had short black hair and brown eyes. His chin lacked a beard, and his face appeared relatively youthful and lively. However, the amount of mana in his figure declared that he was different from the others on his platform.

Khan glanced at the man's shoulders to confirm what he had perceived through his senses. The soldier's uniform had five pairs of stars. He was the strongest warrior and mage in the entire underground hall, and Khan quickly understood that he had found the Colonel sent by the Global Army.

Khan glanced at his left arm. The strange mana had fallen there, but nothing had happened. He couldn't feel any difference in his skin or muscles eyes, so his confused eyes soon went back on the Colonel.

The Colonel's smile widened at that sight, and he even shook his head to reassure Khan. The latter didn't understand what was happening, but Lieutenant Unchai approached him before he could inspect his superior any further.

"Stop staring," Lieutenant Unchai whispered while placing his hands on Khan's shoulders. "Perform a salute and meditate. You only have three hours before the next battle."

Khan nodded and performed a military salute, but the Colonel had already moved his attention on the other battles. Khan took that chance to inspect his left arm again, but everything continued to be okay.

The superior of the defeated Ef'i approached Khan and Lieutenant Unchai to hand back the phone and the knife. Khan accepted those items and exchanged a nod with the alien before moving toward a side of the area.

The battles on the other rings continued to unfold while Khan sat next to the metal wall under the platforms. The Ef'i seemed to have the upper hand over the humans, but the soldiers didn't give them an easy time.

Spells flared on each ring. The other contestants didn't hold back during their fights. Khan didn't have a good view from his position, but he could still use his senses to keep track of the battles and find the strongest Ef'i.

A few Ef'i stood out from the rest, and they soon proved their value by defeating their opponents. Gasps and cheers resounded among the audience as more warriors left the rings. All of them saluted their superiors, but their gazes fell on Khan when they approached the metal wall.

Khan replied to those glances, but he quickly stopped caring about the Ef'i. His attention went back to the other battles, and he watched as they reached their end. Only two soldiers had ended up defeating their opponents. The aliens had dominated the first round.

"Is it always like this?" Khan asked while keeping his voice down.

"What do you think?" Lieutenant Unchai scoffed. "Focus on yourself. Don't worry about the others."

It wasn't hard to understand why the Ef'i won so much. Their tails and claws were natural weapons that gave them a stark advantage over the humans. Also, they had stronger bodies, they were generally tall, and their culture was heavily battle-oriented. Onia's harsh natural conditions gave them incredible resilience, and their four eyes granted them heightened vision.

The matter would have been different if the Ef'i had proper flaws like the Stal, but that wasn't the case. The humans would have to be far stronger to defeat them, and only a few soldiers could meet those requirements.

Khan listened to Lieutenant Unchai's advice. He closed his eyes and fell into his meditative state. He didn't get tired after his battle, but he wanted to check whether the Colonel had done something to his body.

Khan couldn't find anything even after checking his body through his mana. He guessed that the Colonel only wanted to study him, but he didn't know how to feel about that.

The same strange mana had reached the two victorious soldiers, which reassured Khan a bit. Still, he didn't like that gesture, and he hated the fact that he couldn't defend himself from that inspection even more.

Khan eventually put the matter aside during his meditation. He couldn't blame himself since the Colonel was a fifth-level warrior and mage. Also, the tournament claimed his full attention, especially after he confirmed the Ef'i's prowess.

Lieutenant Unchai interrupted Khan's meditation to hand him quick meals or drinks meant to vanquish eventual tiredness. He accepted everything before returning to his rest, and the time for the next battle eventually arrived.

The Ef'i had removed some of the rings during that break. The stages could close into large rectangular items that could pass through the tunnels, so transporting them wasn't an issue. In their place, the aliens had brought larger platforms that expressed the superior value of the following battles.

The same procedures happened when Khan and a young female Ef'i stepped on the ring. Lieutenant Unchai and the alien in charge of the enemy contestant checked the two fighters before leaving the stage. The glow of the artificial lights intensified as countdowns appeared on the metal floors.

Khan had inspected the Ef'i's previous battle. She was faster than her peers, and her slimmer chest granted her superior agility. She still couldn't match Khan's speed, but she had something else that made him worry about the imminent fight.

The floor turned green, and Khan shot forward. The Ef'i smiled in front of that scene and spread her arms while raising her tail to wait for his arrival.

Khan kept track of the mana inside his opponent. The Ef'i was gathering her energy on her palms and tail, but the process made it faint. It seemed that her mana was losing its properties.

The strange event didn't affect Khan's sprint. He reached the Ef'i in an instant, and his body rotated to deliver a kick aimed at the center of her chest.

The Ef'i crossed her arms to block the kick. Her limbs endured the powerful attack, but a red-purple glow followed after the impact. Khan studied his mana entering the alien's limbs, but his eyes flickered when he lost track of it.

The tail shot forward, but Khan used his raised leg to kick it away. While his foot approached the ground, a red-purple glow covered his right hand and created an ethereal short sword. As soon as Khan restored his balance, he threw the chaos claws spell toward one of the arms still crossed in front of the Ef'i's chest.

Khan had every intention of ripping away one of the Ef'i's limbs, but his red-purple short sword vanished when the spell began to pierce her skin. The alien had forced his mana to disperse again, and her tail promptly moved to exploit that opportunity.

The tail hit Khan's exposed side and pushed him away. He had sensed the arrival of the attack, but he had decided not to deploy the [Blood Shield]. The blow had made him lose his breath for a second, and a metallic taste had also filled his mouth, but the impact allowed him to retreat.

Khan took a few steps back before stopping and bending forward. His side felt numb, and waves of pain spread from where the tail had landed. The pointy limb didn't break anything since it had wasted its mana during the previous attack, but he had still felt it.

The Ef'i stopped playing around. She shot forward when she saw that Khan was trying to find a way to deal with her abilities. Mana moved through her body and lost its features again as she reached him and threw her tail forward.

Khan watched the pointy limb drawing near. The Ef'i could remain outside his range thanks to her tail, but he wouldn't let her exploit that innate advantage. He sidestepped the attack right before it could pierce his head, but a long cut opened on his right cheek due to how close his dodge had been.

Khan didn't care about that minor injury. He closed the distance with his opponent while his cheek left a trail of blood on the tail. The Ef'i prepared her arms to block the incoming attack, but her eyes widened in fear when he pushed his palm forward and made it shine with a red-purple light.

The Ef'i began to retreat out of fear of facing Khan's spell, but a kick landed on her ankle before she could escape his range. She lost her balance and began to fall to the floor, but Khan made sure to raise his leg and deliver another attack.

The alien moved her arms and intercepted the incoming kick. She even dealt with the mana that followed the attack through her peculiar methods. Her feet had the chance to reach the floor after she supported herself on Khan's leg, but she found herself unable to retreat since he had closed his firm grasp around her tail.

The Ef'i began to move her mana while mustering her strength to pull back her tail, but Khan didn't dare to waste that chance. Waves of mana came out of the hand around the pointy limb as he threw kicks to destabilize his opponent again.

The alien couldn't attack Khan when she had multiple spots to protect. Moreover, Khan made sure to sweep her feet whenever she restored her balance, so escaping his grasp became impossible.

A flurry of attacks landed on the Ef'i's body. Khan kicked her right side, waist, legs, and arms violently without forgetting to add his destructive mana to the offensive. His hand also continued to send waves of red-purple energy inside the tail, and pieces of her skin eventually shattered as she grew unable to deal with the relentless offensive.

Then, Khan faked an attack aimed at her side and made her prepare mana on that spot before slamming his raised leg on the floor. He used that limb to spin on himself and lift his other foot. His movement ended up being too fast for the Ef'i, who didn't have the time to protect her face from the incoming attack.

Khan didn't follow the impact with a wave of his mana since he feared what internal injuries in that spot could cause. However, the Ef'i wasn't protecting her face, so something broke.. Cracking noises resounded on the ring as the alien fainted and green blood tainted Khan's shoe.

Chapter 285 - Crazy

The Ef'i fainted, but Khan didn't let her fall on the floor. He pulled her tail and bent forward to put an arm around her right shoulder and lay her down gently.

Green blood came out from the alien's mouth and nose. Part of her facial features had taken odd spots, but Khan soon stopped looking at her. A splashing noise reached his ears when he took a step back. His right cheek felt hot and wet, but his right hand ended up claiming the entirety of his attention. His palm and fingers had turned green, and he could even see pieces of the Ef'i's tail there.

Khan's battle had been the second to end. The audience didn't hesitate to focus on him and study his figure. They felt amazed to see him virtually unharmed for the second time, but they didn't hold back to show respect for his victory.

The Colonel's heavy gaze fell on Khan again, but no strange energy reached him at that time. Khan glanced at the young-looking soldier while wiping his hand clean on his uniform. The man smiled and nodded at that sight, but Khan didn't make any gesture.

Lieutenant Unchai and the older Ef'i approached Khan when he left the ring. The alien was as respectful as possible, while the soldier could barely hold back his excitement. Still, Khan went through those interactions without paying attention to them. Worries had filled his mind after the battle, and he couldn't quell them easily.

'She could deal with the chaos element,' Khan thought while approaching the metal wall to rest. 'I got a bit arrogant.'

No one had been able to deal with the chaos element on Ecoruta. The Global Army also valued chaos wielders a lot, so Khan had begun to think that he was virtually unbeatable among first-level warriors as long as he went all-out.

However, his last opponent had proven how counters to the chaos element existed. Khan had still overcome the Ef'i through a mixture of superior experience and prowess, but that was only the second battle. His next fight would probably feature someone at the same level or stronger than the female alien, and that wouldn't even be the end of the tournament.

The second rounds took a while to end, but their outcomes matched what Khan had realized after the first fights. Only another soldier had managed to win, and his condition was far from great. The Lieutenant that took care of him had to carry him to a medical bay due to the injuries suffered during his battle.

All the victorious Ef'i ended up focusing on Khan when he remained the only human contestant in the area. He had paid attention to their battles, but he didn't deign them of his gaze. He stayed deep into his meditative state while Lieutenant Unchai applied a smelly ointment on the cut on his right cheek.

The Lieutenant had wanted to say something since the end of the battle, but Khan's pensive mood masked with an aloof face stopped him from voicing anything. The soldier didn't want to ruin his apparent concentration, especially since he was faring exceptionally well in the tournament.

"What will happen to the other soldier?" Khan eventually asked when the three-hour break was about to end.

"He won't forfeit," Lieutenant Unchai shortly replied.

"He can't recover in time for the third battle," Khan continued. "And he can't take special drugs either. He has no chance to win."

"He will still try," Lieutenant Unchai declared while placing his back on the metal wall. "Who knows? He might be able to injure your future opponent."

"Do you finally trust me to reach the fourth round?" Khan teased in an aloof tone.

"I know you'll do everything in your power to reach it," Lieutenant Unchai explained before lowering his face and continuing through whispers. "Your next opponent is strong."

"I know," Khan exclaimed as his eyes went on the male Ef'i staring at him from the other side of the area.

Khan had kept track of most battles. He had been unable to understand everything from his position, but he had gained a vague idea of his potential opponents during those inspections.

His next opponent had been the first to claim a victory during the second round. The Ef'i was fast and could use fire-based spells. His experience also appeared great.

"Don't hold back against him," Lieutenant Unchai suggested. "The fourth battle will happen tomorrow, but you might fail to heal if you suffer severe injuries."

"I'll win," Khan sighed while closing his eyes, "Both today and tomorrow."

Lieutenant Unchai fell silent, but he soon had to call Khan to make him reach a ring. The Ef'i had moved the stages again, and the large area only featured two of them now. Only two humans had remained, so it made no sense to have more of them.

Khan and his opponent entered the ring, but the audience's abrupt cheers made them glance at a tunnel. A sorry figure covered in bandages and ointments walked out of the passage and approached the ring with a Lieutenant marching at his side.

The enemy Ef'i didn't seem to mind that the Lieutenant had accompanied the injured soldier on the ring, but that gesture revealed the severity of his condition. The wounded contestant could have probably fainted on his way to the platform.

"He won't win," The Ef'i in front of Khan said in a bad human accent. "You won't either."

Khan felt almost able to read the intense battle intent on the Ef'i's face. The taunt brimmed with confidence, but it also had a deeper meaning. The alien wanted Khan to use his full power during the battle.

Khan smiled before shaking his head and letting the waves of mana in his surroundings fill his mind. A countdown appeared on the floor under him, and his figure shot forward when the stage turned green.

The Ef'i voiced a battle cry as mana shot out of his left hand. The energy turned crimson and gained scorching properties as it transformed into a long whip that swung in a straight line.

Khan felt forced to dodge to his left, but the Ef'i created another scorching whip with his right arm and swung it at him. Khan jumped to avoid the attack, and sizzling noises reached ears while the two spells remained on the floor.

The Ef'i laughed as he swung both whips toward Khan. The latter sprinted forward to get close to his opponent and avoid those spells, but the alien rotated on himself quickly and prevented him from getting close.

Khan ended up sprinting in a circle around the Ef'i. The whips continued to follow him, and the alien never stopped spinning on himself. The two threatening spells couldn't reach Khan, but he faced the same problem.

In theory, the alien had to get tired before Khan. Keeping two spells active while spinning so quickly consumed more mana than a simple sprint. However, the Ef'i didn't show any sign of exhaustion even after that exchange continued for a whole minute.

Khan eventually understood the nature of the issue. The scorching mana that came out from the alien's hands had hindered his inspection, but he managed to see past the whips after spending a minute running around his opponent. The Ef'i wasn't adding more mana to his spell. He was only protecting his palms from the fiery weapons.

That low mana consumption began to make sense and forced Khan to change his approach. He slowed down slightly and let the whips approach his back before slamming his feet on the floor and performing a backflip.

The Ef'i couldn't interrupt his momentum as abruptly as Khan. The latter jumped over the whips and sprinted toward his opponent as soon as his feet touched the floor. The alien tried to invert his rotation to swing his fiery weapons at Khan, but it soon became clear that time wasn't on his side.

Khan reached the Ef'i in no time and prepared himself to deliver a powerful rotating kick. Yet, the alien suddenly let go of the whips and unleashed a wave of flames that caught both of them in its fiery might.

Khan retreated while ripping apart his military uniform. Burning and fuming rags fell on the ground as he removed everything still on fire. A pitiful spectacle unfolded in his vision when he inspected his condition, but the Ef'i wasn't too better off.

Only a few rags had remained on Khan. His chest, arms, and knees were in the open now, which revealed his poor state. Burns filled his skin. Most of them were superficial injuries, but they didn't look good anyway.

The Ef'i had suffered similar injuries. His hands were a mess, and the same went for his arms. Still, he appeared able to endure the pain and move normally. He even managed to keep his grin on his face.

'Crazy bastard,' Khan cursed in his mind as the corners of his mouth curved upward.

Khan had sensed the arrival of the spell. He even had the chance to protect himself with the [Blood Shield], but he had held back after understanding how much mana the Ef'i had put in his attack.

The alien had held back and had relied on his superior body to suffer less than his opponent. Yet, the spell had unleashed most of its power at its center, and the Ef'i's hands had to endure it.

The Ef'i quickly summoned his fiery whips again, and Khan's smile widened at that sight. The alien didn't show any sign of pain on his face even after wielding his scorching weapons. He appeared

crazy beyond reason, but Khan could relate with that approach. He could play that game even better than his opponent.

Khan promptly shot forward, and the Ef'i swung his whips toward him. The weapons created a cross-shaped hindrance that threatened to converge on Khan, but a red-purple light came out of his figure before they could land on him.

The whips shattered after facing the wave spell, but the Ef'i salvaged their base by pouring more mana on them. Khan saw the broken weapons on his path again when he reached his opponent, but he decided not to face them.

Khan ducked to sweep his opponent's legs, but the Ef'i didn't let that attack surprise him. The alien jumped and dodged the kick while slamming his whips downward.

Khan didn't expect the Ef'i to read his attack so well. The alien had been fast enough to dodge his kick and launch a finishing blow at the same time.

The sight was quite surprising for Khan. It was rare for someone to be faster than him, and the alien didn't fit in that category either. Khan's top speed remained unmatched, but the Ef'i had managed to surpass him during that short exchange.

Khan could kick himself away to dodge the attack, but the Ef'i was airborne now. The latter couldn't avoid anything in that position. Khan believed that he wouldn't get a better chance during the battle.

The whips began to fill Khan's vision, but his hands soon barged into the scene. The [Blood Shield] covered his palms and allowed him to grab the weapons without suffering severe injuries. His skin burnt and generated an unbearable pain, but he endured everything.

Khan moved the whips out of his way. The Ef'i didn't hide his surprise, but he still let go of his weapons once he understood what was happening. Yet, he reacted one second too late, which allowed Khan to create an opening where his leg could pass.

Khan used the floor as a foothold to throw a powerful kick at the center of the alien's torso. The latter spat a mouthful of blood as the attack pushed him in the air, and his eyes widened in fear when he saw that his opponent began to prepare another technique.

The whips dispersed when Khan threw them away and started to rotate on himself. His hands went on the floor as he used his movement to launch both of his legs upward.

Khan's timing was perfect. The alien would fall right into his kicks, but he had a different plan. The Ef'i pointed his tail downward, and crimson energy began to accumulate on its tip during his descent.

The large amount of mana accumulated on the tail worried Khan, but the alien's timing had also been perfect. Khan was already performing a handstand, leaving him no room to dodge the incoming attack. He could only activate the [Blood Shield] again and hope that his kicks would put an end to the battle.

A beam of scorching crimson light shot out of the tail when Khan's kicks landed on his opponent. The fiery attack reached Khan's back, but the blood vessels in that spot clotted before the impact and saved his insides.

The kicks flung the Ef'i away. The alien ended up outside the ring and rolled for a while before using his limbs to stop himself. He then tried to stand up, but a river of blood exploded out of his mouth and made him faint on the spot.

Chapter 286 - Bottle

Lieutenant Unchai almost shouted when the Ef'i lost consciousness. Khan had won, but his expression froze when he saw his poor state.

Khan didn't stand up right away. He sat on the floor and inspected his condition while curses resounded in his mind. His chest was relatively okay, but his arms, hands, and back were a mess that would take longer than a day to heal.

The [Blood Shield] had prevented the Ef'i's attacks from leaving deep injuries, but Khan's skin had still paid a heavy price. The whips and the last beam had threatened to break his defensive technique, which sounded incredible considering the level of his ability.

Khan couldn't find intact skin on his palms and back. Blood accumulated on his burns due to the blood vessels that had shattered after he withdrew the [Blood Shield]. His heart beat faster than usual, and his chest felt heavy as the pain from his injuries intensified.

'Fuck,' Khan cursed in his mind before standing up and showing his cold face to the audience.

His gestures didn't reveal anything, which only gained the approval and respect of the Ef'i in the audience. Khan had long since proven himself to be a great first-level warrior, but each victory brought him closer to being the very best.

The other fight had ended long ago. The injured soldier couldn't last long against his opponent, and even a reckless offensive didn't give him the chance to inflict injuries. Khan could only suppress a sigh as he left the ring and let Lieutenant Unchai drag him inside a tunnel.

The Lieutenant shouted a series of orders in both languages while a cave drew close. Two soldiers appeared in front of the entrance by the time Khan sat on the simple bed in the corner. The two were carrying bandages and ointments that they didn't hesitate to apply to his injuries.

"Tell me that you can still fight tomorrow," Lieutenant Unchai said in an anxious tone after the two soldiers left the cave.

"I can still fight tomorrow," Khan replied in an uncaring tone.

"Khan, I'm serious," Lieutenant Unchai scolded. "You might actually win the tournament."

"I told you that many times," Khan teased. "Did you start to believe me only now?"

"Mock me as much as you want," Lieutenant Unchai stated, "As long as it helps you deal with the stress."

"I'm not stressed, sir," Khan sighed. "I have been through far worse. How can I get anxious over a mere tournament?"

Lieutenant Unchai gulped before kneeling in front of Khan. He placed his hands on his shoulders, making sure not to touch the bandages before opening his mouth to speak. "You have no idea how valuable tomorrow's battle is. The mine of faswite at stake is bigger than everything gambled in the previous fights."

"What are you asking me to do?" Khan said while fixing his eyes on Lieutenant Unchai's face.

Khan could see the struggle in the soldier's mind. He had already understood the meaning behind the Lieutenant's internal conflict and hesitation, but he wanted him to voice those thoughts.

Lieutenant Unchai was one of the few people who knew how much Khan had changed during that one and a half years. He had seen Khan going from a playful kid to a cold-blooded warrior. That was great from the Global Army's perspective, but the issue about his age remained. He was incredibly young, even too young to have his current mindset.

The Lieutenant had to decide which advice to say in that situation. As Khan's superior, he had obligations toward his growth and well-being. However, he was also a soldier who had to prioritize the Global Army's interests.

"Don't hold back in the next battle," Lieutenant Unchai declared as a tinge of shame appeared on his expression. "Kill your next opponent if you must, but bring the mine home. We'll find ways to mend your relationship with the Ef'i later."

Khan smiled and nodded, but very different thoughts appeared in his mind. He even experienced a bit of sadness. He had just confirmed that Lieutenant Unchai was a soldier of the Global Army before being his ally.

'I won't put my goal at risk,' Khan thought while the Lieutenant straightened his position and did his best to appear satisfied. 'Yet, I still have to win. This is getting troublesome.'

Khan inevitably glanced at his bandages. The ointments had suppressed the pain, but he could still feel his injuries. His back and hands wouldn't heal in a single day, and the rules of the tournament also went against him.

Some Ef'i had been unable to join the second and third fights due to a lack of opponents. They could choose the warrior to send to the fourth battle on their own, without minding the number of victories they had claimed.

Khan's last opponent would probably be in perfect condition, with a set of abilities that countered his Lightning-demon style. Khan couldn't even keep the [Blood Shield] a secret during the tournament, so he had lost a trump card that he could use to create a winning blow.

His fingers shook, and no amount of concentration made them stay still. Holding his knife would be a problem with his hands in that state. His back would also annoy him during his spins, but he had to win anyway.

A heavy presence eventually entered the range of Khan's senses and made him snap out of his thoughts. Lieutenant Unchai realized what was happening only after his superior got closer to the cave, but he performed a military salute in no time. Even Khan began to stand up as the Colonel appeared before the entrance.

"Don't worry about these formalities," The Colonel announced while stepping inside the cave and pointing at the bed. "Sit. I only wanted to have a short chat."

Two soldiers had followed the Colonel, and one handed him a rectangular bag before both left the cave. The superior even glanced at Lieutenant Unchai, and the latter promptly nodded before following his companions.

Khan broke the military salute and sat cross-legged on the bed. The Colonel nodded before opening the bag and taking out a strange-looking bottle with a rectangular shape. The soldier then unscrewed the cap and used it as a cup.

"They gave me this bottle as a gift," The Colonel explained as he poured the dense dark liquid slowly. "The Ef'i don't really like to drink, but they try their best when it comes to their alliance with us. Though I must warn you, it will probably taste like shit."

The Colonel handed the cap full of booze to Khan. A pungent and strange scent reached his nostrils. Khan's first instinct was to back off the drink, but he suppressed that desire and took it.

"Do we share the cup, sir?" Khan asked while inspecting the drink.

"I'm sure you won't mind," The Colonel stated. "You don't seem the type to give up on the habits gained in the Slums in less than two years."

"I'm flattered that a Colonel knows so much about me," Khan commented while taking a sip from the cap.

The drink was awful. It was dense, and the burning sensation started as soon as it entered Khan's mouth. Gulping it felt even worse, but a cozy warmth spread throughout his chest after the sip was over.

"The drink must be worse than my sneaky inspection," The Colonel exclaimed as a sly smirk appeared on his face.

Khan's eyes immediately fell on the Colonel. His whole aura had changed after that comment. Khan felt unable to inspect the mana inside his superior anymore. He only saw an empty spot in front of him.

"Don't worry," The Colonel said while showing his palm. "I was only checking you all. I didn't expect you to sense me."

Khan put the cap on the Colonel's hand and remained silent. He didn't understand what the soldier wanted from him, but he didn't dare to voice questions before figuring out his character.

"You are wary of your superiors," The Colonel commented before taking a long sip that didn't cause any reaction on his face. "That's a good mindset. No wonder you managed to excel during those dangerous situations."

The Colonel handed the cap back to Khan, and he took it without saying anything. Khan's eyes also remained fixed on his superior during the whole interaction and while he drank.

Khan also suppressed his reactions while the dense liquid burnt his mouth and throat. The Colonel smiled at that sight, and he didn't hesitate to take the cap when Khan handed it back.

"I checked you after the results of today's battles," The Colonel explained. "Your achievements stopped being surprising after reading your profile. You must feel in a playground among a bunch of kids."

"The Ef'i are strong, sir," Khan replied.

"There is an immense difference between those preparing for war and those who have seen it," The Colonel stated. "You are even a chaos wielder. I bet you could blow up the whole ring if you wanted."

"Your idea of me is flattering, sir," Khan announced.

"You didn't deny it," The Colonel chuckled before emptying the cap and closing the bottle. "First-level warriors usually don't interest me, but you are definitely special."

"My element makes me unique," Khan declared.

"Your uniqueness goes beyond your element," The Colonel sneered. "The sole fact that you can keep your cool in front of me proves that."

The Colonel began to scratch his beardless chin. Khan's silence seemed to amuse him, but his eyes remained intense. The soldier was looking for something, but Khan couldn't understand what.

"Definitely too young," The Colonel whispered before heaving a sigh. "Let's try with incentives. What do you want for your victories?"

Khan did his best to preserve his poker face as his mouth opened to voice requests. "A promotion, a proper first step in the path to becoming an ambassador, and general support from the Global Army."

"That's not special at all," The Colonel said in a teasing tone. "You have Colonel Norrett in front of you. I'm sure you can come up with something better."

Khan wanted to gulp, but he stopped himself from showing any reaction. The word "colonel" resounded in his mind, and the same went for Lieutenant Dyester's voice. Colonel Norrett probably knew something about the Nak, but Khan didn't know how wise it was to question him about that topic.

Khan opened his mouth before closing it without saying anything. He felt certain that the Global Army was hiding a deeper truth about the Nak. Still, there had to be a reason behind that decision, and he wasn't in the position to learn it.

Showing his interest in the Nak's history could alert someone far above Khan, especially since a colonel would hear his words. Colonel Norrett might have the answers to his questions, but he didn't dare to voice them.

"I want that bottle," Khan eventually said while pointing at the bottle in the Colonel's hands.

The Colonel's eyes widened in surprise, but a loud laugh soon left his mouth. He quickly laid the bottle on the bed and turned to leave the cave.. Khan remained confused as the soldier stopped hiding his power and vanished in the corridor.

Chapter 287 - Mezmac

Khan took a short sip from the cap as he adjusted his position on the bed and prepared himself for a long meditation. Lieutenant Unchai inspected him with his curious eyes, but he didn't dare to say anything or question him about the recent events.

The Lieutenant didn't eavesdrop on Khan's conversation with the Colonel, but he remained curious about the matter, especially after seeing the soldier laughing while leaving the cave. He had no idea what Khan could have said to leave such a good impression on someone so high in the chain of command.

Khan would be unable to give proper answers even if the Lieutenant mustered the courage to question him. He had decided not to ask anything about the Nak to the Colonel, and the support of the Global Army was enough to grant him everything he needed. His request for the bottle had been somewhat random, even if it voiced some of his superficial desires. Still, he also didn't expect the soldier to have that happy reaction.

Khan repeated the conversation with the Colonel in his mind while Lieutenant Unchai inspected him. Truth be told, Khan didn't understand the soldier at all. The interaction had also been mostly casual, with only one line that seemed to hide something deeper.

'Definitely too young,' Khan repeated in his mind. 'What does it mean? Does he want to recruit me in one of his platoons? Does it have something to do with my element?'

Khan couldn't find answers. He didn't know enough to come up with solid hypotheses either. He could only rejoice a bit due to the faint envy that Lieutenant Unchai's curiosity tried to hide. That reaction probably confirmed his performance had been good, and that was enough for now.

"Is drinking before the final match a good idea?" Lieutenant Unchai eventually broke the silence.

"Sir, I'd like to be alone for the rest of the night," Khan responded without addressing the question. "I hope you don't mind."

"No, no," Lieutenant Unchai hastily said while snapping out of his curiosity. "Of course. Do what you need to prepare for tomorrow. I'll make sure to contact you one hour before the fight."

"Thank you, sir," Khan exclaimed while wearing a fake smile.

Lieutenant Unchai nodded before stepping out of the cave and closing it from the tunnel. A groan left Khan's mouth as soon as he remained alone. It actually hurt to hold the cap, but the ointments and the booze were helping with the pain.

Khan spared a few more thoughts on the Colonel before giving up on understanding the soldier's intentions. He took another sip from the cap and crossed his legs as his mind quickly slipped into the meditative state.

The nature of his injuries became perfectly clear now that mana illuminated them. Khan could confirm that his back and hands wouldn't heal before the battle, but he had enough time to bring himself to a decent state. The days on Onia lasted thirty hours, so he would also have the chance to sleep a bit.

Khan's night went by quietly. He spent most of his time in his meditative state, but he didn't hold back from taking a few breaks and drinking in silence.

The booze never got better, but Khan didn't stop drinking. He didn't aim to get drunk, but the familiar situation brought pleasant feelings. Longing spread in his mind as Khan left the bed and sat on the ground to bathe on its faint coldness. Onia didn't reach Nitis' low temperatures, but that was the best he could do there.

Khan didn't remember when he fell asleep. He went from immersing himself in some good memories to facing his nightmare. The unknown solar system filled his vision, but the noise generated by the cave's metal door eventually forced him to wake up.

"Is everything okay?" Lieutenant Unchai asked when he noticed Khan sleeping in the corner of the cave.

"Never better," Khan lied while scratching the corners of his eyes and standing up.

The ointments' effects had ended by then. Khan could experience his injuries to their fullest. The burns on his arms and chest had mostly healed, but his palms and back still needed some care. They felt annoying when he moved or closed his hands, but he confirmed that he could ignore them.

"A soldier will change your bandages now," Lieutenant Unchai announced while gesturing something toward the right side of the corridor. "He will give you a new uniform and apply the oint-."

"I'll skip the ointments," Khan interrupted. "I don't want to be clueless about my condition."

Lieutenant Unchai opened his mouth to say something, but he quickly closed it and nodded. He whispered a few lines when a soldier arrived in front of the cave, and the latter left the cylindric case in his hands outside before approaching Khan.

The soldier began to change the bandages, but Khan gave him precise instructions when he reached specific spots. Khan didn't want anything hindering his fingers or waist. He didn't care if some of his injuries ended up touching the military uniform during the battle.

The soldier glanced at Lieutenant Unchai whenever he heard those requests, and the latter nodded every time. He was putting his whole trust in Khan, so he didn't dare to go against him.

Khan gave dispositions for what was left of his bottle before leaving the cave with Lieutenant Unchai. The two crossed the corridor and reached the large circular hall in a few minutes, and many gazes welcomed them.

The various platforms were already full. Khan could confirm that the number of humans among the audience had increased since the previous day. He found the Colonel quickly, but he also noticed other powerful presences belonging to unfamiliar faces.

The audience didn't cheer or speak. Palpable tension filled the underground hall as Khan and Lieutenant Unchai approached the single large platform placed at the center of the area. Even the Ef'i appeared slightly worried about the incoming battle.

"The mine must be really big," Khan thought before handing his sheath and phone to the Lieutenant.

Only two more people stood in the lower part of the underground hall. Two female Ef'i sat on the opposite end of the metal wall as they inspected the newcomers. Khan and the younger alien exchanged a long gaze, but they diverted their eyes when he decided to use the remaining time before the battle to rest.

The soldier who had handled the bandages had also brought some food, and Khan digested it during the short meditation performed next to the metal walls. Lieutenant Unchai interrupted his rest when

the battle was only a few minutes away, and the two remained silent while they waited for the event to start.

The glow of the artificial lights then began to intensify, and Khan stood up to approach the ring. Lieutenant Unchai followed him, and the two Ef'i imitated them. The usual procedures before the battle went by in a few seconds, and Khan soon found himself alone with his opponent on the stage.

The countdown appeared on the floor. Khan noticed that it was longer than before, but the Ef'i suddenly claimed his attention by speaking in a decent human accent. "Khan, you will lose if you hold back."

"[You know I name]," Khan replied as best as he could.

"[I'm Mezmac]," The Ef'i announced as a smile appeared on her face. "[Give me a good battle]."

Khan moved his eyes between his opponent and the countdown. He found no reason to answer, but his hands opened and closed as the battle drew close. The uncomfortable sensations and pain radiated by his injuries lost intensity as he focused on the mana in the area.

Both contestants shot forward when the floor turned green. Khan was faster than his opponent, but the latter halted her steps before the two could clash.

Khan didn't let that event stop him, but his eyes widened when he saw the Mezmac using her momentum to launch her tail forward. The pointy limb was outside his range, but it threw a wave of mana when it cracked in the air.

The attack had the shape of a sharp bullet that reached Khan in an instant. He had sensed his creation and arrival, but he didn't expect something so fast. He had to duck to his right to dodge the projectile, but the sharp mana ended up leaving a shallow cut on his left shoulder.

Mezmac used that chance to jump forward. Her body rotated as she performed a kick that Khan dodged easily by taking a step back. However, she followed that movement by cracking her tail and launching another bullet aimed at the center of his chest.

Khan was faster than Mezmac, but her spell could match his speed. He dodged to his left, and the bullet left a long cut on his right side.

Khan accepted that dodging the bullets at that distance was impossible, but Mezmac didn't give him the chance to adjust his position. She continued to advance and deliver fast kicks, punches, and attacks that made use of her claws, and her tail cracked whenever he reacted to them.

Retreating made shallow cuts appear on Khan's body, but he didn't dare to counterattack. That would leave him in the open against the tail. Mezmac also made sure not to show any opening during her offensive, so Khan's kick wouldn't have the chance to hit her torso directly.

Mezmac was making full use of her additional limb and knowledge of Khan's abilities. She knew that a single kick on her torso could end the battle, so she made sure to force Khan into a defensive position. He didn't let any severe injury appear on his body, but his situation remained troublesome.

Khan eventually decided to change his approach. Mezmac threw a kick at him, and he responded with a kick of his own. Their feet met mid-air, and Khan used that clash to push himself backward.

The superior speed generated by the clash wasn't enough to escape the threatening tail. Mezmac launched a precise bullet after Khan and forced him to cross his arms in front of his chest before activating the [Blood Shield]. The attack tore his uniform and skin, but his defensive technique managed to prevent the appearance of deeper injuries.

Khan escaped Mezmac's range and reached the ring's edge. The Ef'i couldn't catch up with him, so she remained in her position and inspected her opponent going back in his stance.

"[This won't help you]," Mezmac stated while raising her tail above her head and accumulating mana on its tip.

Khan didn't answer. He had kept track of Mezmac's mana during the previous exchanges. Her spell didn't require much energy since she relied on the tail's quick movements to add that sharp power. She could keep fighting for a long time, and his body would be the first to give in.

His torso, shoulders, and arms featured many shallow cuts. They didn't release much blood, but they could become dangerous if more of them were to appear. Still, Khan didn't have a real tactic available. Even his knife wouldn't help in that situation.

Mezmac's tail was simply too fast. Khan could avoid its attacks from his current distance, but the cycle of dodges and injuries would resume once he approached her. Mezmac could also interrupt his spells easily as long as she didn't commit mistakes, and Khan didn't want to hope in his opponent's errors to win.

"[So, are you ready to fight me seriously]?" Mezmac asked as she bent her knees and prepared herself to resume her offensive. "[I know that you have something else for me]."

Khan couldn't help but show some hesitation now that Mezmac forced him to think, and she didn't like that reaction. Her tail shot forward before stopping abruptly and releasing a fast bullet. Khan had enough room to dodge it, but his legs remained still.

A broad smile appeared on Mezmac's face when a red-purple glow shone in her vision. Excitement filled her expression before some confusion made its way among that feeling.

The bullet had disappeared when Khan had moved his arm. A sharp membrane had appeared around his hand and had allowed him to cut the projectile. However, blood had spurted out of his fingers and palm as soon as he completed the attack.

"[That won't be enough]," Mezmac whispered as she kept her eyes on the glowing hand, but her smile broadened when Khan raised his other hand and enveloped it in another sharp membrane.

Chapter 288 - Injury

The battle changed pace after Khan covered both his hands with sharp membranes. Mezmac immediately cracked her tail forward to fire a bullet, but Khan dodged it by sprinting to his left.

Mezmac launched more attacks and even tried to predict his movements. Her offensive forced Khan to change the direction of his sprint often. He had to stop, turn, duck, and jump many times under the constant assault of the bullets, but his red-purple membranes never wavered during the process.

Khan had confirmed that his version of the Divine Reaper could cut the projectiles. The [Blood Shield] also allowed him to endure the damage caused by his martial art, but that approach had a limit.

The [Blood Shield] was too heavy for his body. Khan had to make each attack count, but he needed to find an opening in his opponent's offensive first. Mezmac clearly had vast battle experience and confidence in her abilities. She even knew most of his techniques now, so eventual tricks had a high chance of failing.

Mezmac was beyond smart. She knew that Khan would only dodge her bullets if she aimed them at his current position, so she tried to predict his movements. Khan had to turn left and right while remaining at the ring's edges to keep avoiding that relentless offensive. He appeared cornered, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

Khan had sharpened his senses and sensitivity to mana to their limits to find a pattern. Every warrior had habits that only years of training and battles could remove. He was the same. He instinctively prioritized his left side when it came to attacks and dodges, so Mezmac probably had a similar flaw.

The flaw didn't have to be big or important. Khan only needed the chance to gain the upper hand in the battle and interrupt that relentless offensive. He would carve his path to victory with his own hands at that point.

Khan danced among the bullets until he noticed something. Mezmac always fired her attacks at the same distance from his current position. Their side depended on where he was facing. In theory, he could understand exactly where the following projectile would arrive.

Khan dodged the incoming attacks a few more times to test his theory, and everything matched his findings. His behavior didn't betray anything, so Mezmac remained clueless about his plan.

Mezmac began to launch another projectile. Her mana started to leave her tail when Khan abruptly turned toward her and shot forward. She couldn't interrupt the attack, so her bullet ended up missing her opponent.

Mezmac didn't panic. She had enough time to launch another attack. Her tail cracked in the air and released a bullet aimed at Khan's chest. She even jumped back to put some distance and gain the time to prepare a third spell.

Khan had the chance to dodge and suffer only a slight injury or rely on the [Blood Shield] to block the bullet, but he opted for a different approach. He waved his left arm forward and cut through the projectile. The skin above the clotted blood vessels exploded into a gory mess, but he avoided wasting time.

Mezmac managed to launch her third attack, but Khan cut through it with his right arm. He was basically on her by then. His kicks could reach her, and only half a step separated her from his hands.

Mezmac didn't have time to launch the fourth attack, and the situation wouldn't change even if she could. Khan had reached her, but she wasn't hopeless.

Mana moved toward her hands before gathering on her fingertips. Khan began to complete the half-step, but Mezmac suddenly snapped her fingers and sent two bullets toward him.

The fingers didn't carry the same power of the tail, but their bullets still forced Khan to interrupt his movement to wave both hands forward. He cut through the projectiles, but that delay allowed Mezmac to attack with her tail again.

Mezmac had kept part of her abilities hidden, and Khan could only improvise. He cut the new bullet and tried to follow with another attack, but she snapped her fingers again. Khan used his other hand to destroy one of the projectiles, but the other slammed on his shoulder and forced him to use the [Blood Shield] on that spot.

The tail launched another bullet, and Khan cut it before having to face the fingers again. Mezmac continued to retreat, but it would take her a few cycles of attacks to reach the ring's edges. Khan could already feel his chest growing heavy due to his abuse of the [Blood Shield], so he knew that he wouldn't last until that point.

Mezmac snapped her fingers and began to gather mana in her tail, but surprise filled her face when she saw Khan jumping forward while performing a partial rotation. One of the bullets missed him, but the other pierced his right arm and reached his side. A metallic taste immediately spread in his mouth, but he focused his everything on stretching his left arm.

His glowing hand dug deeply in Mezmac's chest. The injury made her lose her balance and fall on her back, and Khan followed her on the floor. Her tail tried to shoot at his face, but he swung his left arm toward it. His fingers cut through her flesh as they came out of her and severed the pointy limb.

Mezmac cried in pain, but Khan didn't hear her. Dizziness filled his mind, and the world in his vision began to spin. His sharp membrane broke, but he was above his opponent, so he managed to close his left hand on her face.

"Give up!" Khan shouted as drops of blood fell out of his mouth.

His balance was all over the place. Khan had one knee on Mezmac and the other on the floor, but he felt about to fall. He could hear his heartbeat in his ears, and the Ef'i noticed his poor state.

Mezmac suppressed her pain and began to raise her arms, but a red-purple glow suddenly filled her vision. Khan was pale. He breathed heavily, and he appeared about to faint, but his eyes carried a resolve that she took a while to recognize. She saw killing intent past the radiance spreading from the hand on her face.

In front of the possibility of death, Mezmac lowered her arms before crossing them above her head. Khan needed a second to notice that gesture, but his entire body relaxed at that point. His opponent had officially forfeited.

The adverse effects of the [Blood Shield] took control of his body after he realized that he had won. Khan fell to his left and began to cough. He lay on the floor as pain took control of his senses. Everything hurt, and his heavy chest only worsened his condition. He found it hard to breathe for a while before he regained some form of control.

The world around Khan began to reclaim its place in his senses. His vision started to focus, and his heartbeat grew fainter. Yet, his awareness of his surroundings only brought new waves of pain as he became able to sense all his injuries.

His hands were on fire, and the same went for the right side of his chest. Khan found it hard to move his right arm, and something inside him released a sharp pain. He had never felt so bad, and he fought back when he sensed a foreign touch on him.

"Calm down!" Lieutenant Unchai's voice eventually reached Khan's ears, and he stopped struggling.

A familiar figure slowly became clear at his side. Khan recognized Lieutenant Unchai and relaxed his body. The soldier's mouth moved, but pain and tiredness overwhelmed Khan's mind. He didn't want to faint, but he found no reason to remain awake either in his messy state, so his vision quickly went dark.

The nightmare returned as clear as ever. Khan remained stuck in his memories of the Second Impact for a long time before he managed to wake up. His eyes took a while to focus on the area, but he eventually saw a scene that felt both familiar and unfamiliar.

Khan found himself in a large cave with multiple black pillars on its rocky walls and ceiling. He was alone in the room. He was lying on a large bed with a series of tubes attached to his body and machines around him.

'How did I end up in this situation again?' Khan mocked himself as he inspected his state.

His mind felt unnaturally light, but he addressed that state to one of the liquids poured inside his body through the tubes. The military uniform was nowhere to be seen, but a blanket covered his naked body. Khan could see tight bandages around his hands, right shoulder, and chest, but he felt no pain coming from those spots.

Khan closed his eyes to check his condition through his mana, and he immediately noticed injuries. His back had healed, but the skin on his hands had yet to regrow completely. His right shoulder had a hole that his mana and a foreign substance were slowly closing, and the same went for his side. Still, he felt a faint uneasiness when he studied his chest.

"You are awake," A female voice suddenly resounded in the room.

Khan felt surprised to see that an Ef'i had appeared in front of the entrance. He didn't hear the metal door opening, and her accent had been so perfect that he expected her to be human.

The Ef'i wore a white medical coat and walked while checking the screen in her hands. Khan could see a series of stats from his position, but his chest began to hurt when he tried to lift his head to peek at the device.

"Take it easy," The Ef'i ordered while approaching the bed and checking the various machines.

"Your values are good, but you are recovering from internal injuries. I'm afraid you'll need to be here a bit longer."

"Internal injuries?" Khan asked in a rough voice before clearing his throat.

"Your hands were better than I expected," The Ef'i explained while pointing at the bandages.

"[Mezmac] took your shoulder, but the drugs are working, and your mana is reacting well to them. Yet, I noticed that your heart had suffered some damage during the battle. It's not serious, but you shouldn't push yourself for a few weeks."

'My heart?' Khan thought as the memories of the battle flowed in his mind. He couldn't find anything that involved his heart, but he eventually understood what had happened. The [Blood Shield] was to blame for that.

"Will I be okay?" Khan quickly asked.

"Of course," The Ef'i chuckled. "I've checked you personally. You didn't suffer any lasting injury. Though you will carry a few marks."

Khan heaved a sigh of relief. He didn't care about the scars, but he didn't want his journey to end due to his recklessness. He wouldn't forgive himself if he let a Niqols' technique be the cause behind such a tragic outcome.

"Since you are awake," The Ef'i continued, "My congratulations for winning the tournament. I almost can't believe that you are only seventeen."

"Thank you," Khan weakly replied. "How long have I been out?"

"One week," The Ef'i revealed. "The official celebrations have already happened, but there will be an event for you once your condition improves."

"Did-," Khan began to ask before gulping and continuing his question. "Did Mezmac survive?"

The Ef'i couldn't help but nod when she saw Khan's concern for Mezmac, and her explanation didn't hesitate to arrive. "She had to go through surgery to reattach her tail and fix her chest, but she will recover. Her days as a warrior aren't over."

Khan heaved another sigh of relief. He was mostly worried about his career, but he wouldn't like to have killed someone over a mere tournament.

"What happens now?" Khan asked.

"You keep resting now," The Ef'i ordered. "You aren't allowed to leave the bed until your internal injury heals. I won't let your superiors enter this medical bay either, so focus on sleeping and meditating. I'll leave you alone now."

The Ef'i left the room quickly, and the metal door slid close behind her. Khan could finally understand why he didn't hear it before. The entrance simply made no sound.

'I guess improving the [Blood Shield] now is just stupid,' Khan thought as he fell into the meditative state. 'I hurt myself already. The next checkpoint might kill me.'

The dangerousness of the Niqols' old ways wasn't surprising, but Khan had been overconfident in his resilience. He would have died on Ecoruta if a similar internal injury had appeared on the battlefield. He had been lucky that the tournament had happened on friendly terms.

'My body needs to get stronger to endure the technique,' Khan sighed internally.. 'I need the [Blood Vortex] as soon as possible.'

Chapter 289 - Opportunity

The time spent recovering was lonely, and Khan also felt restless during the first days stuck in the bed. He had trained every day in the last period, so being bedridden bored him. He could meditate freely, but he often found himself forced to sleep, which annoyed him due to the nightmares.

The following days went better. Khan came to terms with his situation and managed to make the best out of it. He had forgotten what it was to rest properly, but he slowly recalled it now.

The short interactions with the alien doctor and the long hours spent meditating allowed Khan to keep track of his recovery. His hands were the first to heal, and his shoulder and internal injury followed in the next days.

Khan ate and slept a lot, making sure to prioritize his rest over eventual attempts to perform his usual exercises. He wanted to resume his regular schedule after spending almost two weeks bedridden, but the Ef'i threatened to sedate him if he tried, so he gave up on the matter.

The Ef'i cleared Khan after two and a half weeks. He could finally leave the bed, and his duties returned as soon as his feet touched the floor.

The medical bay's entrance opened as soon as Khan finished donning his new military uniform. He and the alien doctor turned to see a happy Lieutenant Unchai barging inside the room and reaching Khan in an instant to pat his shoulders. The soldier never stopped laughing during the process, and Khan let him have that moment.

"You really did it!" Lieutenant Unchai shouted. "I can't believe it! Incredible, incredible!"

"I told you that I would have won," Khan chuckled. "How did the celebration go?"

"They have been great!" Lieutenant Unchai shouted again before clearing his throat and lowering his voice. "It's a pity that you couldn't come. You have lost the chance to meet many important figures."

"That's fine," Khan sighed. "It's enough that they have learnt my name. I bet that Colonel Norrett has also left."

"He has been one of the first to leave the planet," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "His duties stretch over multiple planets. He couldn't remain here any longer."

Khan nodded before walking toward the entrance. However, a doubt appeared in his mind when he was about to leave the room. He turned toward the smiling Lieutenant, and a question left his mouth. "What do I have to do now?"

"What do you mean?" Lieutenant Unchai asked.

"Do I have new orders?" Khan wondered.

"Right," Lieutenant Unchai exclaimed. "There will be an event tonight. After that, you are free to do whatever you want."

'That doesn't help,' Khan thought while the Lieutenant approached him.

Khan didn't know what to do for his next step. Remaining on Onia felt pointless, but the same went for going back on Ecoruta. He had sort of made peace with what had happened on Nitis. He wasn't happy, but he didn't feel awful all the time anymore.

"The Colonel has reserved a position for you," Lieutenant Unchai suddenly announced as he placed a hand on Khan's shoulder and led him inside the corridor. "You don't have to accept, but I think you shouldn't miss that opportunity."

"What opportunity?" Khan questioned as his eyes lit up, but a series of presences claimed the two's attention and interrupted their conversation.

"Mezmac," Khan called when he saw two Ef'i approaching him from a side of the corridor. He recognized his last opponent and her superior, and his eyes quickly went on her injuries.

Mezmac was wearing a yellow robe that left her arms and most of her legs uncovered. Khan could see bandages from the opening under her armpit, but his attention eventually fell on her tail. The

Ef'i had reattached what Khan had severed during the battle, but the solid white structure covering the tip area stated that she had yet to recover fully.

"You healed faster than me," Mezmac said while wearing a proud smile. "No wonder I lost."

"It's nice to see that you are fine," Khan responded. "I hope that you'll recover completely soon."

Lieutenant Unchai pushed Khan toward the two Ef'i before whispering the reason behind his gesture. "They will be your guides today. We'll see each other at the event."

The sudden revelation surprised Khan, but he didn't let the Lieutenant repeat himself. He nodded before approaching the Ef'i and following them across the corridor.

Mezmac summarized their schedule, and Khan felt more than happy to follow it. The two Ef'i led him across the underground structure and back to the surface, where he met other aliens of a similar age. He also had the chance to meet a few older Ef'i, and everyone congratulated him for his victory in the tournament.

The schedule was pretty easy. Khan would have to spend the entire day with the Ef'i and follow their training. He approached the event with enthusiasm and joined every exercise the aliens threw at him.

The Ef'i made use of Onia's hot temperatures to bring their bodies to their limits. Khan found himself jogging around the camp for a few hours, performing many different exercises that involved the entirety of his muscles, and meditating among them to recover his breath.

The tiring day reached a major break during lunch hour when Khan joined the Ef'i in a messy and loud meal. More meditations followed that event, and a long sparring session arrived next.

Needless to say, Khan was pretty popular during the sparring session. All the Ef'i wanted to fight him, but their superiors made sure that they didn't go all-out. They actually put rules to avoid turning those battles into something similar to the tournament.

Khan obviously won every fight. His opponents were weaker than the Ef'i met during the tournament, and the rules of the sparring session allowed him to claim victories as soon as he landed a few kicks. He had retrieved his knife during the day, but the aliens never got the chance to test it.

The long day spent among the Ef'i allowed Khan to gain deeper insights into that battle race. The Ef'i were relatively simple-minded, honest, and battle-thirsty. They didn't care about the deeper uses of mana unless they could deploy them during their fights. Still, they had a profound respect toward strength, which put Khan on a pedestal during the event.

Some Ef'i eventually led Khan toward one of the habitations in the camp, where he took a long shower to remove all the dirt, sweat, and sand accumulated during the training and sparring session. The same aliens then accompanied him underground, in a large hall that contained many adult Ef'i and human soldiers.

Khan also found the contestant of the tournament and Lieutenant Unchai in the underground hall, but he never got the chance to interact with them. The event was a dinner that saw many Ef'i

approaching Khan to exchange conversations about his performance. He did his best to behave as politely as possible, but the messy nature of the aliens eventually affected his interactions.

The long day and dinner allowed Khan to improve his accent and establish valuable connections among the Ef'i. He heard many names that night, but his conversations with those alien figures never involved deeper topics or proper political matters.

The Ef'i only wanted to talk about the battles, and he could only go along. They even used a device to replay all the matches of the tournament, and Khan found himself forced to give his opinion many times.

The dinner eventually ended, and the Ef'i led Khan back to the surface. The light had already returned on Onia by then, but it was still too early for the camp to come to life. The streets were empty and silent, with only occasional soldiers and aliens patrolling them.

The Ef'i began to lead Khan toward a habitation, but they left him when Lieutenant Unchai appeared on their path. The soldier took care of escorting him for the rest of the road, and the two didn't hold back from conversing.

"They are a lively bunch, aren't they?" Lieutenant Unchai laughed happily.

"They are indeed nice," Khan smiled. "I didn't expect them to welcome me so warmly."

"The Ef'i only care about strength," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "They aren't stupid, but they choose to remain simple. There's beauty in that."

Khan couldn't help but agree. He had a good time among the Ef'i. None of them had treated him differently because he was a human. They were a bit too battle-oriented for his tastes, but they weren't bad at all.

"Well, the life of an ambassador isn't too different from what you have experienced today." The Lieutenant stated. "Do you still want to go down that path?"

"Of course," Khan honestly declared. "Learning about different cultures, languages, and traditions is fun. The universe is so vast. Remaining ignorant feels like a waste."

"Good answer," Lieutenant Unchai laughed while patting Khan's shoulder.

"What will you do now?" Khan asked. "Will you go back to Earth now that the tournament is over?"

"Most likely," Lieutenant Unchai revealed. "I have a few options in mind, but I have yet to decide. I might find something temporary before joining a training camp at the beginning of the next academic year. The entrance tests are in less than six months."

Khan sighed when he thought about those tests. He still recalled the fight against the Tainted boar. That battle seemed to belong to a different and simpler life.

"You were only an idiot with a shovel back then," Lieutenant Unchai chuckled when he noticed Khan's pensive expression.

"A lot has changed," Khan stated before recalling something. "Right, you said that the Colonel had reserved a position for me. What was it?"

"Oh, that," The Lieutenant exclaimed. "I'm sure a formal offer will come in a few days, but there is no reason to keep it from you. Istrone's crisis has exposed a weakness in our education. The Global Army is adding a few courses meant for real-life struggles, and the Colonel wants you to teach one of them."

"What?" Khan couldn't help but shout.

"In your case, the subject will involve the dangerousness of real battles," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "Many soldiers can fight, especially those from wealthy families, but it's rare for them to develop killing intent before seeing the battlefield. Imagine how many would have survived on Istrone if they were all like you."

The Lieutenant's words made sense, but Khan still couldn't accept them properly. He was merely seventeen, but the Colonel wanted him to become an actual professor.

"How am I supposed to teach them that?" Khan asked.

"I have no idea," Lieutenant Unchai admitted, "But I'm sure you'll figure it out. You'll also have the help of the other professors, so everything will be fine if you decide to accept."

Khan thought about the matter for a few seconds, but his first instinct was to refuse the offer right away. He wasn't a professor, and he didn't want to go back on Earth. He wasn't ready for the eventuality of facing his father.

"I'm not ready for that," Khan revealed. "I wouldn't even know where to begin. I'm just a soldier."

Lieutenant Unchai scratched his chin without saying anything. The two eventually arrived in front of the tall building containing Khan's habitation, but neither took a step inside.

"Look, Khan," Lieutenant Unchai broke the silence, "You have spent the last year fighting. No one can question your prowess, but you need more skills to become an ambassador, and the battlefield can't give you those."

"But still-," Khan tried to complain.

"Besides," The Lieutenant interrupted Khan, "You deserve a break. Go back to Earth, teach other soldiers how you have survived until now, and study alien languages on the side. You can do good by sharing your experiences, and your knowledge will only benefit from the lack of battles."

Khan wanted to finish his complaint, but no words came out of his mouth. Lieutenant Unchai was entirely right, but Khan still felt hesitant in front of that opportunity.

"Can I think about it?" Khan asked.

"Of course," Lieutenant Unchai stated. "You can do whatever you want for now. No one will say anything even if you decide to spend time on Onia. I'm just saying that you should focus on your education for now."

Khan nodded before stepping inside the building. The Lieutenant followed him, and the two soon stopped in front of a large flat that featured multiple rooms and comfortable furniture.

"I've left the bottle you gave me here," Lieutenant Unchai explained before performing a military salute. "It has been an honor to be with you during the tournament."

"Thank you, sir," Khan sighed before entering the habitation and sealing the entrance. He had a lot of thinking to do, and he needed to remain alone for that.

Chapter 290 - Peace

The idea of returning to Earth had never crossed Khan's mind during that period. Nitis had left him in pain, broken, and cynical. Thinking hurt, which was why he decided to throw himself into a battlefield.

However, Lieutenant Unchai's words made sense on many levels. Khan was only seventeen. He was incredibly strong for his age, but he remained a first-level warrior with no deep knowledge. He was even quite ignorant about common subjects taught in the training camps.

An ambassador required far more than strength. Someone in that position needed a vast knowledge of the political array, multiple social skills, and a good understanding of alien's customs. Khan had nothing similar, but he was working on the last point.

It was clear that the path was long, and Khan understood how traveling through battlefields wouldn't give him what he needed. A peaceful period when he could study and fill his gaps appeared necessary, and Earth really sounded like his best option.

The job was even quite fitting. Experiencing the life of a professor wouldn't only give Khan the chance to expand his social skills. He would also establish many relationships with descendants from important families. His subject was relatively new too, so he expected many recruits to join it.

Still, Khan remained uncertain. He had no idea how to teach, and his experience with Rick barely counted. Moreover, everything would happen on Earth, which didn't make him feel too excited.

When Khan managed to look past his pain and desperation, he could see his true self. He was curious and open-minded. The chance to experience different cultures, species, customs, and planets excited him. He also liked to fight and prevail over his opponents. Life in a safe environment didn't suit him.

Nevertheless, Khan had to work hard to achieve a type of life that matched his personality. Right now, his only value came from his battle prowess. The Global Army probably wouldn't refuse his requests to visit different planets, but he would be nothing more than a soldier there.

His fame would also fade at some point, and his privileges would disappear with it. Khan could probably reach high positions inside the Global Army before that, but he would be unable to have total freedom if he remained a simple warrior.

'Do I really have to go back on Earth?' Khan wondered while sipping the awful booze from the cap.

Khan was sitting on his large bed while pondering about the issue. The Colonel's bottle was on a small table next to him, and his free hand tapped his phone lazily as he browsed the network. He was checking his alternatives, but he couldn't find anything special.

The Global Army had already updated his profile, but that didn't improve his opportunities. The number of possible jobs had increased significantly, but they mostly involved roles as a foot soldier. The best ones saw Khan joining private platoons meant to defend valuable shipments or locations.

A few positions were vaguely interesting. Khan could become a student in specific academies that provided a higher level of education. He could even travel toward alien training camps and

experience the uses of mana there. Still, those roles were beneath the position of a professor. Accepting the Colonel's offer seemed the best option career-wise.

Khan didn't feel excited at the idea of becoming a student again, and his role on eventual alien planets would never reach the levels experienced on Nitis. He didn't have any special skill or knowledge, so his position inside those training camps wouldn't touch anything important.

The matter would have been different if Khan had specializations in some complicated subjects that involved mana and tech. However, the simple nature of his abilities could only grant minor roles in places where the Global Army had already established good relationships.

'My career could suffer there,' Khan sighed while removing the filters that showed the alien training camps. 'I would be a foot soldier among experts in multiple fields.'

Khan didn't share his father's passion for technology and research. He had learnt to like to study the natures that mana could obtain, but only because it made him stronger. He was an adventurer, but he needed to stop traveling to acquire the skills that the Global Army required to give him that job.

'Do I really have to go there?' Khan repeated in his mind as a groan escaped his mouth.

The sole idea of meeting his father would shatter everything he had achieved in those months. Khan was feeling better after losing himself in the mana for so long. He had even started to enjoy battles and smile a bit more, but his pain was still there. He knew that Bret's face could make everything resurge in an angry shape.

Khan couldn't make up his mind, so he decided not to think about the matter until the official offer arrived. The bottle ended that night, but he easily found a new one the next day. Every door in the camp opened for him, and no one ever dared to ask for money.

Khan soon fell prey to his previous busy schedule. He spent his time inside training halls or sparring sessions. He didn't want to think about his future or plan his next move. The Ef'i's lifestyle was simple and appealing for someone in his situation. Everything came to him as long as he won. Everyone looked up to him as long as he remained the best.

Still, the time to make a decision arrived after spending two days fighting and training non-stop. Khan was about to fall asleep inside a training hall when his phone rang, and the message that he didn't want to read arrived.

The message came from a profile labeled "Global Army" and described the details behind the job. It turned out that Ylaco had yet to gain enough recruits to create new positions for eventual professors, so the offer saw Khan going to Reebfell, one of the big cities on Earth.

The job was quite simple. Khan would have to coordinate the professors handling the physical subjects to create a class that taught about the actual dangers of the battlefield. The position only occupied a few hours every week. It also had a salary, but he didn't understand whether that number of Credits was good or not.

The message didn't state precise details about the job. Khan would have to set them with the other professors handling similar subjects. Everything was vague since the position was new, and a lot could change throughout the years as the Global Army studied the results.

Everything sounded far too perfect. Khan wouldn't only get paid. He would also gain a flat inside Reebfell's camp and free access to most buildings. Many books would even be at his disposal, and the position would grant him many discounts on things that required Credits.

Only an idiot would refuse such a great offer, but Khan still hesitated. He wouldn't have to face his father, but his destination remained Earth. Nothing would stop him from thinking there.

'Am I running away from peace?' Khan wondered as he sensed that nothing managed to appease his hesitation. 'Am I afraid that everything I have experienced would become meaningless?'

His hesitations had many reasons, but he still needed to make a decision. Khan bumped the back of his head a few times on the training hall's metal wall before moving his finger near the two labels at the end of the message. One of them would mark his acceptance of the job, and he pressed it after taking a deep breath.

The decision was final now, but Khan didn't feel better. Part of the painful emotions he had managed to suppress in the last period even returned after opting for peace. He was turning the page on a series of tragedies and awful experiences, but no happiness or relief arrived.

A series of messages arrived after accepting the job. The Global Army sent him indications meant for his return on Earth. Khan had to leave the camp to reach the nearest location with a teleport, which required a car and a code that the soldiers had to scan to confirm the truthfulness of his requests.

Khan glanced at the almost empty bottle near him. He wasn't drunk, but he decided not to drive in that condition. His eyes closed and the nightmare went by as he rested and dispersed the effects of the booze.

When Khan woke up, he reached his habitation and cleaned himself before taking a new military uniform. After leaving the building, he approached the parking area and showed the code to the soldiers guarding the cars. One of them offered to ride Khan to the teleport, but he refused.

Khan still felt awkward in a car, but the solitary drive to the camp with the teleport allowed him to gain more confidence. The vehicle had a map that kept track of his position, so getting lost was virtually impossible. He didn't even have a specific timeline to respect, so he took many detours to experience the hot wind on his face.

The departure didn't feature any grand salutations, and the drive also lacked significant events. Khan reached the other camp in a few hours. Soldiers welcomed him warmly, but he limited those interactions to short salutes.

The building with the teleport quickly appeared in his eyes, and he reached the actual device after showing his codes to the soldiers inside it. The usual scans went by before Khan could step on the oval platform and sense the synthetic mana accumulating around him.

The scenery changed in an instant. Dark metal filled Khan's vision, but his eyes quickly fell on a series of excited gazes that had converged toward his figure. Many soldiers left their consoles to inspect him from head to toe.

"Is this Reebfell's training camp?" Khan asked to break free of that awkward situation.

One of the soldiers wearing white medical coats snapped out of her daze and took a step forward. The middle-aged woman nodded before pointing at a corridor and voicing a short greeting. "Khan, sir, we were waiting for you. Please, wait in front of the building once you cross the scanners. A soldier will reach you shortly."

Khan nodded and stepped out of teleport. He had long since grown used to the scanners by then, but the excited gazes of the soldiers handling the various machines felt awkward. His fame had already spread on Earth, and no one even tried to hide it.

'I wonder if Professor Norwell had to go through something like this,' Khan cursed in his mind before looking at the results of the scanners.

His attunement with mana had merely gone up by one point during his stay on Onia. The pace of his growth had slowed down as he advanced toward the next checkpoint, and the matter naturally annoyed him.

'Strange,' Khan thought when he left the building and took a deep breath of Earth's air.

Khan still recalled what he had felt after leaving Istrone. His body had experienced a moment of bliss back then, but nothing similar happened now.

'Have I become too used to alien planets?' Khan casually wondered while inspecting the Reebfell's camp.

The camp showed a scene that Khan didn't experience in a long time. It was almost night, but some light still filled the area. Clean streets and large spots with well-kept grass expanded in his vision, but the many young soldiers in the distance remained the most surprising detail in the scenery.

Memories inevitably surged in Khan's mind. He recalled his time in Ylaco's training camp with Martha, Lieutenant Dyester, Luke, and Bruce. Those peaceful events seemed to belong to a different life, but a smile still appeared on his face at the sight of such naïve happiness. Most of those young soldiers had no idea what could happen once they left the safety of those buildings.

'I guess this is what I have to teach,' Khan thought as he kept his gaze on those faint figures. 'I need to break their naivety.'

A figure eventually grew close. Khan saw a young woman with two stars on each shoulder approaching him and performing a military salute as soon as she arrived near him.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Khan," The woman announced. "I'm Amber Teldom. I'm sure working with you will be great."

"Are you a professor, ma'am?" Khan questioned while inspecting the woman.

Amber had long brown hair and green eyes. She was slightly shorter than him, but her physique was virtually perfect. She was slim but with curves in the right places, and her face carried a faint sweetness. Khan found it hard to see her as someone who handled battle-related courses.

"I take care of a special course about spells," Amber explained as a sweet smile appeared on her face. "You don't have to be so polite. We are peers right now. Actually, I think I might have to address you as "sir" soon."

"Why is that?" Khan asked as the two started to leave the building.

"The headmaster is about to give you a promotion," Amber explained. "He is the only one in this training camp who can award them. Don't worry. We are about to see him."