

Chaos' Heir 291

Chapter 291 - Promotion

Khan had requested a promotion, but he didn't expect it to arrive so suddenly. He had read something about those events from Lieutenant Pouille's books, so he knew that they weren't anything major, especially for the lower ranks. Yet, Khan still believed that he would have had some time to prepare.

Khan inspected himself. He had showered, but the drive back to the teleport had tainted his uniform with sand and dirt. He even raised his arms to sniff his armpits, and the effects of Onia's heat quickly became evident in his nostrils.

"Don't worry," Amber giggled when she watched that scene. "It won't be anything major, so you are more than fine like this."

"I hope my promotion doesn't cause problems," Khan stated while giving up on the matter and resuming the march.

Amber was older than Khan, and she had two stars on each shoulder, but she had basically revealed that she was still a regular soldier. Khan would have to work with her, so getting a promotion before her could create envy and other issues.

"I'm the only one to blame for my position," Amber admitted. "I've spent all my life inside training camps or cities. I have only left Reebfell's area a few times."

"You must be outstanding as a professor then," Khan complimented to keep the topic on Amber.

"I only have a good academic record," Amber explained. "Most soldiers ignore that mana can bring far more than destruction. The Global Army has developed countless minor spells that many ignore to focus on their stars."

Khan could only nod. He had already tested the "enhanced reading" value, and he believed that the "simulated mental battle" would also become extremely useful once he learnt how to deploy it. He could easily guess that the Global Army had other good minor techniques in store, and his broad approach to the mana strengthened that belief.

"Though enough talking about me," Amber smiled. "You are the hot topic of the year, and I can be the first to question you."

"My profile already says a lot," Khan sighed. "I'm still getting used to my fame."

"You might want to do that quickly," Amber suggested. "Everyone in the camp has already learnt about your arrival. They can't wait to see you."

"I guess I need to prepare a good first lesson," Khan wondered.

"You can't possibly be scared of a few recruits after everything you have gone through," Amber teased.

"It's not that," Khan responded as his eyes began to wander through the camp. "I think I can really help some of the recruits. I wouldn't claim that my knowledge can save lives, but I might be useful. It would be a pity if I couldn't convey what I've learnt due to my poor experience."

Amber's eyes widened in surprise. She didn't expect such a mature answer. She had initially been worried that someone so young wouldn't understand the responsibilities of a professor, but it seemed that Khan didn't need any help there.

Khan lost himself in his thoughts during those silent seconds. Reebfell's training camp unfolded in his eyes, and complicated emotions filled his mind.

The clean streets, the perfectly intact buildings, the joyful and carefree voices in the distance, and the overall lack of tension in the air created a peaceful scenery that Khan had almost forgotten. He wasn't used to that calm and safe environment anymore. Even Onia didn't have that atmosphere.

Amber had misunderstood Khan. He didn't acknowledge his responsibilities due to his new job. He wanted the soldiers to hear him out because he had seen what a lack of experience could cause.

Khan had witnessed too many deaths, so he wanted to share his knowledge to prevent others from going through the same pain. He knew that most of those naïve and innocent recruits didn't deserve it.

"It's nice, isn't it?" Amber eventually asked while gazing at the young soldiers in the distance. "I almost can't believe how things can be so normal after Istrone."

"I'm surprised some training camps recovered so quickly," Khan admitted.

"The Global Army had to make many promises to reassure the various families," Amber explained. "I don't know the details, but I bet that the wealthy families have requested far more than simple Credits."

"Is your family wealthy?" Khan asked.

"A bit," Amber said through an awkward laugh. "I feel a bit bad for how easy it has been for me. I didn't have to go through what you guys have experienced."

"Being lucky isn't a sin," Khan reassured as his eyes kept inspecting the camp. "I'm sure none of Istrone's survivors would wish that to happen to others. I know I don't."

Amber remained speechless again, and a warm smile inevitably appeared on her face. Khan was only being honest, but that was enough to reassure her. She could see that he had remained a good person even after everything he had gone through.

"You sure know your way with words," Amber teased.

"What do you mean?" Khan questioned while bringing his attention to Amber.

"I've heard that you are quite popular with the ladies," Amber giggled while covering her mouth. "I can understand why now."

"Who is even spreading these rumors?" Khan frowned.

"Well, you can't stop soldiers from looking into you," Amber responded. "Besides, people like to spread gossip. I've heard the craziest things about you even before you got a job here."

"Give me an idea," Khan insisted.

"Are you sure?" Amber asked as her laugh grew louder. "Some rumors see you in bed with Ef'i."

"How would a human even do that?" Khan cursed while shaking his head.

"I have no idea," Amber replied without bothering to hold back her laugh anymore. "Still, they worship strength, and you won the tournament. Also, you already had experience with aliens, so-."

"Alien," Khan interrupted. "One alien."

Khan did his best not to reveal anything, but Amber understood that she had touched the wrong topic. She didn't expect the atmosphere to change so drastically, but she quickly addressed the issue. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you. I'm sure everyone will understand the difference between the truth and the rumors once they see you."

"It's fine," Khan replied while wearing a fake smile. "I'm just a bit anxious about the promotion."

Amber could see that something had changed. Khan had spoken honestly until now, so she recognized his lies. Still, she decided not to probe further since the topic had clearly annoyed him.

The atmosphere between the two became a bit awkward, and Khan didn't do anything to ease it. He continued to inspect the camp, but his eyes had long since stopped examining the various details of the scenery. A dark face filled his vision, and the memories of a cozy coldness had started to seep inside his mind.

The two eventually walked near a group of young soldiers busy interacting with each other. The latter's first instinct was to wave their hands at Amber, but they stopped their gestures when they noticed Khan. He casually glanced at them and performed a fake smile, but he quickly disregarded them to move his focus back on the various buildings.

Similar scenes happened as the two crossed more soldiers. All of them tried to greet Amber, but Khan's presence made them hold back from trying to interact with the duo.

"They sure like you," Khan commented after witnessing the same scene four times.

"I just do my best," Amber exclaimed happily. She couldn't help but feel relieved to see that Khan didn't take her previous words to heart.

"That seems to be enough," Khan stated, and silence fell between the two again.

It didn't take much longer for Amber and Khan to reach a large building that seemed to stand at the center of the camp. Large windows and tall metal columns created an expression of modern architecture that the settlements on other planets struggled to have. Khan even guessed that the Global Army had renovated the structure recently.

Amber led Khan inside the building. The large corridors and halls connected to them were almost empty due to the late hour, but the two still met random soldiers busy patrolling the areas or activating the robots meant to clean everything. Those men and women limited themselves to nod at Amber, but they didn't hold back from inspecting Khan from head to toe.

The two climbed a series of staircases until they reached the last floor. Various locked doors filled the sides of the single corridor in the area, and Amber walked straight for the office at its end.

"Headmaster Pitcus," Amber called after pressing on an interactive menu on the door. "It's Professor Teldom. I brought Khan."

The door took only one instant to unlock and slide open. Khan could soon see a large office featuring a long short table, two luxurious couches, two armchairs, and a large desk at its end.

Khan's eyes quickly went on the old-looking man sitting behind the desk. Headmaster Pitcus had long grey hair tied in a bun and thick eyebrows of the same color. Small glasses tried to hide his brown eyes, and a short beard grew from his chin.

Headmaster Pitcus appeared slightly overweight, but his figure retained the huge silhouette of a muscular man. Still, his threatening size didn't match his amiable face. The corner of his eyes carried evident wrinkles, but they didn't ruin his harmless vibe.

Khan found it strange that the man's military uniform didn't have stars. Yet, he could vaguely evaluate the Headmaster's level through his senses, and his inspection surprised him. The soldier appeared weaker than Colonel Norrett, but not by much.

"Thank you, Professor Teldom," Headmaster Pitcus cleared his throat and stood up before pointing at one of the chairs in front of the desk. "Please, Khan, take a seat."

Amber performed a military salute and left the office. The metal door closed behind her, leaving only Khan and Headmaster Pitcus in the room.

"It's an honor to meet you," Headmaster Pitcus exclaimed as Khan approached the door.

The sudden statement made Khan interrupt his gesture for a second, but he quickly sat and voiced a polite answer. "The honor is mine, sir."

"Nonsense," Headmaster Pitcus laughed as he sat back on his chair. "I'm just a retired old man. I can't compare to the latest champion of Onia's tournament."

'An old man with the power of a colonel,' Khan thought while performing the best fake smile that he could muster.

"I won't keep you for long," Headmaster Pitcus stated. "The promotion to Lieutenant is usually uneventful, and yours won't be an exception. Things will change if you make it to Captain, but you will only get new offers and a monthly allowance for now."

"That's more than fine," Khan replied without dropping his smile.

"Excellent," Headmaster Pitcus declared while activating a menu on his desk and browsing through a few labels.

Khan's phone rang at some point, and Headmaster Pitcus gestured at him to take it. A message featuring a long text had appeared on Khan's device, and he skimmed through it to get a vague idea of its contents.

The message congratulated Khan for his promotion to Lieutenant and described the benefits of his new position. The monthly allowance and the access to better jobs were only some of the advantages. He could also use special discounts and offers for soldiers at his rank. Some services in the cities and other camps would also feature pros now.

Everything sounded terrific, but Khan didn't know what to do with it now. He glanced at the list of possible jobs out of curiosity, but they didn't change too much. He could be in charge of specific platoons or have better pay in other locations, but that was it.

"You probably are the youngest Lieutenant in the history of the Global Army," Headmaster Pitcus eventually said, claiming Khan's attention. "I feel quite lucky to be the one who has approved your promotion."

"I'm the lucky one, sir," Khan politely replied.

"Nonsense, your promotion is completely deserved," Headmaster Pitcus scoffed. "I know Captains who have achieved half of your feats after being in service for decades. Keep working hard, and I'm sure that more promotions will come in no time."

"Thank you, sir," Khan exclaimed.

"Well, I will send you the details about your habitation and duties while you exit the building," Headmaster Pitcus explained while closing the menus on his desk. "There won't be lessons tomorrow, so you can use that time to coordinate with the other Professors. Except for that, you can use the whole camp as you wish. I won't pry in your personal life as long as it doesn't affect your duties."

Khan understood the hidden meaning behind the Headmaster's words and stood up to perform a military salute. Then, he turned to approach the door.

"One last thing," Headmaster Pitcus called. "I know that you are young, but it's not ideal for a Professor to hang around recruits. Try not to use your position to gain, let's say, female attention."

'Why is everyone worried about that?' Khan cursed in his mind, but his fake smile remained unaffected. He even managed to speak without letting anything tamper his voice. "I understand, sir. It has never been my intention."

"Excellent," Headmaster Pitcus wore a broad smile while pressing a button behind his desk to open the door.

Khan left in a hurry, happy that he could finally drop the act. The Headmaster seemed a decent person, but he preferred not to disclose too much of his personality until he learnt more about him.

His phone rang while he was descending from the staircases. Khan could quickly learn where he would stay and his working hours. His courses barely occupied fifteen hours of his week, so he would have a lot of free time.

The night had fallen on the training camp, but the street lamps kept everything visible. The curfew didn't apply to Khan, but he still decided to head directly for his habitation due to tomorrow's inevitable meeting with the other Professors. Still, a familiar presence entered his sense's range after he began to march toward his destination.

Khan wouldn't care about the soldiers who broke the curfew. He would just change road and pretend not to have seen anything. However, he could only halt his steps and focus on the figure sitting on a bench in the distance now.

The figure noticed Khan only when he stopped walking. He could see it leaving the bench and sprinting toward him. It didn't take long before he found Cora clung to his torso.

Chapter 292 - Ideas

'Cora, Reebfell, of course,' Khan cursed in his mind as he let the girl approach him and take his torso in her embrace. 'How could I forget her city?'

Cora Ommo had been one of the survivors in Khan's group during Istrone's crisis. She had initially been useless in the battles, but she had slowly managed to muster her courage and confidence as their travel across the forest continued. Still, Khan recalled her for very different reasons.

Cora had been a warm and caring presence during Istrone's crisis. Khan couldn't appreciate her back then due to his mental barrier, but he had never failed to see her good heart. Moreover, she had fallen for him since the first desperate moments inside the forest, and her feelings had eventually made her steal his first kiss.

Khan had always retained a good memory of Cora. Still, everything that had happened after the kiss had forced him to ignore the events connected to her. Martha's comatose state, the release of the mental barrier, and Liiza had taken complete control of his mind after Istrone. Besides, he had firmly believed that the chances of meeting her again were basically non-existent.

Everything returned while Cora tightened her embrace around his torso. Her worry, care, and timid promise resurfaced in Khan's mind. He had the chance to inspect those memories through his new emotional spectrum now, and he had to admit that he liked her character, at least as a friend.

'Don't tell me that her crush on me has survived,' Khan hoped in his mind, even if his current situation seemed to prove him wrong.

"What are you doing here after the curfew?" Khan asked while patting her back.

Cora shook when she felt Khan's touch, but the gesture was enough to remind her of her situation. She let him go and took a step back, but her annoyance overcame her shyness, so she crossed her arms and pouted.

"Why didn't you tell me that you were coming to Reebfell?" Cora asked in an annoyed tone that didn't suit her blushing cheeks.

Khan had the chance to inspect Cora properly now. She had always been pretty, and her beauty had only benefited from the last year. She had even done her best to prepare herself for the meeting. Her long blonde hair appeared as soft as silk, and her light make-up highlighted her large green eyes.

"I forgot that you lived here," Khan honestly admitted while voicing a short laugh. He didn't want to pretend with Cora. She didn't deserve his lies.

"I knew it," Cora sighed while lowering her gaze to hide the sadness that was replacing her pout.

"Though I didn't forget about you," Khan continued. "And I obviously still remember your kiss."

The sadness vanished in an instant to make room for intense redness. The street lamps made it impossible for Cora to hide her embarrassment even if she kept her head lowered. She didn't expect Khan to mention her kiss so openly, especially after his previous comment.

"What is it?" Khan teased while bending forward to try to enter Cora's vision. "Did I say something wrong?"

Truth be told, Khan's behavior was taking Cora entirely by surprise. She had interacted with him while he was under the effects of the mental barrier, so she had never seen most of his sides. She was nowhere near ready for his teases.

"Hey, can you look at me?" Khan whispered after his face almost arrived in front of Cora's eyes.

Cora gasped and took another step back, but she ended up losing her balance. Still, Khan pulled her arm before she could fall on her back, but the gesture brought her on him again.

"I didn't think first-level warriors could be so clumsy," Khan continued to tease while keeping a hand at the center of her back to make sure that she didn't do anything abrupt again.

Khan didn't need to use his senses to understand Cora's level. She was wearing her military uniform, and the single star on both her shoulders reflected the street lamps' light. She had clearly worked hard in that period, and he could only rejoice at that sight.

"I'm not clumsy," Cora complained while raising her head and doing her best not to run away from that situation.

Her arms were on Khan's chest, and he was holding her. Moreover, his firm gaze was on her. Cora noticed that he had become taller and that she was exactly where she wanted to be.

Khan had countless teases ready in his mind. Cora's eyes also fell on his mouth every few seconds. He could almost hear her desires, and he knew that he could fulfill them at that exact moment.

However, Khan had no intention to kiss Cora. He had gone through the same situation with Delia, but she was older and more experienced. Instead, Cora appeared as innocent as Khan recalled. She would probably do everything he asked, but he didn't want to use her.

A tinge of disappointment appeared in Cora's eyes when Khan let her go and took a step back. She followed him with her longing gaze, but her hands tightened into fists when she decided to hold back.

"Did you break the curfew just to meet me?" Khan asked before Cora could lower her head to hide her blush again.

"Of course," Cora proudly announced. "I wanted to see you. It's been more than a year."

"What did you plan to do about the guards?" Khan chuckled.

"I-, I didn't think about that," Cora admitted. "Everyone has always treated me nicely after Istrone, so they'll probably let it pass."

"I see," Khan whispered before raising his voice a bit. "Let me accompany you back to your dormitory. I'm sure no one will say anything if they see you with me."

"But you might be in trouble if you take detours!" Cora immediately exclaimed.

"Nothing will happen to me," Khan reassured. "The Headmaster has just promoted me. I'm a Lieutenant now."

Cora remained stunned for a second before wearing a broad smile. She appeared ecstatic to hear the news, and her genuine happiness almost overwhelmed Khan. He didn't expect her to disregard her shyness so quickly.

"That's great!" Cora shouted. "You totally deserve it. I've kept track of your deeds. There is no one more suited than you for a promotion."

"How often did you check on me?" Khan teased, and Cora realized that she had said too much.

"Only from time to time," Cora explained while lowering her head, "Whenever I felt lonely. I've read about Ecoruta, the tournament, and Nitis."

Khan noticed how Cora had hesitated before naming Nitis, and the reason for that was quite evident. Khan could only curse Lieutenant Kintea mentally for that cursed report.

"But I didn't check only you," Cora continued. "Ethel is doing fine with her prosthesis, and Dorian has also gained a few merits. I know that George has been with you on Nitis. I'm glad you weren't completely alone there."

Cora hesitated again during her last line. Khan nodded while deciding whether to address the issue, but he quickly chose to change the topic.

"What about you?" Khan asked. "Did you spend the last year here?"

"I didn't do anything special," Cora revealed. "The camp was almost empty, and the Global Army never refused my requests, so I spent my time training. I kept thinking that more of us would have survived if I had been stronger."

"Hey, you can't blame yourself," Khan stated while taking a step forward to place a hand on Cora's shoulder. "You did well on Istrone, and you worked hard to fix your flaws afterward. You are strong, stronger than me."

"Stop trying to make me feel better," Cora said while trying to escape from Khan's grasp.

"I escaped after Istrone," Khan admitted, and Cora stopped her movement to inspect his expression.

"What do you mean?" Cora asked.

"I couldn't stand the sight of the empty streets," Khan revealed. "I couldn't just go to bed after sleeping on wet mud for weeks."

Cora didn't know how to react in front of that open admission of flaws. In her mind, Khan was unbeatable, unstoppable, and perfect, and his recent achievement had only fueled that image. Yet, he had weaknesses like everyone else, and he had decided to show them to her.

Cora gave in and lowered her head to lay it on Khan's chest before whispering without stuttering at all. "I've missed you so much."

Khan felt the need to hug her, but he held back. He couldn't treat her as a simple friend since he knew what she felt for him. A wrong gesture might fuel her hopes and dreams, and he didn't want that.

Cora was like George. She had seen the dark side of the battlefield with Khan, so he instinctively treated her as a companion. She had also proven her goodwill, so Khan felt confident in considering her as a friend.

Still, Cora also wasn't like George due to her feelings, and Khan couldn't give her what she wanted. Her appearance had nothing to do with the matter. Her character was even adorable, but that was one of the reasons why Khan felt the need to avoid playing around. He could hurt her badly, so he couldn't be selfish.

Khan heaved a sigh while caressing Cora's shoulder. He wanted to say something to change the situation, but Cora acted before he could talk. She moved toward him and wrapped her hands around his torso again, leaving Khan no choice but to hug her.

Khan let Cora stay in that position for a few seconds before tapping her shoulder and repeating his offer. "Let me get you to your dormitory."

Cora remained still for a few seconds before nodding and leaving the embrace. She avoided Khan's gaze, but she made sure to walk next to him as she led him through the camp. The two didn't say anything, but the silence seemed enough to fill the night.

Two soldiers guarded the entrance for Cora's dormitory, and they immediately stood up when they saw two figures getting close. One of them wanted to shout something, but her companion pulled her sleeve and interrupted her when he recognized Khan.

The two soldiers ended up performing a military salute when Cora and Khan reached the entrance. Khan nodded before finding himself in another embrace that Cora broke quickly. She then showed her smile and turned to enter the building.

Khan didn't bother to look at the curious smiles that the soldiers had worn after Cora had walked past them. He knew how the situation looked like, and he didn't care about the possible rumors that they might spread. He was sure there was far worse about him flying among the gossips.

'She wouldn't have survived on Istrone without me,' Khan thought as he strolled toward his habitation. 'My course is for this exact reason, but I can't turn innocent soldiers into me with simple lessons. They would need to go through Istrone for that.'

A solution eventually hit Khan. It was impossible to recreate situations that could generate other soldiers like him. He also wanted to avoid that since he knew how much he suffered. Yet, the project seemed doable when Khan took Doris, Luke, or even the old George as possible goals.

'Though they still need to taste real danger,' Khan pondered, 'But how do I create that inside a training camp? The training halls won't do. I need something alive, and I don't count. The same goes for themselves.'

The only alternative was with the Tainted animals that the Global Army used for the entrance tests. Ordinary soldiers who had yet to become first-level warriors would probably struggle in a pure one versus one against those creatures. Of course, the matter had different factors, but they would come after Khan understood whether he could even gain access to those beasts.

'I guess I can only see what the other Professors say tomorrow,' Khan eventually thought before putting the matter in the back of his mind.

Cora occupied his thoughts for the rest of that lonely walk. Khan didn't know how to make her give up on her crush without hurting her. Treating her poorly was also impossible due to how sweetly she behaved, and Khan had no intention of being a dick. However, that would only add fuel to her feelings.

'I'm in a damned pickle,' Khan realized when his building unfolded in his view.

There were different thoughts in his mind, and he heard them clearly, even if he decided to ignore them every time. Part of Khan knew that opening up with Cora probably wasn't a bad option. Her

inexperience was her only flaw, but her earnestness compensated greatly.. She deserved love, and she could probably give more than any other partner, but Khan still silenced those ideas.

Chapter 293 - Train

The flat was immense. Khan didn't even know what to do with all that space. The habitation featured a large bedroom, a laundry area with multiple spare uniforms, a reinforced room with a series of tools meant for physical exercises, a living room, and a dining room with a small fridge and a microwave.

Luckily for Khan, he could find instructions for all the machines. Otherwise, he would have had a hard time understanding what some of them did. Still, his first night inside his new flat allowed him to learn how everything worked, so it didn't take him long to hit the bed.

The alarm rang at dawn, and a few messages arrived on his phone while he was in the bathroom. Amber had contacted Khan about the meeting with the other professors tasked with the new subjects, and Cora had also sent him something that his device didn't immediately accept.

Khan was a professor now. The recruits could contact him through the network, but he still needed to accept those requests. Of course, most soldiers would avoid bothering him, but Cora was different.

Khan didn't hesitate to accept Cora's request. He actually felt surprised that she had been bold enough to send him something, but the message turned out to be a simple "good morning".

A short conversation followed that message. Cora and Khan told each other their plans for the day, and she wished him good luck when she heard about the meeting.

Amber scheduled the meeting a few hours after breakfast, so Khan had the time to handle a few things before that appointment. He reached the canteen, enjoyed a large meal, and purchased a few snacks and drinks to bring back to his flat.

The menus in the canteen had many items that required Credits, but Khan went for the free stuff that he happily carried back to his flat. His fridge became full of cans and bottles that morning, but he soon disregarded them.

Khan had been too early to meet other professors or recruits, and he had finished his meal a couple of hours before the meeting. He could spend that time doing some of his regular exercises and showering before leaving his flat to head toward the appointed location.

The streets of the training camp were full of life at that hour. It was a free day, so many recruits had decided to hang out on the many benches and lawns that filled the area.

The scene was beyond peaceful, and Khan found himself staring at the various happy and innocent faces that he met on his path. He had to admit that he had failed to enjoy those moments during his time in Ylaco's training camp. His training with Lieutenant Dyester didn't know breaks, and his state as a poor recruit had pushed him to work harder than his peers.

'I really missed a lot,' Khan couldn't help but think as those peaceful moments unfolded in his view.

The Global Army could force the soldiers to face difficult moments, and the many lessons usually filled everyone's schedule. However, the recruits were simple boys and girls at their core. They

wanted to have a good time, socialize, and hang out whenever they had the chance. Khan and Martha had been exceptions back then.

The recruits froze whenever they noticed Khan staring at them, but he promptly diverted his gaze every time. He didn't want to add more rumors to his figure, but the peaceful scenes still captured his attention often.

Amber had scheduled the meeting in a type of building that Khan never had the chance to visit in Ylaco's training camp. The place wasn't big, but it featured a series of shops where recruits and professors could spend time enjoying warm drinks, booze, desserts, and other expensive meals.

Khan found Amber inside a café featuring a series of comfortable armchairs and a few tables. Large windows acted as walls and made the environment bright. The clean grey floor and the other surfaces shone by reflecting the sunlight, and everything felt incredibly cozy due to the lingering warmth that filled the area.

Khan found the café a bit too hot for his tastes, but he didn't let that feeling appear on his face. His full attention soon went on the other two figures sitting at Amber's table.

One of the figures belonged to an elderly bald man with a long white beard. The soldier had a black cane laying on his armchair, and both his shoulders featured three stars. The many wrinkles on his face hinted at his old age, but his lively azure eyes gave a far different impression.

The other figure belonged to a middle-aged woman with long brown hair, dark eyes, and olive skin. She was pretty stunning, and her slow but elegant gestures carried deep confidence. Her uniform also featured three stars on both shoulders, but she felt weaker than the man.

"I thought I was on time," Khan commented while approaching the table.

"Lieutenant Khan!" Amber exclaimed while standing up and pointing at her two companions. "Let me handle the presentations. Captain Aaron Goldmon teaches war tactics, while Lieutenant Lydia Abaze is an expert in survival techniques."

"Please, Khan is more than enough," Khan said before nodding at the two soldiers. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

"We finally meet," Lieutenant Abaze exclaimed while sizing Khan from head to toe. "You are more well-behaved than I expected."

"He is just a good liar," Captain Goldmon scoffed. "I can smell the beast inside him from here."

"Let him be, Captain," Lieutenant Abaze complained. "Insulting him out of rumors doesn't suit your experience."

"I wasn't insulting him," Captain Goldmon laughed.

Khan ignored that eccentric interaction and took his place between Amber and Lieutenant Abaze. The armchair was comfortable, but Captain Goldmon's intense stare prevented him from appreciating that sensation.

"You don't falter easily, do you?" Captain Goldmon asked.

"Captain," Lieutenant Abaze sighed.

"I'm just evaluating him," Captain Goldmon sneered while rolling his eyes. "Our recruits will have to learn how to fight from someone not much older than them. I need to be sure that he is the right man for the job."

"And?" Lieutenant Abaze asked.

"He looks good," Captain Goldmon stated.

"Thank you, Captain," Khan said in the politest tone he could muster.

Captain Goldmon snorted, and Lieutenant Abaze heaved a helpless sigh. Amber tried her best to hide her awkwardness, and Khan found himself inspecting the situation without a clear idea of what to do or say.

"I guess it's time to start this meeting," Captain Goldmon exclaimed.

"Let's order something first," Lieutenant Abaze replied.

"They don't serve what I want here," Captain Goldmon chuckled.

"It's far too early to drink," Lieutenant Abaze complained.

"Lieutenant Khan doesn't agree, am I right?" Captain Goldmon commented, and three pairs of eyes fell on Khan.

"I'm completely new at this," Khan declared while wearing a fake smile. "I'll follow your lead and learn what I can."

"Boring," Captain Goldmon snorted.

"Very well, let's start the meeting," Lieutenant Abaze exclaimed. "The three of us have already introduced our respective subjects to the recruits since the second semester has started. I believe we all have different approaches, so imitating us won't work. What did you have in mind?"

Khan wanted to hear the different approaches before voicing his idea, but Lieutenant Abaze didn't give him that chance. He felt forced to speak since the three soldiers had moved their attention on him again. "I was thinking about using Tainted animals."

"For what?" Captain Goldmon asked.

"Battle experience," Khan explained. "Most recruits use training halls, which pose virtually no threat. I want them to face fear."

"We are still talking about recruits in their second semester," Lieutenant Abaze pointed out. "Mere Tainted animals won't be a threat for many of them."

"I was wondering whether I could handpick the Tainted animals to use in my lessons," Khan revealed. "I know that they aren't worthy opponents, but a big beast might scare the recruits a bit. The army uses them in the entrance tests, so finding a suitable creature shouldn't be a problem."

"I actually don't know where the Global Army keeps the Tainted animals," Amber commented.

"I know," Captain Goldmon stated while caressing his beard. "Your idea isn't bad, but you'll be in charge of your students' safety. Are you sure you can take care of that?"

"I do plan to make them suffer a bit," Khan honestly admitted. "Isn't that the point of our subjects?"

Captain Goldmon exploded into a laugh, and Lieutenant Abaze nodded. Amber limited herself to smile, but she understood that Khan's statement had been on point.

"There is only one problem with that," Captain Goldmon announced. "Most of the Tainted animals that the Global Army keeps near the training camp are rather harmless. You won't find what you need here."

"That's easy to fix," Lieutenant Abaze responded while looking at her phone. "It's still early. Let's see a few shops in Reebfell. I also need to buy some provisions for my classes."

"A trip to the city sounds nice," Amber smiled while standing up.

"Wait, what?" Khan exclaimed as he watched Lieutenant Abaze and Captain Goldmon standing up.

"Hurry up," Amber stated as her sweet smile broadened. "We should have enough time to hit a few shops before they close for lunch."

Khan couldn't help but feel a bit excited. He had lived in Ylaco, but he carried no memories of that period. The Second Impact had erased everything from back then, and only vague images that held no meaning had remained in his mind. Reebfell wasn't Ylaco, but it remained one of the big cities on Earth.

Captain Goldmon didn't give Khan the time to think about the matter. The soldier's cane hit the floor rhythmically as he hurried outside the shop, and Lieutenant Abaze followed him. Only Amber remained a bit behind to wait for Khan, but it was clear that she was pretty restless about the imminent trip.

Khan could only put his doubts aside and follow the soldiers. He didn't know how he would purchase the Tainted animals without Credits, but that problem fell in the back of his mind for now.

Captain Goldmon's cane appeared useless. The soldier was oddly agile, but he still tapped the floor with his metal stick to set the pace of the march. The group soon left the building and moved toward an area of the camp that Khan had yet to visit, which turned out to hold an underground parking hall featuring multiple vehicles.

The parking area was as simple as possible. A series of artificial lights shone on the ceiling and filled the vast hall with a bright white glow that made the many dark cars shine. A series of tunnels also stretched from the four walls, and some clearly led to the surface.

"Are we going to drive to Reebfell?" Khan asked as he inspected the various cars.

"I wish," Captain Goldmon sneered, "But I believe the ladies prefer to take the train."

"Train?" Khan exclaimed, and the answer to his question arrived when the group moved to a lower floor.

The parking hall was connected to a relatively small platform that featured a few benches and interactive walls. The area also featured a dark tunnel that stretched left and right, and Khan couldn't help but peek inside it to inspect the structure.

The bottom of the tunnel had two metal slabs that seemed to stretch along with the whole structure. Synthetic mana also ran between them without ever expanding upward. Waves of energy flowed behind the circular wall of the channel, and Khan remained stunned in front of their sheer quantity.

"Is this your first time seeing the train?" Amber asked while pulling Khan by his uniform.

Khan nodded and retreated at the center of the platform before inspecting Lieutenant Abaze tinkering with the interactive walls. A countdown appeared on the menus after she tapped a few labels, and the mana inside the tunnels also started moving oddly.

'Something is coming,' Khan quickly realized, and his gaze instinctively went on the right side of the tunnel.

"Ooh," Captain Goldmon voiced when he saw that gesture. "The reports must be true. Your senses are on point."

Khan glanced at the old soldier, but the latter had already lost interest in him. Instead, Amber and Lieutenant Abaze inspected him with curious eyes. It was clear that Captain Goldmon's seemingly casual comment had improved Khan's image in the women's minds.

A small cylindrical vehicle with a pointy front arrived before the platform when the countdown was about to reach zero. Its speed was so high that winds blew in the area while it stopped. A whooshing noise then followed as its metal doors slid open and revealed a small room with six comfortable seats.

Khan inspected everything thoroughly as he followed his three companions. The insides of the train appeared strangely large, even if the actual vehicle was relatively small. Bright lights and multiple menus also filled the ceiling and various surfaces. There was the chance to have drinks and meals, but no one chose to eat.

The train set off after everyone sat. Belts even came out of the seats and fastened on their own. Khan experienced the sudden pressure caused by the incredible acceleration, but everything became quiet and still relatively soon.

The train made no noise, and it was hard to understand that it was moving. Khan tried to keep track of the synthetic mana in the tunnel outside, but the vehicle was too fast for his senses. His focus soon went on the menus and holograms that his seat created, and he eventually found a map that described the path.

The vehicle would take less than half an hour to reach its destination, and the professors didn't bother to spend that time talking. Captain Goldmon took a nap. Lieutenant Abaze inspected videos covering random topics while Amber read some of the news connected to the shops that she wanted to visit.

Khan followed Amber's example and inspected the list of shops on the train's menus. It didn't take him long to find something connected to the Tainted animals, and a few ads immediately claimed his interest.

It turned out that Khan's knowledge of Tainted animals was far poorer than he expected. The Global Army had long since become able to replicate the same living beings that he had seen on Nitis. Khan could see artificially mutated beasts that featured various enhancements, both genetic and bionic.

The enhancements had different purposes. Most of them were battle-related since the wealthy families wanted to create good training fields for their descendants. Instead, others could even affect the animals' behavior, with some ads claiming that their beasts were utterly docile.

'Where did I even live until now?' Khan wondered as he inspected the menus.

The number of possibilities was immense. Khan even found shops that performed custom-made enhancements. There was simply too much, and he barely had the time to absorb everything during the short trip.

The train eventually stopped, and its metal doors opened to reveal a small platform similar to the one in the camp. Khan felt slightly disappointed when he saw that desolation, but the scenery that unfolded when the group climbed to the upper floor surpassed his expectations.

A large staircase led to an immense hall full of people, lights, vehicles. Khan was sure that he wasn't on the surface, but he still saw an incredible quantity of life and oddities.

A cozy yellow light illuminated the whole area, but the glows coming from the banners of the many shops that filled both sides of the hall created a colorful spectacle. Stands and other stores occupied specific spots where the people were forced to pass. Most of those men and women walked, but some used hoverboards, rollerblades, or small motorcycles to move around.

The scene almost overwhelmed Khan. There was simply too much that he had never seen in that sole hall. The clothes that Reebfell's citizens wore were enough to fill his mind with curiosity and confusion. He managed to spot only a few military uniforms while everyone else was donning something else, which could be eccentric at times.

"Khan, focus," Lieutenant Abaze called while looking left and right to find less crowded paths. "Let's go there. I'm sure that shop will be able to satisfy Captain Goldmon's taste."

"That's a bit expensive for my pay," Amber admitted without hiding her faint shyness.

"Don't worry," Lieutenant Abaze responded. "The Captain might sound grumpy, but he is a gentleman. He never lets underlings pay."

"And you made sure to use that to your advantage every time," Captain Goldmon snorted.

"The place also has an updated list of the best offers if you want to buy something," Lieutenant Abaze continued, ignoring the Captain's comment.

Amber nodded happily, but Khan lost interest in that conversation. Marvel still filled his mind due to the incredible sight that the immense hall was providing. He didn't expect a city to be so lively.

"What is it, Khan?" Amber asked when she noticed Khan's lack of excitement. "I'm sure you must want something."

"I don't have Credits," Khan revealed. "The first pays have yet to arrive."

"How did you spend everything earned in the last year?" Amber exclaimed.

"Earned?" Khan frowned. "I've never earned anything."

Lieutenant Abaze had listened to the conversation, and her elegant expression froze when she heard Khan's words. A heavy sigh eventually escaped her mouth when she realized what had happened,

and an order soon followed. "Professor Teldom, please escort Lieutenant Khan to a console. We'll meet at the shop."

Amber nodded before taking Khan's arm and pulling him among the crowd of people to reach a different side of the underground hall. Everyone moved quickly, so it didn't take the two long to arrive before a room with a series of consoles. The place was empty, and Amber didn't hesitate to push Khan inside it and place his hand on one of the devices.

The screen immediately recognized Khan through his genetic signature, and it even welcomed him by mentioning his rank. A series of menus then appeared, and Amber pointed at a label that said: "withdraw".

"Press it," Amber ordered. "It won't work unless it's you doing it."

Khan didn't know what was happening, but he followed the orders. After pressing the label, a series of lines that described Khan's various achievements went by. The console was basically listing the merits accumulated during his past missions, and a big number with five digits appeared when everything ended.

'Please, place your phone on the console to withdraw thirty-two thousand one hundred fifty-seven Credits,' Khan read on the screen when a new line appeared under the big number.

Chapter 294 - Expensive

Khan remained stuck in front of that big number, but a frown soon appeared on his face. The more he thought about it, the more he realized that he had no idea how valuable that sum was.

"Amber?" Khan eventually called.

Amber had helped Khan browse through the initial menus, but she had diverted her gaze from the screen once the console had started to calculate his merits.

"You should keep your wealth private," Amber responded without turning.

"Can you take a look, please?" Khan asked.

Amber still hesitated, but Khan had sounded lost, and she also felt a bit curious. Her gaze slowly went on the screen, and her eyes trembled at the sight of such a sum.

"I knew it would have been a lot, but that's still surprising," Amber declared.

"What do you mean by a lot?" Khan questioned.

Amber frowned since she didn't understand what there was to explain, but she tried her best anyway. "You can buy a small house in the city with these Credits. Though you wouldn't be able to afford living there afterward."

Khan nodded, but confusion soon reappeared on his face. He turned toward Amber and tried to wear his most serious expression as he voiced another question. "How many cans of spicy chicken can I buy with these Credits?"

"S-spicy chicken?" Amber stuttered. She thought that Khan was joking for a second, but his firm voice forced her to take the question seriously.

"Well, I think you can buy ten or fifteen cans for one Credit," Amber calculated while placing a hand under her chin. "I'm not sure. I've never bought cans of food."

Amber glanced at Khan to see whether her answer had solved his doubts, but she realized that he had long since stopped listening to her. His eyes had lit up, and his mouth had opened in astonishment.

"Ten cans of spicy chicken for each Credit!" Khan exclaimed in his mind. "That's, that's, that's a lot of cans!"

Khan almost threw his phone at the console after understanding how wealthy he had become. The machine did everything on its own. He only had to confirm the transfer on his device, and the Credits soon appeared on his profile.

"I'm rich!" Khan exclaimed after retrieving his phone.

"Not really," Amber promptly contradicted. "You have no idea how quickly those Credits can disappear if you are not careful."

Amber had vaguely understood what was happening. That was Khan's first time with Credits, so she could imagine the type of euphoria that had taken control of his mind. Still, that feeling could be dangerous, especially for someone who had no experience with money.

"Let's buy some stuff!" Khan exclaimed while turning and moving toward the crowd in the underground hall.

"Wait," Amber called while grabbing his arm. "You don't need to spend money right now. Focus on purchasing the Tainted animals you need, but don't go overboard. The Global Army won't refund those Credits otherwise."

Khan turned toward Amber to show his frown and voice one of his doubts. "What's the point of money if I don't spend it?"

"That-," Amber began to speak, but she quickly realized that she didn't have a proper answer to the matter. Still, Khan continued to look at her, so she came up with a few responsible lines. "The Global Army won't back you up forever. You'll need a proper home at some point, and you also lack the support of a family. How will you buy better weapons and resources if you spend everything you have now?"

Khan opened his mouth to complain, but he soon closed it to lower his gaze. Amber was right, but he felt disappointed anyway. He finally had Credits, but spending them sounded like a waste.

Amber noticed the disappointment in Khan's face and heaved a deep sigh. She had never seen him like that, but the reason behind those reactions was obvious. Khan was famous for his many achievements, but something about him still belonged to a seventeen-year-old boy.

"Let's rejoin the Captain and the Lieutenant," Amber suggested. "I'll help you browse through the offer. There must be something worth buying."

Khan's eyes lit up again, and he immediately nodded before shooting toward the crowd. Amber was still holding his arm, so she ended up rushing back into the underground hall with him.

Amber felt the need to call Khan or force him to stop since he was going too fast for that crowded area, but those instincts vanished when she noticed that they never bumped into anyone. Khan flowed among the lines and small vehicles without ever stopping to inspect his surroundings.

That performance was so surprising that Amber remained silent until the two reached their destination. A large shop featuring many circular tables and simple seats unfolded in their vision. The area had no waiters, and multiple ads moved on the four walls.

Captain Goldmon and Lieutenant Abaze had taken a table deep into the shop, and Khan didn't hesitate to reach them. Most of the seats in the area were taken, but no one inspected him or Amber. Everyone appeared too busy talking with their companions, dates, or looking at the menus in front of them.

"You don't waste time, do you?" Lieutenant Abaze commented when she noticed that Amber was still holding Khan's arm.

Amber gasped and let go of Khan, but he ignored the comment and Captain Goldmon's laugh to take a seat. Having money had opened countless possibilities, and he couldn't think about anything else right now.

"I wasn't, we weren't-," Amber tried to justify herself.

"I was only teasing you," Lieutenant Abaze interrupted before glancing at Khan. "Besides, he seems busy looking at the offer. I guess the trip to the console went well."

"Thank you, Lieutenant Abaze," Khan exclaimed.

"You can call me Lydia," Lieutenant Abaze replied as an elegant smile appeared on her face. "We have the same rank and position. There is no need to be so formal."

"He is a few decades too young for you," Captain Goldmon mocked.

"As if you knew my real age," Lieutenant Abaze calmly added.

Khan limited himself to nod before moving his eyes back on the interactive surface of the table. The various menus didn't only list the drinks he could purchase inside the shop. Many labels led to the multiple offers depicted on the walls.

"Let's order something to drink before going through the offers," Lieutenant Abaze reminded. "I'll have this tea."

Lieutenant Abaze pressed on a label, and her drink appeared on a list at the center of the table. Even its price was there, and Khan remained stunned when he read it.

"Two hundred Credits for a single drink?!" Khan shouted in his mind before inspecting the shop's menu.

It turned out that Lydia's drink was one of the most expensive items on the list. It even surpassed most of the shop's meals, but the other cheaper labels didn't reassure Khan.

'The life in the city is definitely expensive,' Khan realized as he scrolled through the list.

Many drinks required more than a hundred Credits, all of them involving a single cup. The shop didn't sell entire bottles, even when it came to booze.

Amber sat and picked one of the cheapest drinks, but Lieutenant Abaze immediately took it out from the central list before explaining her reasons. "The Captain will pay. Don't hold back."

"I like that brand," Amber smiled.

"Nonsense," Lieutenant Abaze stated while adding another expensive tea to the central list.

Amber wanted to say something, but Lieutenant Abaze promptly shook her head and forced her to give up on the matter. Meanwhile, Khan was still busy getting over his amazement. Also, he couldn't understand the differences among the various drinks on the list. The shops added descriptions, but they only increased his confusion.

"Khan, I'll pick for you," Captain Goldmon announced while Khan was still in the middle of his confusion and amazement.

The event didn't help Khan too much. Captain Goldmon added two drinks worth more than one hundred Credits each, and Khan inevitably compared them to the number of food cans that he would be able to purchase with the same money.

'I could become the king of the Slums by selling ten of these drinks,' Khan commented in his mind before showing a fake smile to the Captain.

Captain Goldmon confirmed the orders, and part of the menus disappeared from the table since four circular holes opened on its surface. Four drinks came out of them, and Lieutenant Abaze quickly distributed them.

Khan's drink turned out to be strong booze. It was terrific, even if it burnt his throat. He could taste multiple intense flavors with a single sip, and the cozy warmth that spread through his chest brought his mind back to the happy moments on Nitis.

The Captain also seemed to relive happy moments while he drank. Khan noticed that detail, but he didn't know whether the booze was to praise for those effects.

Lieutenant Abaze and Amber's faces gained a slight redness when they drank their tea. Both of them licked their lips after every sip, and their eyes rarely left their cups.

The table went silent, but no one found the situation awkward. The four professors enjoyed their drinks without ruining the moment with useless talks.

"I guess it's time to go," Lieutenant Abaze said when she noticed that everyone had finished drinking.

Captain Goldmon had paid while confirming the order, so he didn't hesitate to stand up. Khan and Amber imitated him, and the four soon returned inside the underground hall.

"Khan, how was it?" Captain Goldmon asked while the group moved among the crowd.

"Really good," Khan honestly admitted.

"It's said that only those who have experienced true hardship can appreciate that brand," Captain Goldmon explained.

"I never thought that the humans could create such things," Khan whispered while focusing on the path ahead.

The group reached a set of staircases and climbed them to arrive on the surface. The scene that unfolded in their vision ended up leaving Khan stunned again. There was so much to inspect that he ended up turning whenever something claimed his attention.

Skyscrapers made of black and grey metal pillars divided by large windows grew at the sides of immense streets. Vast sidewalks filled with people bordered those huge buildings, and vehicles shot left and right in an orderly manner.

Khan immediately noticed the stark absence of wheels. All the cars floated right above the smooth and clean streets tainted only by the azure tubes that created a glowing spiderweb linked to the buildings. The streetlamps and sparse signboards also had connections with those small channels that carried synthetic mana.

Still, the vehicles flying among the tall buildings remained the most surprising aspect of the scene. They weren't fast, but they managed to ignore the crowded environment on the ground by moving in the sky.

Khan remained captivated by the many flying vehicles. He even followed them with his eyes, and a few ended up entering some buildings through windows that opened remotely or proper platforms that came out from the metal pillars.

"They are also extremely expensive," Amber explained when she noticed Khan's interest in the flying vehicles. "You also need a special driving license for them, which isn't cheap."

"What about proper spaceships?" Khan asked.

"They are even more expensive," Amber revealed.

"But the Global Army can provide the training and driving license for them," Lieutenant Abaze added. "Are you interested in becoming a pilot?"

"I just miss flying," Khan admitted. "I guess it's not the same without the wind blowing on your face."

"Nothing beats flying through space with a spaceship," Captain Goldmon declared while tapping his cane on the floor. "The teleports have tried to turn that type of travel obsolete, but many still like the complete freedom found among the blackness above. Also, pilots are necessary to find new valuable planets and intelligent lifeforms."

"So, should I try to get a spaceship?" Khan asked while continuing to inspect the many vehicles flying above his head.

"It depends on the type of ambassador you want to become," Captain Goldmon scoffed. "Do you want to manage the relationships that the Global Army has already established, or do you prefer to look for other species while exploring the immense but dark universe?"

Chapter 295 - Negotiation

The conversation ended there. Captain Goldmon stopped being in the mood to voice wise words, and Khan lost himself in the spectacular scenes that appeared in his view. As for the answer to the soldier's question, Khan didn't need to think about it. He had to find the Nak, which most likely involved exploring the depths of the universe.

Amber noticed something deeper in Khan's lost expression, but she wrongly addressed it to his marvel. Khan was utterly astonished by the majestic sight, but his real stupor came from his senses.

Everything from the smallest banner to the largest building used synthetic mana. The symphony that Reebfell played felt messier than any battlefield Khan had seen. Even the vehicles relied on that energy to move, which only increased the number of waves that Khan perceived.

Khan grew used to that chaos in a few minutes. He had initially compared Reebfell to a battlefield in his mind, but those thoughts soon disappeared. The mechanical nature of the buildings, lamplights, banners, and vehicles prevented the environment from getting an authentic messy atmosphere. Everything eventually became predictable and oddly lame.

Khan didn't claim to understand how the technology around him worked. He even knew that the current spectacle had required the efforts of multiple experts and various studies. Still, that use of the mana felt limiting.

The reason behind that sensation was hard to find. The fusion between technology and synthetic mana gave birth to an unnatural environment that didn't fully express the nature of that incredible energy. Of course, those ideas and sensations existed only in Khan's mind, and it seemed that no one else was noticing that strangeness.

'Maybe I feel like this because I have seen how mana behaves when it's free,' Khan wondered.

No one around Khan could solve his doubts. Liiza might have a few ideas, while Zalpa could probably give a grumpy explanation, but he had to remain in the dark for now.

The group walked for a while, with Captain Goldmon leading everyone through the crowded streets. Cars whooshed above them and on their left, but no one paid attention to them. Even Khan soon accepted them as the norm in that environment.

Khan had browsed the menus in the previous shop while he remained immersed in his drink, but he didn't understand what was worth pursuing. He didn't even care about most of that stuff. His life in the Slums had made him lose interest in every item that could improve his time inside the camp. He could only consider knives, training programs, and techniques, but none of the offers suited him.

Truth be told, Khan's set of techniques was more than enough at his current level. He had two powerful martial arts, three spells, a defensive skill, a method that enhanced his training speed, and two more valuable abilities. Adding something else was pointless, especially since he still had to learn everything he owned.

Generally speaking, his training should focus on perfecting his martial arts by increasing his proficiency level. Khan also had to achieve mastery of his spells and techniques, and the same went for the skills obtained on Nitis.

Khan even had to deepen his understanding of the chaos element. His experience on Nitis had given him ideas on how to use his mana through the Niqols' arts, but he needed training for that.

His equipment and the techniques that didn't have any elemental requirements were the only aspects that could benefit from the trip to Reebfell. However, the offers didn't feature any knife or special abilities, but that turned out to be normal, according to Amber.

"Only specific shops can sell those goods since they need the authorization from the Global Army," Amber explained when Khan questioned her about the matter. "You must understand that no one here thinks about wars or battles."

Khan nodded, even if he struggled to think like a citizen of a big city. His time inside the Global Army had consisted of battles and tragedies. Instead, his life in the Slums had mostly been about keeping his stomach full. The sole idea that someone could be interested in different phone models, cleaning robots, cars, or clothes was impossible to understand for his current mindset.

"Don't worry," Amber giggled when she saw Khan's confusion. "It's still early. I'm sure we'll visit those shops."

"Does the Global Army need to authorize everything connected to wars and battles?" Khan asked as his group continued to march through the streets.

"Yes, well, there are exceptions," Amber revealed.

"The Global Army is Earth," Lieutenant Abaze jumped into the conversation. "Everything you see exists because the Global Army wants it to exist. Yet, some powers linger slightly outside its influence."

"The noble families," Khan responded.

"The families in general," Lieutenant Abaze corrected. "The Global Army is Earth, but the many families make the Global Army. It's only normal for them to have grey or completely black areas that normal citizens can't touch."

"What do you mean by normal citizens?" Khan asked.

"Everyone living in the Slums or weak soldiers without backing," Lieutenant Abaze explained. "My family is quite wealthy, so I can have access to goods and events that you'll never see on the menus around here. Professor Teldom is the same, while the Captain is a few steps above us."

"She forgot to say that I'm the reason behind my privileges," Captain Coldmon snorted. "I didn't always have a family ready to wipe my a-."

"Captain," Lieutenant Abaze interrupted.

"What? They have both heard far worse," Captain Goldmon complained.

"It's still rude," Lieutenant Abaze stated, and the Captain sneered before giving up on the matter.

'I guess I'm a normal citizen,' Khan thought, 'Which means that I can't gain access to the really good stuff until I build significant connections or accumulate many achievements.'

His thoughts went on Rick, Captain Clayman, Colonel Norrett, Luke, and George. Khan had met important figures in his life, and he had even established good connections with some of them. In theory, he also had favors to call in. Yet, they would have little to no value right now since his position inside the Global Army was relatively poor.

Some of his connections also had to mature, especially when it came to Rick. Potentially, he could be his greatest trump card, but everything depended on whether he could achieve something inside the Rassec family.

Casual lines flew among the group. Amber and Lieutenant Abaze had realized how poorly Khan understood the human culture, so they described a few peculiar shops or scenes that they found on their path.

The train had stopped in a commercial area that featured almost every type of shop. Khan could see an immense variety of items for sale. The goods could go from simple toys to eccentric tools. He smiled slightly at the sight of small flying puppets, but he frowned when he noticed glowing make-ups or dyes that changed color every few seconds.

A lot of those items expressed the incredible fields that human technology had reached, but others highlighted its excesses. Khan could probably accept everything with his broad mindset, but some ornaments, clothes, or even flashy accessories on the vehicles felt utterly useless and uncomfortable. He couldn't understand how someone would ever think to spend money over them.

The strangest aspect of those eccentric items came from their popularity. Almost half of the people that Khan saw made him frown in confusion. The situation had reached the point when he had to concentrate on wearing his perfect poker face to avoid claiming unwanted attention.

Lieutenant Abaze left the group during the march, and Amber followed her. The former had to purchase materials for her subject, but she still wanted to visit girly shops, and Amber couldn't refuse her request to accompany her.

Khan remained alone with Captain Goldmon, who spoke rarely. The soldier only explained that they didn't take a taxi to show him the area. Khan had no idea what that was, but he used the network to solve his doubts instead of asking other questions.

The shops with the Tainted animals usually stood at the edges of the commercial district due to the awful scents that those creatures could release. The technology in the city easily took care of those odors, but Captain Goldmon explained how that layout had become a tradition by then.

Khan didn't need the Captain's warning or a banner to understand when the destination was nearby. It wasn't hard for him to sense big lifeforms with a significant amount of mana among those predictable waves of energy. His eyes soon fell on a series of huge buildings that had vast entrances and banners that depicted dogs, bears, or other animals.

"All this side of the district is related to the Tainted animals," Captain Goldmon explained. "The first shops have the most famous brands, which are also more expensive."

"Amber has said something about a possible refund from the Global Army," Khan stated. "Captain, how much do you think it will cover?"

"A few thousand Credits, but only because it's you," Captain Goldmon exclaimed.

"Are they enough to purchase a Tainted animal?" Khan continued.

"Tainted animals are simple to create," Captain Goldmon revealed. "You take a normal beast and force it to mutate. It takes little to no mana to complete the procedure, so they can be very cheap. Still, I think you are here for creatures worth more than a thousand Credits."

"Which means that I'll have to spend some of my finances," Khan continued.

Khan had started to understand how expensive life in the city could be. He had read every price and offer during the walk. His thirty-two thousand Credits could vanish incredibly quickly.

Moreover, there was an issue that had started to bother Khan. Amber's responsible warnings had been on point, but Khan didn't care about houses for now. Still, he minded his ability to purchase superior techniques, training methods, and spells, which could obviously be expensive.

Saving was the best option. His double income as a professor and lieutenant would give him one thousand and five hundred Credits every month, so his finances could increase rapidly. However, he cared about his role.

"We can go directly to the cheap shops if you-," Captain Goldmon announced while wearing a curious smile.

"No, bring me to the shops that might have suitable creatures," Khan interrupted. "You know the area and the level of the recruits better than me, so I'll rely on your expertise."

Captain Goldmon inspected Khan for an instant before nodding in satisfaction. The more the soldier looked at Khan, the more he believed that he would be a good professor.

The Captain and Khan walked deeper into the areas with shops related to Tainted animals until the former stopped in front of a large building with "Beasts' King" written on its vast banner. That part of the city was less crowded, so Khan could inspect the whole structure from side to side before pushing open its tall doors.

The entrance felt too light for its size, but Khan didn't question the nature of its materials. His attention quickly went on the many huge cages that occupied both sides of the building. They were mostly made of a dark alloy, but their fronts had barriers similar to those in Ecoruta's underground structure.

Each cage had peculiar specimens. Khan saw multiple odd Tainted animals as he walked through the clean path among the cells with the Captain. Dogs with scarlet eyes and metallic claws, hyenas with hard spiked fur, strange bears that stood on two legs, snakes with barrels instead of fangs, and much more filled the building.

'They are too weak,' Khan thought as he walked past the cages.

It didn't take much for an animal to become "Tainted". As Captain Goldmon had said, the mana simply had to trigger mutations, but they didn't necessarily need to bring physical improvements. Most of the creatures in the cages had barely earned their infamous label. Even normal humans would have a high chance to defeat them.

The building was devoid of customers, so the duo's presence didn't go unnoticed. A middle-aged waiter with an unkempt beard and messy dark hair left a desk in the middle of the floor to approach Khan and Captain Goldmon.

"Sirs, sirs!" The waiter called while rubbing his hands. "Please, come this way. How can I help you?"

Khan couldn't help but notice how the waiter was wearing simple clothes. His yellow T-shirt and trousers featured a few dark spots and a couple of holes, and the same went for the brown apron above them. His figure contained mana, but Khan barely put him above the checkpoint for first-level warriors.

"We are looking for Tainted animals suitable for recruits in the second semester," Captain Goldmon exclaimed without glancing at the waiter a single time.

"You are in the right place!" The waiter almost shouted. "Here at the Beasts' King we have a great assortment of Tainted animals for that specific category. Most of our creatures have developed physical enhancement, and we have also decided to add bionic improvements to others to add some deadliness."

"The beasts here are too weak," Khan said while glancing at the bottom of the hall. "Even those there won't do."

"How would you know without looking at them?" The waiter asked as a tinge of displeasure appeared on his face.

"Because he said so," Captain Goldmon snorted while finally laying his eyes on the waiter. "Well, do you have something worthy of our time?"

The waiter didn't like Khan's apparent lack of respect due to his young age, but his expression returned extremely polite in front of the Captain. The man nodded a few times and rubbed his hands with more intensity before answering. "Of course. Do you mind following me to the second floor? The beasts there will surely meet your requirements."

Khan had the instinct to frown, but his face didn't reveal his confusion. He couldn't sense anything coming from above, but he followed the waiter with the Captain anyway.

One of the cages turned out to hold an elevator that the three didn't hesitate to take. Khan's eyes widened in surprise as soon as the metal doors slid open and the second floor unfolded in his vision. A series of new presences had appeared in his senses even if they had been impossible to perceive before.

"Does the floor isolate the mana?" Khan asked while tapping his foot on the dark surface.

"Yes, the presence of stronger Tainted animals usually makes the weaker ones restless," The waiter explained before voicing a doubt. "How did you know?"

"He knows because he knows," Captain Goldmon scoffed as his cane tapped the floor.

Khan showed a fake smile to the waiter before resuming his inspection. The second floor was basically identical to the first, but the animals inside the cages were clearly stronger. Still, they also felt too weak for his subject.

"Don't you have something close to first-level warriors?" Khan asked after going through most cages.

"We do have Tainted animals at that level," The waiter revealed. "However, many have developed abilities due to the mutations, and a few have even gone through bionic enhancements. I don't think they are safe for recruits."

"Do you have anything in-between?" Khan questioned while pointing at the cages. "These beasts are too weak. They'd die in a few lessons."

The waiter stopped rubbing his hands to scratch his chin. He appeared conflicted about the matter, but he eventually came up with an option. "We have a few failed experiments like that, but they have no safe words or training. Their aggression is even off the charts. I don't want our shop to create problems for the training camp."

It was obvious that Khan and Captain Goldmon were working. They were some of the few people wearing military uniforms, so the waiter had immediately connected them to Reebfell's training camp.

"Safe words?" Khan asked.

"We teach each Tainted animal to faint through a combination of words," The waiter explained before turning toward a cage that contained a giant pig with a metallic skull outside its head. "Fly through the sky!"

The pig's azure eyes widened at those words, and its legs immediately went limp. The creature fell on its sides, and Khan could quickly confirm that it had fainted. Of course, the scene surprised him to no end.

"How did you even teach that to Tainted animals?" Khan couldn't hold back from asking.

"Our shop has one of the best taming progr-," The waiter proudly announced, but the Captain interrupted him by clearing his throat.

"Right," Khan said while suppressing his enthusiasm. "Show me these failed experiments."

The waiter didn't appear convinced about the matter, but he still led Khan and the Captain back to the elevator. The machine reached the fifth floor, which turned out to be slightly darker than the others. There were even fewer cages, and the area was generally a bit dirtier.

Khan didn't care about the illumination of the cleanliness. His attention immediately went on the cages, and his eyes also lit up when he sensed the power of the creatures inside them. One of them even claimed the entirety of his attention and made him move without waiting for the man.

The front of a vast cage eventually unfolded in Khan's view, and a satisfied smile appeared on his face when he saw the massive ape inside it. The creature had no fur, and four bionic red eyes shone on its head. The beast was almost three meters tall, and its arms seemed bulging columns.

The ape was sleeping, but it woke up when it heard Khan stopping in front of its cage. The beast didn't like that event, and it immediately jumped on its feet to leap forward.

The Tainted animal slammed on the barrier that locked the cage, but the event didn't put an end to its offensive. It attacked a few more times before chattering in anger.

"This one is definitely a waste," The waiter explained after reaching Khan with Captain Goldmon. "Its skin is incredibly tough, and the muscles under it are even scarier. It can endure the attacks of a first-level warrior for a few minutes, and its physical strength is far above average. However, the scientists up there have messed up during its growth. It's too violent, which makes it impossible to tame."

"How much for it?" Khan asked.

"I can't sell this one," The waiter immediately refused. "With all due respect, I don't want the Global Army to close the shop because one of our animals has killed a recruit."

"He asked for a price," Captain Goldmon snorted.

"I'm sorry, sir," The waiter continued. "I really don't want to disrespect you, but this creature can hold its ground against first-level warriors. Normal recruits will get badly injured or worse if they aren't careful."

"We still want to purchase it," Captain Goldmon declared. "Name a price."

The waiter could only give up on making the two change their minds. He placed a hand under his chin again before naming a number. "Eight thousand Credits."

Khan expected the price to be high, but not so high. Still, his face didn't reveal anything. He even managed to bargain. "You said that this one isn't for sale. Lower the price since you have no uses for it."

"We can still feed it to other Tainted animals," The waiter calmly explained. "It's a normal practice to save mana."

The Captain glanced at Khan. He waited a bit to see whether Khan could come up with other ideas to lower the price, but it was clear that he had nothing else.

Khan felt the need to refuse that price. Eight thousand Credits was simply too much, but Captain Goldmon spoke when he was about to say something. "Do you like having a training camp here?"

"Of course, sir," The waiter replied as a confident smile appeared on his face. "Business and Reebfell as a whole thrive with so many recruits around."

"Do you know why the camp managed to reopen so soon?" Captain Goldmon continued. "Do you know anything about Istrone?"

"Istrone was a tragedy," The waiter responded as his smile disappeared. "Still, I don't see how that's connected to this negotiation."

"He is the connection," Captain Goldmon declared while pointing his cane toward Khan. "He is the reason Reebfell even had survivors in the first place."

The waiter inspected Khan in confusion for a few seconds, but his eyes soon widened. His mouth opened, and he stuttered a couple of times before managing to voice a complete question. "Wait, are you Khan?"

Khan had vaguely understood what the Captain was doing, so he didn't hesitate to play along. His face turned cold as he corrected the waiter.. "Lieutenant Khan."

Chapter 296 - Shopping

The waiter remained speechless for a few seconds. Istrone's rebellion had been a sudden and tragic event that had affected the entirety of Earth. The Global Army as a whole had suffered a huge blow, and the effects of the matter had spread past the various families that had lost descendants.

Almost every business in the big cities had seen a decrease in their yearly incomes. Only the shops that sold defensive gear or similar items had experienced a boom, but that had also quieted down quickly since the Global Army had taken everything into its own hands.

The event had created such heavy consequences that basically everyone had done their best to know more about Istrone's rebellion. Khan's name had appeared in many reports, so many had learnt about him. Some interested parties had even started to follow his profile to keep track of his growth.

The waiter wasn't an interested party, but he knew about Khan and learning about his early promotion only deepened his astonishment. Yet, he quickly proved himself worthy of being part of one of Reebfell's shops.

"Congratulations!" The waiter exclaimed while replacing his surprise with a broad smile that faked pure happiness. "No promotion has ever been more deserved! I'm sure you'll reach even higher ranks."

The sudden change in the waiter's approach almost startled Khan, but he didn't let anything appear on his face. His expression remained cold, and the same went for his steady gaze on the man's figure.

"My apologies," The waiter cleared his throat while adding an ashamed tone to his voice. "I have failed to recognize Istrone's hero. It has never been my intention to offend you."

"What about the price?" Khan asked without showing any reaction to those polite excuses.

"I'll obviously lower it," The waiter proudly announced. "I'll even add a special discount to apologize for my behavior. Will four thousand Credits work for you?"

Khan used the entirety of his knowledge in lies and pretenses to perform a slightly displeased pout while he turned his gaze on the Tainted ape. He faked hesitation, but he didn't make it too evident. The waiter had to think that he could look through Khan.

"I can go as down as three thousand and eight hundred Credits," The waiter continued after the heavy silence got the best of him. "I'm afraid I can't lower the price any further. The shop would lose money otherwise."

Khan was ready to accept, but he decided to let the silence fall among them again. The chattering and screaming of the Tainted ape only added tension to that situation, but Khan's intentions went beyond the simple attempts to lower the price even further.

The waiter had clearly underestimated Khan, which was a weakness that the latter wanted to remain. Khan pretended to glance at Captain Goldmon to look for his opinion, and the soldier played along by performing a slight nod.

"We'll buy it," Khan stated while taking out his phone. "The shop will handle the transport to the training camp, right?"

"Of course, of course," The waiter happily responded. "Customers usually have to pay extra for that service, but that obviously doesn't apply to you."

"Excellent," Khan voiced without showing any happiness. "We can handle the payment then."

Khan had no idea how the payment worked, but he pretended to be completely confident in the matter. The waiter didn't notice anything, and he quickly led the two back to his interactive desk on the first floor.

"Do you want to subscribe to the shop?" The waiter asked after he prepared the desk for the payment. "We'll keep you updated on every offer and new product, and you'll even receive a special permanent discount."

"Maybe next time," Khan immediately refused as his eyes scanned the menus on the desk. Luckily for him, the various figures and labels were extremely clear. He only needed to place his phone on a specific spot and confirm the payment.

Khan's funds went under thirty thousand Credits, but he didn't feel anything about that loss. That currency was too ethereal in his mind. He couldn't sense any attachment toward that money.

The waiter voiced a few polite and excited goodbyes that Khan and Captain Goldmon dismissed as they left the building. Their pretense continued even after they began to walk back to the central areas of the commercial district, but Khan eventually decided to speak honestly.

"Thank you for your help, Captain," Khan said while adding a nod to his line.

"Why did you look at me after he lowered the price?" Captain Goldmon asked. "You had the chance to improve your image in his mind."

Khan remained slightly startled in front of the question, but he decided to explain his reasons. "I didn't need to show off. The waiter might let something slip if I ever happen to go there alone the next time."

"You planted a weakness," Captain Goldmon chuckled. "Not bad."

"I'll only be able to use it once," Khan added. "I might not manage to pull something similar off in the future either. I didn't expect to be so famous even outside the training camps."

"Istrone's rebellion has been on everyone's mouth for many months," Captain Goldmon revealed. "The Global Army lost a lot, so Earth as a whole suffered."

Khan could only nod and let his eyes wander among the crowd as Istrone's memories appeared in his vision. He still remembered the Kred, his first kill, the blood, and the cries. Still, those scenes couldn't affect his mood deeply anymore.

"You shouldn't give others the chance to help you so easily," The Captain declared, forcing Khan to snap back to reality. "I'm too old to care about that stuff, but many won't hesitate to use those occasions to earn favors."

"I understand," Khan honestly stated. "Thank you again, Captain."

Captain Goldmon snorted and let the topic die before voicing another question. "Do you have something else to buy?"

"I don't want to impose, sir," Khan quickly replied. "I'm sure I'll be fine on my own."

"I don't want you to get lost before your first lesson," Captain Goldmon sneered. "Besides, you don't know Lieutenant Abaze. We have many hours to kill."

"Wouldn't you prefer to spend that time drinking somewhere?" Khan politely questioned.

"Shut up and accept my help," The Captain ordered while loudly tapping his cane on the ground.

"Yes, sir!" Khan exclaimed as a faint smile appeared on his face. "I'd like to purchase books and techniques connected to my path. I'd also want to use your presence to avoid getting ripped off."

Captain Goldmon laughed at that shameless announcement, but he nodded and began to accelerate. The soldier quickly led Khan toward another area of the commercial district, and the crowd's general level revealed the different purposes of the shops there.

Khan didn't fail to notice how most of the people in the area were stronger than him. Those who had yet to become first-level warriors had strong companions acting as guards or escorts. Almost all of them also wore serious and experienced expressions. It was clear that the shops there attracted citizens who had battle and war-related interests.

Everyone seemed to know each other. Khan often saw polite greetings or loud salutations. Reebfell was showing him its political array, but he couldn't affect it for now. Those faces belonged to strangers he couldn't approach without a valid reason.

No one bothered to look at Khan. Captain Goldmon's stars claimed the gazes from some guards and experienced soldiers, but everyone soon went on their own way.

Khan and Captain Goldmon could visit multiple shops without encountering any hindrance, and the crowds inside them prevented the various waiters from being expansive. Every interaction was short, direct, and often disappointing.

'How can a defensive technique weaker than the [Blood Shield] cost ten thousand Credits?!' Khan complained in his mind after leaving another shop. 'And what's this fixation with sex-related abilities? Why does every shop have them?'

Khan's complaints were a bit out of place. Every shop had a vast assortment of techniques, and many of them were interesting. However, their price was exorbitant, and that wasn't even the greatest problem. He already had better abilities in almost every field.

Khan wanted to obtain new abilities, but he felt forced to postpone the matter for when his level increased. He had already guessed that his state was pretty good, but he had hoped that Reebfell could prove him wrong. Still, the situation turned out to match his initial evaluation.

Everything changed when Captain Goldmon led Khan toward shops specialized in training programs. Everything was cheaper there since the human approach to mana was rather mechanical. Most soldiers didn't care about improving their general control over their energy since they could directly focus on mastering specific techniques. Yet, that didn't apply to Khan.

"You could have found weaker versions of those training programs on the network," Captain Goldmon stated after he and Khan left a shop. "You didn't need to spend almost two thousand Credits only to get the best ones for your level."

Khan almost failed to hear the Captain since his eyes remained fixed on his phone. Two new labels had appeared in the special menu that listed his arts and training programs, and he couldn't wait to try them.

'The "advanced perception" should bring my senses to the next level,' Khan excitedly thought, but the light in his eyes intensified when he read the second label. 'Instead, "advanced control" might finally solve my problem with the [Blood Vortex].'

The shop didn't have anything directly related to the manipulation of mana. The humans simply didn't use that approach, so Khan had to settle for something more general. Still, he felt pretty satisfied with his purchases. He believed that the two training programs would streamline his regular schedule.

"Are the Niqols' methods so good?" The Captain asked when he saw that Khan wasn't giving any answer.

Khan couldn't help but stop looking at his phone. The question had taken him by surprise, and his body almost reacted on his own when he heard something related to Nitis. Yet, the Captain's calm expression showed nothing but interest, so Khan decided to answer honestly.

"They are different," Khan explained. "They are definitely good, but I wouldn't place them above the human approach. I admit that the Niqols' methods might be too difficult for most soldiers."

"I see," Captain Goldmon voiced. "Did you manage to control the chaos element so quickly due to the Niqols' approach to mana?"

"I won't answer that, sir," Khan responded.

"Good boy!" Captain Goldmon laughed before leading Khan toward his final destination.

Khan had already obtained a good book about the most famous alien species, but he decided to purchase better ones. He also bought a few teaching programs to learn different languages, and he subscribed to a service that offered daily updates on the political environment in the universe.

After that, Khan and the Captain left the area to enjoy another drink and wait for their companions.

Chapter 297 - Fun

Captain Goldmon knew Lieutenant Abaze well, especially when it came to her habit of spending entire hours shopping. She even stopped replying to the Captain's messages at some point, so he and Khan ended up spending a long time in the bar that they had picked as their gathering point.

Khan had learnt to know the Captain a bit during their time together. The soldier was often rude and grumpy, but he was never mean. Also, he was good toward his underlings, and he never failed to teach lessons when the situation required it.

Captain Goldmon was a man of few words. He wasn't the type of person who would start conversations to kill time, and Khan appreciated the silence between them. The soldier even bought new rounds of drinks whenever they emptied their cups, making his company even easier to enjoy for Khan.

The drinks were expensive, but their high quality justified their price. Khan and the Captain enjoyed their good booze in silence as memories resurfaced in their minds. They both had experienced events capable of making their gazes wander for a long time, and neither of them tried to probe the other.

Some things couldn't be said. Some things had to remain in the minds that had experienced them, and both Khan and Captain Goldmon silently agreed on that part. They let the booze get to their heads as they ordered one drink after another.

Khan had no intention of getting drunk, but the situation turned out to be so favorable that he stopped controlling himself. Captain Goldmon was good company. He appeared as an old soldier who had chosen to ignore the political environment and possible promotions to be a simple man, and Khan could only appreciate him.

Khan initially tried to ignore his phone out of respect for the Captain, but his hesitation slowly dispersed as his trust in him grew. The two didn't need words to grow closer, so Khan soon decided to keep himself busy among his drinks and memories.

Khan had spent a lot during that short morning, but his purchases felt worth it. He reviewed his two training programs without activating any hologram, and their exercises sounded interesting. He also started skimming through his new books with the "enhanced reading", but he soon had to stop relying on the technique since the booze was making him fail to perform it too often.

Captain Goldmon didn't say anything about food, and Khan also ignored the matter as he continued to drink. At times, Khan even tried to toast with the soldier and stare at his eyes, but the lack of reactions from the latter reminded him that he wasn't on Nitis anymore.

"You handle your drinks well," Captain Goldmon commented from time to time, probably forgetting that he had already voiced the same lines in the past minutes and hours.

Khan limited himself to wear a fake smile at every comment, and the Captain never failed to follow with a snort. It was clear that the soldier didn't like that dishonest behavior, but Khan couldn't trust him right away. He had partially lowered his barriers only because the Captain seemed to have no interest in playing political games with him.

The morning turned into afternoon, and the sun eventually began to set. Khan tried to slow down on his drinking when he was about to approach his limits, but the Captain began to order new booze for both of them whenever he emptied his cup.

At first, Khan tried to keep up with the Captain's drinking speed, but his body couldn't match the resilience of a third-level warrior. He had to voice his desire to stop when the situation became truly risky, and the Captain accepted his request with one of his usual snorts.

Lieutenant Abaze and Amber reached the shop one hour after Khan stopped drinking. Their faces revealed how fulfilled they both felt, but their expressions changed as soon as they laid their eyes on Khan and Captain Goldmon.

Khan wasn't too off. His head spun during the spikes of dizziness, and redness had taken control of his cheeks. His breath wasn't great either, but he could prevent himself from mumbling. He also retained a good understanding of his situation, and the break from drinking had started to do wonders.

Instead, Captain Goldmon was far worse. He was a third-level warrior, but he had drunk an uncountable number of cups after Khan had taken his break, and his face showed each one of them. His eyes were half-closed and red, his head went up and down, and vague mumbled words left his mouth from time to time.

"I knew I shouldn't have left you alone for too long," Lieutenant Abaze commented.

"You should contain your shopping drive then," Captain Goldmon responded in a surprisingly clear tone.

'Is he drunk or not?' Khan wondered while showing his surprise.

His doubts only increased when he saw the Captain abruptly straightening his head after he threatened to fall on the table. Khan didn't know how to judge his state, but Lieutenant Abaze soon took the matter into her own hands.

"I think it's better to go," Lieutenant Abaze announced while approaching the Captain's seat and tapping his shoulder. "Captain, we had to take the train."

"I know," The Captain scoffed in a clear tone. He picked his cane to force himself to stand up, and Lieutenant Abaze wrapped her arm around his right elbow to support him.

Khan stood up slowly to avoid falling prey to his dizziness. The world in his vision tried to spin, but he stayed still for a few seconds to find his balance. He was fine, but he couldn't stop thinking about the food cans in his fridge back in the training camp.

"How are you feeling?" Amber whispered when Lieutenant Abaze began to lead the Captain toward the underground hall.

"I'm fine," Khan chuckled. "I'm not stupid around booze."

"I know that from your profile," Amber teased.

"You have no idea how troublesome that is," Khan joked. "Every superior I meet tries to offer me a drink or two. I mean, I don't mind it, but I'm not a drunkard."

"Didn't you just spend most of the afternoon drinking with your superior?" Amber asked as a giggle escaped her mouth.

"We covered the shopping part first," Khan proudly revealed.

"Did you find a suitable Tainted animal in the end?" Amber asked.

"I did," Khan stated. "Yet, I'm still unclear about the teaching part. Everyone in the camp seems to love you. Do you have any advice, Professor Teldom?"

"Stop it," Amber laughed. "I don't have any secret. Besides, our subjects are quite personal, so we all have different teaching methods. I treat the recruits honestly. I think that gave me a decent following and a good image."

'Is she unaware of her general sweet aura?' Khan wondered, but his state prevented him from realizing that he had started to stare at Amber's face.

"What is it?" Amber diverted her gaze shyly.

"Oh, sorry," Khan quickly exclaimed. "I was thinking about the other reasons behind your popularity."

Amber frowned, but she blushed when she connected the previous stare to the last line. She tried to glance at Khan, but he had already moved his attention on the street.

"Are you always this direct when you drink?" Amber questioned.

"I'm always direct," Khan declared before a sigh escaped his mouth. "I have just developed bad habits in the Slums."

"Like?" Amber continued.

"The soldiers don't care about the squabbles there," Khan explained. "Everyone is on their own, and many areas can be dangerous. There are rules, but they only work when you get caught. You end up learning to lie and hide your character since you can't trust anyone."

"Did I gain your trust then?" Amber asked while wearing a sweet smile.

"Not at all," Khan laughed before nodding at her when he noticed her surprise. "I've only understood that you are a good person."

Amber wasn't used to such direct compliments, especially from Khan. Still, she felt at ease, and another question inevitably escaped her mouth. "Are you really seventeen? Where did you even get your confidence?"

"Don't fall for me already," Khan smirked before glancing at a random point in the distance.

"I-, I didn't mean that!" Amber complained, but Khan only laughed.

His reaction made Amber complain even harder until she started pulling his arm and triggering more teasing words. She let him go and pouted, but she eventually started to smile.

Casual conversations and a few jokes flew between Khan and Amber until the group reached the underground hall. The four didn't waste time and entered the platform where they could call the train, and everything fell silent once they took their seats inside the vehicle.

Captain Goldmon fell asleep as soon as he sat, while the others killed time through their phones and the holograms generated by their seats. Khan could review his day. He had spent quite a bit, but his gains felt worth it.

A few messages reached his phone during the trip back to the training camp. An unnamed soldier contacted him through an account labeled "Global Army" to talk about the Tainted ape that had arrived. Khan had to look at his schedule to give proper indications, and the conversation ended soon after.

Khan would have to host his first lesson tomorrow, and his schedule was already on the network. His subject wasn't mandatory, and Headmaster Pitcus had placed it in the late afternoon, but he believed that many recruits would come due to his fame. Still, keeping them there would be up to him.

When the train stopped, Captain Goldmon left his seat and started to depart on his own. He voiced short goodbyes and climbed the stairs back to the parking area. Lieutenant Abaze's salutations were more polite, but they were also short since she couldn't wait to check everything she had bought in Reebfell.

Khan was hungry, but Amber wasn't in a hurry to get back to her habitation, and he needed her help for a small issue. It was only slightly past dinnertime, so the two returned to the surface slowly as they chitchatted and exchanged jokes.

"How did you even survive for so long without knowing such basic features?" Amber laughed while pointing at a label on Khan's device. "Press there, then open that window. Do you see that label? It will lead to a menu where you have to write why the Global Army should give you a refund."

"Writing isn't my strong point," Khan admitted while wearing a pleading expression and glancing at Amber.

"I had already planned to help you with that," Amber revealed. "I believe the Global Army will cover the entire purchase. As for the expenses for the Tainted animal's maintenance, I think they will depend on your performance during the lessons."

"Right, that thing again," Khan sighed. "I think I know how I want to handle my lessons, but many recruits will probably run away after the first one."

"Don't sell yourself short," Amber praised. "You might not notice it, but you have a charming character when you stop pretending. Just be honest with your recruits, and everything will be fine." Khan sighed again, but he didn't waste that chance to tease Amber. "Do you feel charmed already?"

"Shut up," Amber chuckled while getting closer to Khan to help him write the request for a refund. The two walked slowly through the streets of the training camp as they joked and finished handling Khan's matters. Both of them were having fun, and the emptiness of the area allowed them to put aside the eventual stoic pretenses that meeting recruits would require.

"Done!" Khan exclaimed after sending his request. "Thank you, Amber."

"You are good with words," Amber stated. "I'm sure you'll get the hang of the formal writing quickly."

The two had no reason to walk together now that Khan's problems were over, but he didn't hesitate to voice an offer. "Let me walk you back home to thank you for today."

"Shall I remind you that I'm stronger than you?" Amber teased.

"Do you want to walk me home then?" Khan laughed, and Amber shook her head while a smile appeared on her face.

"My building is in that direction," Amber said while pointing toward a street and turning toward it.

Khan limited himself to smile and follow her, and the two soon started exchanging jokes again. A few casual topics also appeared, and Amber even described part of her lessons.

Khan didn't know why, but he was having a good time. Amber was easy to talk to, and the booze was doing its job, but Khan still felt surprised that he could go entire minutes without experiencing his constant desperation. It would typically take a fight to achieve that, and the lack of romantic interest toward Amber only intensified his amazement.

Amber was definitely beautiful, but Khan was enjoying having a friend with whom sharing a light-hearted laugh and ordinary conversations. Amber was giving him a taste of normality, and he felt able to accept it after a few struggles.

However, the rest of the world seemed unable to let Khan have that moment. He and Amber found a recruit sitting on a bench when they reached the central areas of the camp. Their first instinct was to fall silent for a bit, but Khan stopped his tracks when he recognized Cora.

Cora stood up and glanced at Khan before diverting her gaze. She waited in her spot and didn't make a single step toward him.

"Is she here for you?" Amber asked since Cora kept glancing at Khan.

"It's complicated," Khan sighed.

"Don't tell me that you kept your date waiting to be with me," Amber exclaimed as a tinge of annoyance began to seep into her tone.

"Do you think I'm that kind of man?" Khan asked while fixing his eyes on Amber.

The direct question made regret appear in Amber's mind. She didn't want to doubt Khan, but her words might have offended him. She opened her mouth to apologize, but Khan spoke before her.

"Hey, it's fine."

Khan sounded reassuring, and Amber could only try her best not to appear awkward. She wore her sweet smile and glanced at Cora before teasing him. "You shouldn't play with a woman's heart. Go to her. I'll ask you how it went tomorrow."

"What about my heart?" Khan whispered.

Amber didn't expect those words, but Khan began to walk toward Cora before she could ask anything. He only voiced short goodbyes in which he implied that he would contact her tomorrow.

"Why didn't you send me a message?" Khan asked when he reached Cora. "I might have missed you if I didn't pass through here."

"I didn't want to disturb you while you were working," Cora explained. "I would have gone back on my own before the curfew."

"You don't need to be so careful," Khan sighed.

"You might have avoided me if I asked to meet through a message," Cora responded while lowering her gaze. She had to muster the entirety of her courage to say that.

Her boldness surprised Khan, but he soon smiled and bent forward to make his eyes meet hers. Cora blushed, but she forced herself to look at him without diverting her gaze.

"I won't leave you hanging, okay?" Khan reassured. "Just, don't wait in the middle of the camp on your own anymore. It hurts knowing that you are doing it in the hope of meeting me."

"Do you promise?" Cora asked timidly.

"Just like I promised not to forget about your kiss," Khan laughed, and the entirety of Cora's face turned red.

"I-, why do you keep bringing that up?" Cora complained, but Khan didn't answer, and the two soon started walking toward her dormitory.

Chapter 298 - Crowd

The walk with Cora was uneventful. Khan teased her a bit, and she stole a hug before reaching the entrance of her dormitory, but that was it. Khan could hurry back to his flat afterward, and his rumbling stomach saved him from falling prey to his messy thoughts.

Khan wolfed four cans of food before moving his focus on his purchases. He had already skimmed through them while he was with Captain Goldmon, but now he had the chance to test them.

The "advanced perception" and "advanced control" were training programs featuring different exercises meant for their specific topic. They would work on two of the three fundamental aspects of the Niqols' approach to mana but from the human's perspective.

The different approach had both negative and positive aspects. Humankind didn't treat the mana like the Niqols. Their understanding and general consideration of that energy were relatively shallow, so the training programs wouldn't reach the same depths that Khan had seen on Nitis.

However, that shallow approach also involved a broadness that would allow Khan to gain benefits in more than those two fields. He had even confirmed that part when he was at the bar with the Captain.

The "advanced perception" involved exercises that the Nigols put in the control field, and the "advanced control" did the same with the manipulation of mana. In theory, Khan would work on the entirety of his foundation, which was exactly what he desired.

It was far past ten pm by the time Khan finished eating. The next day would see him hosting his first lesson, but he would have the entire morning and most of the afternoon free. He had enough time to recover from every hellish schedule that he decided to pursue, and the training camp even offered him the chance to go truly all-out.

'I shouldn't skip sleeping entirely tonight,' Khan concluded after reviewing his opportunities. 'Yet, I can't waste eight hours like that either.'

Khan almost couldn't help himself as he pressed on the first exercise of the "advanced perception" and began to perform it. The training made him imagine the edges of his senses as a sphere that he had to expand by sending tiny tendrils past those limits.

The exercise was efficient, even if it didn't reach the levels of [The Pure Trees]. His senses expanded extremely slowly, but they went past their limits, and that was more than what he was achieving without a proper training method.

Khan didn't remain stuck in the exercise for too long. He went to the next one after half an hour and found something that far different requirements and tasks. The training program asked him to focus on a single large spot at his senses' edges and push it forward.

Khan didn't take long to grow used to the exercise, so he quickly moved to the next one. The training program wanted him to imagine a series of spikes pressing on his senses' edges, but he mastered that part in no time too.

The "advanced perception" suffered from an issue that Khan had predicted even before deciding to purchase it. The training program was the best he could find for soldiers at his level, but it used human standards to set its difficulty.

The first exercises were too easy for Khan, which was the reason behind his skimming through them. He wanted to find the training that suited his level before putting the program inside his schedule.

The following exercises were harder versions of the first three. Khan had to imagine more tendrils, larger spots, or denser spikes, but he completed all of them after a few tries.

The difficulties arrived when the training program asked Khan to fuse the three types of exercises. He had to imagine tendrils, spikes, and large spots at the same time, and his many failures made him smile. He had finally found his starting point.

Midnight had passed by then, but Khan didn't hit the bed. He moved to the "advanced control" to repeat the process, but he felt disappointed to see that the initial exercises were even easier there.

The matter made sense when Khan considered humankind's approach to mana. Control over that energy was a skill that the humans didn't need to nurture since it was easier to master a single technique or spell.

Still, Khan wasn't a normal human. He even felt that his attachment to his species had done nothing but waver during the last year. He wanted his general ability to control mana to be far above the average, and the same went for the manipulation field.

Luckily for Khan, some of the last exercises of the training program turned out to be pretty tough. Khan had to create intricate diagrams around him with his mana and make them rotate in the air. Their movements also had to change from time to time, and their complexity affected the exercise's outcome.

Khan even made it harder for himself. The exercises in the "advanced control" involved a bit of the manipulation field since he had to condense the mana to increase its stability. However, he also decided to alter its nature while he made the diagrams rotate to make the training more complete.

It was deep into the night when Khan found the starting point for both training programs. He didn't feel sleepy, but he forced himself to hit the bed. Still, he set the alarm so that he would wake up by dawn.

The nightmare didn't last long, and Khan jumped out of bed as soon as the alarm rang. He had a lot to do and try out, and he didn't forget the lesson that would arrive later in the afternoon.

To Khan's surprise, his phone had three different messages. One came from Cora in the form of a simple "good morning", another from Amber teasing him about Cora, and the last from the Global Army, which confirmed the total refund for the purchase of the Tainted ape.

Khan had learnt how things worked with Credits. He left his flat and reached one of the consoles placed near the central area of the camp to withdraw the money from the refund. He saw his finances getting close to thirty thousand Credits again, but the event created no happiness or satisfaction in his mind. It only confirmed that the Global Army would support him fully for now.

It was too early for the training camp to get crowded, but Khan met a few recruits willing to make the best out of their day. Those boys and girls performed military salutes whenever Khan crossed their paths, but he only nodded at them since most of his attention was on his phone.

Cora wanted to meet for a few minutes while Amber kept probing about last night's events. Khan couldn't refuse the former after his promise, so the two met in the canteen and enjoyed a peaceful breakfast. As for Amber, Khan didn't mind talking with her, but he never revealed too many details.

Khan found it funny that his only two friends in the camp woke up as early as him, but the matter didn't bother him. Amber only wanted to have a laugh, and Cora would die rather than become a hindrance for him. The conversation with Amber ended after a few messages, and Cora went on her way happily after the breakfast was over.

'Now,' Khan exclaimed in his mind as he watched Cora disappearing in the distance.

The phone quickly appeared in his hand, and his fingers tapped the screen until they reached the map of the camp. Khan didn't hesitate to head for the training halls. He had every intention to spend most of his day there.

More recruits began to appear on the camp's streets, but most failed to perform their military salute before Khan walked past them. He was basically running, and his destination was his favorite place in the world.

A few short buildings eventually unfolded in his vision. Reebfell's camp had three structures featuring multiple training halls. The quality, type, and purpose of those spaces changed slightly from room to room, but Khan had already made up his mind about his destination.

Khan went into the second building, which contained the elite versions of the training halls for soldiers at his level. He picked the only area with stats that could meet his requirements. His status as a chaos wielder gave him a stark advantage toward technology in general, so he had to choose something capable of enduring his mana.

The training hall opened as soon as Khan placed his phone on its entrance. The interactive floor activated, but a few menus remained dark. When he put his phone in its the designed spot on the wall, more options appeared, but they had a price attached.

'I'm indeed too poor to spend all my time here,' Khan concluded after evaluating the options in his mind.

The training halls were expensive, especially when it came to programs that allowed spells and similar powerful techniques. Moreover, Khan's status as a chaos wielder had only worsened the situation.

Still, Khan could benefit from multiple discounts. He was a Lieutenant, a Professor, and the winner of Onia's tournaments. He could see the original price of those programs, but their cost went down by more than half due to his status.

The discounts weren't enough to make the training halls affordable. Khan had a monthly income of one thousand and five hundred Credits, but using those services at their fullest would cost him around four hundred and fifty Credits each week. He wouldn't be able to save anything if he decided to go all-out. Yet, he could settle for a schedule that prevented him from going broke.

Of course, that was his first day there, so he tested the best program that money could buy. Khan ended up facing multiple reinforced puppets made from an alloy resistant to mana. Those dummies could perform different martial arts, and they even knew how to apply simple battle tactics that made use of their superior numbers.

The battles were harsh. Khan saw his seemingly unstoppable spells being unable to destroy his opponents in a single blow. Even his knife often failed to shut them down, but the Divine Reaper wasn't to blame. The puppets didn't have weak points, so cutting their heads or opening large cracks in their chests didn't interrupt their offensive.

Khan obviously lost himself in the mana around him. His experience in the city allowed him to grow used to the synthetic energy inside the puppets quickly, so he could stop thinking in no time and bathe in the feeling of having worthy opponents.

A soldier brought Khan lunch directly in the training hall, so he never left the area until his phone rang to inform him that his time was up. His lesson would start in a few hours, and that required him to handle a few matters to prepare it.

Khan returned to his flat, showered, and responded to the messages that had arrived on his phone. The soldiers tasked with the maintenance of his Tainted animal knew that his lesson was approaching, so they contacted him to complete the last preparations.

The meeting happened near the building that would hold Khan's lesson. He needed a vast and reinforced hall due to the size of the Tainted ape, and the training camp had something suitable near its edges. It took him a while to reach that place, but everything went smoothly afterward.

Three soldiers moved a large cage covered by thick dark fabrics inside a building that resembled a hangar. The place was clean, but it lacked the sophisticated features of the halls in the central parts of the camp. Yet, it was perfect for Khan, so he didn't complain.

"Are you sure that you don't need help, sir?" The leader of the squad that had moved the cage asked after making their vehicle place the item in the corner of the hangar.

"You can remain in the area," Khan responded while taking a peek under the fabrics, "But I should be more than enough on my own."

The Tainted ape didn't like being kept in the darkness, but the arrival of the artificial light in the hangar angered it even more. The creature immediately leaped ahead, but the transparent metal of its entrance endured the blow perfectly.

'Good cage,' Khan commented in his mind before letting the structure be.

The soldiers performed a military salute and left Khan alone in the hangar. His lesson would start in less than an hour, so he sat next to the cage and began to meditate. As for the alarms, he didn't set any.

Presences began to enter the range of his senses as he meditated. Khan saw a young crowd gathering inside the hangar, even if he kept his eyes closed. People seemed to flow endlessly, but they stopped entering the building after a few minutes.

Khan waited a few more minutes before interrupting his meditation and straightening his position. The Tainted ape had slammed its head on the transparent part of the cage a few times while the recruits had gathered, and the event had naturally startled them, but Khan's awakening claimed the entirety of their attention.

'So many,' Khan couldn't help but think as his stern gaze moved among the anxious recruits. All of them tried to keep their eyes fixed on him, but many ended up looking at the floor during the inspection.

A quarter of the hangar was full of recruits, which messed up Khan's plans, but he quickly found a solution. He reached his phone and opened one of the long walls. The well-kept lawns of the training camp unfolded in everyone's view, but all the recruits turned toward Khan as soon as he cleared his throat.

"Okay, raise your hand if you have read my profile," Khan ordered in an aloof voice.

Everyone raised their arms, and Khan expected as much. The sheer number of recruits in the hangar was a direct consequence of his fame.

"Well, we can skip the presentations then," Khan said in a loud voice as he laid his back on the dark wall. His eyes fell on one of the recruits who didn't divert his gaze before he voiced another order.

"You, can you tell me why you are here?"

The sudden question startled the young man. He inspected his surroundings to make sure that Khan had really pointed at him, but he couldn't find any way out of that situation. He performed a military salute, cleared his throat, and shouted his idea loudly. "We are here to learn how to fight, sir!"

"Wrong," Khan stated, and despair appeared on the young man's face.

"Let's make this clear now so you won't complain if you decide to stay," Khan continued. "All of you know how to fight. I bet that some are close to reaching the competent proficiency level, while others might be only one step away from mastering their first spell. Many of you even have experienced masters at your disposal."

Everyone remained silent. Some recruits understood what Khan wanted to say, but they didn't say anything.

"Still, almost all of you wouldn't be able to apply what you have learnt in an actual battle, let alone a war," Khan revealed. "Istrone has proven that a crisis can fall on you at any time and place, and it's my job to make sure that you are ready for it."

Khan sighed before continuing. "I won't hide that my classes will be dangerous. I'll do everything in my power to make you experience the fear that only a real battlefield can provide. You will get hurt, so get out if you aren't willing to go through that."

The recruits steeled their faces and tensed their bodies to remain as still as possible. They wanted to show their determination and confidence, but that sight didn't impress Khan.

"Very well," Khan exclaimed while approaching the cage. "I'll give you another chance to leave before the beginning of the lesson. Today you'll have one versus one fights against this creature."

Khan pulled the fabrics and uncovered the cage. The Tainted ape appeared in everyone's view, and its angry screams filled their minds with fear.

"This creature can kill you," Khan announced. "There is no point hiding it.. I'm the only one in this hall capable of defeating it, and I'll also be the only one coming to your aid once you get overwhelmed. So, do you still want to stay?"

Chapter 299 - Madman

The recruits in the hangar didn't have Khan's senses. The ape was big, violent, and angry, but it remained a Tainted animal in their minds. They had fought something similar in the entrance test more than half a year ago, and they had also gone through months of training.

The ape's appearance was scary. Its four bionic eyes shone with a threatening red light, and its furless skin revealed its bulging muscles, but the creature remained a Tainted animal at its core, which gave the recruits some confidence.

Khan kept track of the changes in the recruits' expressions. That short inspection gave him an idea of his students' current state. Some showed nothing but hesitation and fear, which stated their lack of confidence. Others gulped but did their best to appear ready for the battle, and a few wore traces of arrogance.

Those reactions were within Khan's expectations. He still recalled his days in Ylaco's training camp and the level of his peers. He was off the charts, but Martha, Luke, and a few others could put up a

fight. Other cities even had a few exceptions like George, who had learnt to cast spells during his first semester in the Global Army.

Everything seemed to point toward the possible victory of some excellent recruits, but Khan knew the actual power of the Tainted animal. It was easier to view it as a proper first-level warrior to evaluate its dangerousness. Even he wouldn't have been able to beat it back then.

"None of you can beat this Tainted animal today," Khan continued in an attempt to quell the slight arrogance that had filled some recruits. "It's not about your experience. You simply lack the ability to deal with it, but that's the very reason behind this challenge."

Needless to say, the arrogant recruits took Khan's words as a challenge. Their confidence had different sources, but they still felt stronger than a mere Tainted animal.

"Who is the strongest among you?" Khan asked while leaving the wall to approach the lines of recruits. "I'm talking about the special class. You must have a few names in your minds."

Khan could sense the amount of mana in the recruits, but he couldn't see their prowess. He could gain a vague idea through their reactions, but that was far from enough.

Many glances converged toward two recruits in the frontline. Khan also inspected them after following those gazes. One of them was a tall young man with a good physique and driven eyes. The other was a slender young woman with blonde hair tied in a bun, a pair of short swords at her sides, and an arrogant expression.

"Which one of you wants to go first?" Khan asked while moving his gaze between the two. "Also, don't be so tense around me. Many of you are older than me. Ask as many questions as you want."

"Is it possible to know the Tainted animal's abilities, sir?" The man shouted while performing a military salute.

"No, you'll have to find those by yourself," Khan replied.

"How do we know that we have won, sir?" The woman continued.

"You must push the Tainted ape back in the cage or kill it to win," Khan responded.

"Are we allowed to use mana?" The man questioned in his loud voice.

"Of course," Khan scoffed. "This isn't a training hall or a test to show your prowess. I will let the ape break your bones before saving you, and trust me. You will need saving."

"Permission to go first, sir," The man exclaimed before the woman could say anything.

"Sure, go," Khan said in a plain tone before turning toward the rest of the recruits. "All of you, get out of the hangar. Line up in front of that entrance and leave the floor to your companion."

The recruits followed the orders and positioned themselves right outside the wall that Khan had opened previously. The tall man remained alone in the vast hangar, and Khan slowly walked toward the cage before jumping on it.

The cage was more than four meters tall, but Khan had easily jumped on top of it. His performance surprised the recruits, but Khan spoke before they could lose focus on the test. "Move forward a bit.

Line up with the transparent surface. We don't want the ape to jump on your companions by mistake."

The man nodded and took his position. The Tainted ape immediately started slamming on the transparent surface when it saw the recruit, and its aggression seemed to make him falter a bit. Still, he tried his best to remain resolute.

"Come on, get in fighting stance and prepare your mana," Khan ordered from the top of the cage.

The man executed the orders. He half-turned his waist and bent his legs while raising his arms. His hands closed into fists, and mana moved slowly toward his knuckles and ankles.

'Not bad,' Khan commented in his mind when he inspected the flow of the man's mana. It was pretty smooth, which confirmed his status as one of the best recruits in that year.

"I'm going to open the cage," Khan shouted. "Are you ready?"

The man nodded, and Khan tapped his feet on the cage to interact with the menus. A vertical opening soon appeared on the transparent surface before its two halves opened outward.

The Tainted ape voiced a scream before shooting toward the young man. The floor was sturdy, but the creature still managed to make it shake lightly. It didn't exactly run. Its charge consisted of long jumps that ended with its two huge arms slamming on the ground.

The ape reached the young man quickly, but the latter didn't let that huge figure scare him. The creature slammed its arms downward as it descended toward the recruit, but it failed to hit anything.

The young man had flowed to his right when he saw the thick arms aiming at him. His fast dodge created an opening, and he didn't hesitate to exploit it by punching the ape's side.

The recruit smiled when he sensed that his execution had been perfect. He had yet to reach the competent proficiency level, but his dodge and attack had used mana correctly. However, something began to feel strange in his mind.

The man realized the source of that strange feeling only after the ape swung its arms toward him. The recruit didn't have time to dodge from that position. The happiness that had come from his perfect execution had made him blind toward an obvious detail. The Tainted animal didn't budge when the attack had landed on its side.

The thick arms delivered a clean blow to the man's torso. The recruit flew away for a few meters and slid on the metal floor after he landed. Blood had begun to come out of his mouth, and fear had appeared on his face. However, the screams and noises that got close to his position forced him to struggle to stand up.

The recruit went back on his feet only to find the ape descending toward him. The creature's thick arms filled the entirety of his vision, and deep terror spread through his mind. He couldn't dodge that attack. He didn't even know if his arms would be enough to save his life.

The man closed his eyes, lowered his head, and crossed his arms above him, but no attack arrived. Instead, angry screams and painful cries began to reach his ears.

The recruit waited a few seconds before opening his eyes, and the scene that unfolded in his vision left him amazed. The Tainted ape wasn't in front of him anymore. Something was pushing the beast toward the cage, but that figure wasn't clear most of the time.

The young man squinted his eyes and did his best to inspect the battle. Whenever the ape flew back, he managed to see Khan between its arms or at its sides. The recruit struggled to see Khan's attacks, but he noticed the calm, collected, and even slightly bored expression of his Professor.

The Tainted ape was incredibly strong for its level, but Khan had fought Stal that could rival second-level warriors. The beast's size and physical strength were nothing in his eyes, and its attacks were too slow. He could flow between its large arms and kick it back toward the cage without even sweating.

Of course, Khan made sure to push instead of breaking. His kicks could pierce the ape's skin, but he didn't want to inflict injuries. After all, the Tainted animal still had more than fifty recruits to face.

The cage closed as soon as the entirety of the Tainted ape entered its boundaries. The beast slammed on the transparent surface in anger, but Khan didn't even look at it. He turned and reached the young man in an instant, only to find him on his knees.

"What? You thought that you had won after landing a single hit?" Khan asked before heaving a sigh at the sight of the tremors that ran through the recruit. "You are good for a training camp, but that behavior would kill you on the battlefield. Go back to your companions now."

The man gulped and tried to stand up, but a violent cough took control of his body and made him spit blood on Khan's shoes. The event terrified the young man, who immediately tried to apologize, but Khan pulled him up from his uniform and put a shoulder under his armpit to support him.

"We don't have all day, do we?" Khan laughed while helping the recruit walk back to his companions.

Everyone was speechless. The young man and the other recruits had remained in awe in front of Khan's prowess. He was their age, but his fighting ability, confidence, and general lack of fear in front of danger belonged to a completely different realm.

His change of behavior also surprised the recruits. They had imagined Khan as a cold and stern professor, but his laugh sounded honest, and he didn't care about his dirty shoes. He was even adjusting his pace to match the injured man's state.

"Sit here," Khan gently said when he reached the row of recruits with the young man. His eyes rose and stopped when they landed on the young woman from before, and another order left his mouth. "Get in. You are next."

The woman nodded and stepped inside the hangar. The young man sat, but a cough retook control of his body. He spat blood again, and the event gave him the courage to voice a request.

"Permission to go to the medical bay, sir."

"Denied," Khan casually replied while walking toward the cage. "You don't have medical bays on the battlefield. Meditate, but try to look at your companions' battles too."

The recruits finally understood the nature of Khan's subject now, and the desire to run away inevitably filled their minds. Many even started to view him as a madman who had earned his current job by pure chance.

"Are you ready?" Khan asked when he reached the top of the cage, and the woman nodded.

The cage opened, and the Tainted ape shot forward. The beast reached the recruit in an instant, but she dodged the descending arms easily. She also swung her short swords during her evasive maneuver, and two long cuts appeared on the creature's side.

The Tainted ape tried to follow the woman with its arms, but she was too fast. She ran around the beast, swinging her blades whenever she found an opening, but she always failed to leave significant injuries.

The recruits' eyes lit up at that scene. Their companion was doing it. She was overwhelming the Tainted ape, but the inevitable eventually happened. She failed to use her mana correctly during one of her dodges, which allowed the beast to slam its arms on her.

The woman flew away, and her swords left her hands. Her left arm bent unnaturally, and she remained still when she crashed on the floor. She turned only when the Tainted ape was about to fall on her, but Khan appeared between the two before the creature could complete its attack.

Everyone witnessed Khan's overwhelming prowess again. He kicked the ape back inside the cage in no time before walking toward the injured woman. Yet, to his surprise, she forced herself to stand up on her own. She even returned to her companions after retrieving her weapons without saying a word.

Chapter 300 - Questions

A few battles followed the woman's fight, but the recruits stopped stepping forward after seeing the best warriors in their year losing and suffering injuries. They didn't leave the hangar, but they found no point jumping into a situation that could leave them badly wounded.

Khan could play the Lieutenant's card and convince some of those recruits to go against the beast anyway, but that would be pointless. He couldn't teach if his students didn't want to learn, which was somewhat acceptable. He had never expected his class to be popular in the first place.

The six recruits who had the courage to go against the Tainted ape were meditating on the lawn outside the hangar. They opened their eyes from time to time to check on the lesson, but their injuries remained their main focus. Their condition wasn't too poor, but they would definitely benefit from a trip to the medical bay.

Instead, most of the other recruits were clearly scared. Tremors ran through their bodies whenever Khan looked at them. They didn't want to refuse his orders, but fighting the Tainted ape was out of the question.

A few recruits had even worn cold expressions. They had developed a proper disgust toward Khan's teaching methods, but he didn't care about their opinions. He didn't even bother to address it.

"Is that it?" Khan asked while facing the row of recruits. "Is there no one else who wants to experience the terror of the battlefield?"

The recruits diverted their gazes. They didn't know what to expect from the madman in charge of the subject, and they didn't want their actions to worsen their situation.

"Good, no one should have the desire to experience that," Khan laughed before turning toward the insides of the hangar. "Come, come, and help your wounded companions. There won't be other battles today, but I still need to make a speech."

The recruits followed Khan's orders and gathered around him when he sat next to the cage. They formed a half-circle and made sure to place their injured companions in the front rows, but their attention often went on the angry Tainted ape screaming from the other side of the transparent surface.

"I think the purpose of my subject is clear by now," Khan exclaimed once everyone took their place on the floor. "You aren't bad, especially you six. I'm sure you will do great inside the army, but the universe is full of dangers, and you aren't ready to face them."

Most of the recruits in the hangar had seen blood for the first time in Khan's lesson, and almost everyone had understood the harsh truth that he had tried to teach. Many didn't like his methods, but they had to admit that they had been effective.

"Many of you have enough backing to avoid the battlefield forever," Khan continued. "Still, Istrone has proven that your wealth can't protect you when it matters. I have been the poorest recruit during the Kred's rebellion, but it's thanks to me that the Global Army managed to send reinforcements before the situation worsened even more."

Khan fell silent for a few seconds. He let the recruits absorb his words and accept the reality of the situation.

"I know I can come out as ruthless," Khan revealed, "But that same ruthlessness has allowed me to survive on Istrone, prove myself on Nitis, excel on Ecoruta, and win the tournament on Onia.

"I'm not asking you to become me. I wouldn't wish that on anyone. Yet, I think I have something worth teaching, something that might save your life one day. I can't force you to attend my lessons, but I suggest you do, even if you don't join the various exercises."

Khan did his best to convey his honest desire to prepare those recruits for the worst, and many understood that. His tone carried a faint sadness that was almost impossible to miss. He was only seventeen-year-old, but he had seen more than most soldiers twice his age.

"You won't fight the Tainted ape during my next lesson," Khan explained, "But I'll still try to break your confidence. I'll try a safer method to make sure that everyone can experience what I want to teach, so attend it before deciding to ditch my subject."

Khan smiled, but his gesture didn't reassure anyone. He was a big deal in the Global Army right now, so the recruits wanted to do well with him, but his standards seemed impossible.

"Well, I don't have anything else for today," Khan laughed. "You can go if you want unless you have something to ask. I'll try to be as honest as possible."

The young man who had been the first to face the Tainted ape raised his arm, and Khan nodded at him. The recruit cleared his throat a few times before voicing a question. "Sir, do we get grades for this subject? How do we know if we passed?"

Many nodded at that question, and Khan recalled that he had forgotten to explain that part. His subject was an extra in the normal education provided by the Global Army, so it didn't have explicit benefits.

"You'll pass when you can kill the Tainted ape," Khan explained. "I can't give you grades that have relevance to your education. I guess being prepared for the battlefield isn't enough as an incentive, right?"

No recruit nodded, but Khan saw their desire to do that. He chuckled playfully as he scratched his head. He didn't actually think about that, but it didn't take him long to come up with a solution.

"What do you think about a written recommendation?" Khan asked. "I think I'm famous enough to give value to something like that."

"Will the recommendation describe our personal qualities?" The woman with two short swords questioned.

"Sure, anything you want," Khan immediately agreed. "I'm not great with that stuff, so just tell me what you prefer. I only want you to survive during a crisis or on the battlefield. You have no idea how easy it is to die there."

Khan's complete disregard for the political consequences and benefits that his subject would have left the recruits speechless. He was really trying to do something good there, which granted points to his image.

"How did you manage to do so well on Istrone, sir?" Another injured recruit asked.

"My mindset is different from yours since I come from the Slums," Khan laughed, "And I have my master's harsh training method to thank too. My element has also played an important role in my preparation since I mostly focused on my martial art before Istrone."

"Which was the worst battlefield in your opinion, sir?" The young woman from before questioned.

"They were all bad," Khan stated. "I guess Istrone hit the hardest since I had to kill for the first time there, but the others didn't make me feel good for sure."

"Are the Stal on Ecoruta as big as they say?" Another recruit asked.

"Most of them are as tall as the ape," Khan said while pointing at the cage. "Yet, they are easy to fight if you have spells or other ranged attacks. Their physical strength is a problem, but they are quite dumb."

"What about the Guko?" Another question resounded from the audience.

"They are emotionless aliens," Khan responded without hiding his displeasure. "They only act logically, so I don't have a great impression of them."

"And the Ef'i?" The audience continued.

"They are a good company if you earn their respect," Khan explained. "They are messy and loud, but definitely good. Still, keep track of their tails if you end up fighting them. Those limbs are dangerous."

The recruits continued with their questions about Khan's many adventures, and they even became more confident as he kept giving honest answers. Many also stopped adding "sir" to their lines, and Khan didn't scold them about that.

The questions grew more personal, and Khan did their best to answer them. He tried to depict the cruelty and chaos of the battlefields he had seen in great detail. He didn't hide anything, no matter how gruesome an image could be.

"Why did you go on Ecoruta after Nitis?" A recruit eventually asked.

"I needed to clear my head," Khan responded while wearing a fake smile. "Though jumping in another battlefield isn't a great move, so don't imitate me."

"Was that about your girlfriend?" The woman with two blades asked.

Khan's fake smile couldn't help but freeze. Liiza was still a tough topic for him, but he didn't want to create a wall between him and his students, so he forced an answer out of his mouth. "Yes, it was about her."

The recruits' eyes lit up, and many opened their mouths or began to raise their hands, but no one ended up speaking. They realized that their next questions would have been too personal, especially after Khan had admitted how much Liiza had mattered to him.

The hangar fell silent. The recruits had gained a general idea of what Khan had gone through after Ylaco, so they only had questions that they didn't dare to voice in their minds.

Khan preferred to avoid waiting until the questions reached Liiza. He clapped his hands and jumped on his feet before giving his last order of the day. "Go back now. The lesson is over, and I hope to see you all in the next one. As I said, try to come before making your mind about my subject. Also, I'll answer your questions again even if you don't join the exercises, but let's keep them on the battlefields and similar topics, okay?"

The recruits understood the message and stood up to perform a military salute. Then, they left the hangar, and Khan finally had the chance to retrieve his phone to add a few notes.

Khan had the list of his students on his phone, and he could add personal impressions that no one could read. His packed schedule would make his days full, so he had decided to update his notes after each lesson.

Dinnertime had arrived, so Khan stuffed his stomach in the canteen before returning to his flat. The soldiers would take care of the Tainted ape, and Cora didn't ask to see him again that day, so Khan could dive into his training.

His goals were clear in his mind. Khan wanted to master his remaining techniques through the two training methods and improve his overall foundation.

The "simulated mental battle" could make the training halls redundant, and the [Blood Vortex] was necessary to become a second-level warrior quickly. Hence, Khan focused on his training methods for most of the night. His next lesson would be in two days, so he could go all-out now.

The only distraction that night came from Amber. She sent Khan a message to ask him about his first lesson, and he didn't mind taking some time off to answer her.

'No one died, so I think it went well,' Khan replied.

'I'm starting to take pity on your students,' Amber said in her next message.

'Hey, I stopped everything after a few broken bones,' Khan responded.

'I was wrong. I'm already pitying them,' Amber joked.

'Come on. I think it went really well. They even asked many questions about Istrone and the other planets,' Khan texted.

'That's great, though I expected as much. You are their age. They must feel safe asking you that stuff,' Amber explained.

'I hope they stick around,' Khan revealed.

'I'm sure they will,' Amber reassured.

'Are you getting all cute on me because of yesterday's girl?' Khan teased.

'Are you implying that I'm not cute normally?' Amber asked.

'You win this round, Professor Teldom,' Khan admitted.

The two chatted for a few more minutes, but Amber eventually went to sleep. Khan continued to train all night, and he went for the canteen as soon as the sun rose. He met with Cora again, and she did her best to scold him when she heard that he didn't sleep at all.

Khan made Cora give up on the matter quickly. He had to accompany her back to her dormitory to reassure her, and the soldiers that saw them inevitably gave birth to gossips.

After leaving Cora in her dormitory, Khan went directly toward the training hall. He had nothing to do that day, so he planned to spend most of his time fighting puppets.

His day went exactly as planned. Khan left the training hall when it was almost dinner time. He was in desperate need of shower and clean clothes, so he returned to his flat instead of going directly to the canteen. Still, when he came out of the bathroom, he found more than twenty messages waiting for him on his phone.

'What the fuck?' Khan exclaimed in his mind when he started to read the messages. They all came from unknown profiles, but he recognized their last names. Many members of his students' families had contacted him to complain about his teaching methods.