

Chaos' Heir 41

Chapter 41 - Teleport

Khan had read the travel's schedule on his phone, but he didn't expect it to involve a teleport. He knew nothing about interplanetary voyages, but his imagination had led him to believe that everything would happen through a spaceship.

The circular hall featured a large oval platform at its center. Khan studied its feature after Martha pointed at it, and curiosity inevitably spread inside him.

The platform had two curved pillars growing out of its vertices. Tubes that contained an azure liquid ran through the two horn-like structures and gave them a powerful aura. The pipes experienced random surges of energy that made their light shift from dim to bright and gave them an unstable vibe.

Similar tubes connected the white platform to the various consoles placed on the walls of the hall. Khan managed to see a few graphs and diagrams on their screens, but he couldn't understand much. He only recognized some equations mixed with symbols that had no meaning for him.

"We inherited this technology from the Nak," Luke said without moving his eyes from the teleport. "We rebuilt their spaceships at first, but everything changed when we found the first teleport. Interplanetary travels became far easier after that."

"Spaceships are far more reliable," Lieutenant Unchai explained while turning toward the special class. "You wouldn't even think about stepping in there if you knew how many things could go wrong. The amount of synthetic mana required for the teleport is also massive, but the Global Army has made an exception for its brightest recruits."

The boys and girls in the group couldn't help but smile at those remarks. The Lieutenant was openly labeling them as the best of their course. Even the wealthiest kids felt good to gain such acknowledgment from a proper soldier.

"We set the location to the third quadrant," One of the scientists exclaimed while turning toward the Lieutenant. "You can begin to step on the teleport."

Lieutenant Unchai nodded and stepped on the platform. He gestured to the recruits to follow him, but they took a few seconds to overcome their fears.

Only a few among them were brave enough to jump directly on the structure. Khan, Luke, and Bruce didn't even hesitate after Lieutenant Unchai's gesture. Khan couldn't wait to experience the teleport, while the other two boys trusted the Global Army too much to feel scared.

'Woah,' Khan gasped in his mind as tingling sensations ran through his spine. 'I have never felt the mana so clearly!'

The two horn-like pillars seemed able to contain the mana inside the edges of the platform. Khan felt immersed in a dense liquid that caused his bones to experience faint tremors.

'This feels different from my mana,' Khan thought while closing his eyes and immersing his mind into that atmosphere. 'It's almost dirty.'

All the recruits eventually stepped inside the teleport, and Lieutenant Unchai inspected his group one last time before nodding toward the scientists.

"Exit locked in," One of the scientists shouted. "They are ready to receive us."

"Synthetic mana one hundred percent stable," Another scientist shouted. "Starting the countdown!"

The shouts awakened Khan from his thoughts. Numbers resounded in the hall and quickly moved toward zero as the azure light radiated by the many tubes intensified and became a blinding halo.

Then, azure sparks started to run through the horn-like pillars until they connected their sharp tips. The scene only lasted one second since Khan's vision suddenly went dark.

A faint pressure appeared inside Khan. That feeling intensified until pain started to spread through his abdomen. His internal organs churned, and he inevitably held his breath to endure that process.

Luckily for him, the sensation only lasted for a few seconds. Other feelings appeared as soon as the pressure afflicting his abdomen started to fade. He felt cold spreading from his knees and palms as retches tried to reach his mouth.

Khan suppressed that sensation and struggled to open his eyes. The same white metal of the teleport appeared under him, but he soon noticed that something was off when he glanced past the platform's edges.

A green metal covered the surroundings of the teleport and ended on walls that carried similar shades. Consoles that had different shapes from those seen in the training camp filled that circular hall, and unknown faces handled them.

Khan found himself kneeling on the platform, but his curiosity didn't give him the time to stand up. He had caught a glimpse of something strange, and nothing inside him dared to move until he focused on that scene.

The scientists inside the new hall were mostly humans, but there were a few strange figures that he had only seen through his phone. Khan had obviously searched the Ef'i on the network, but seeing them with his own eyes caused a completely different reaction in his mind.

The Ef'i were a humanoid alien species with pale-brown skin that featured a few yellow patches on their back. Their faces were almost human, except for their stretched four eyes, pointy ears, long heads, and complete lack of hair.

Their hands had five fingers, but black claw-like nails grew from them. The few alien scientists in the hall kept them short, but Khan knew that they could stretch them at will.

The Ef'i had large feet but a slim physique. Still, their most iconic feature was the pointy tail growing from the bottom of their back. The white medical coats of the alien scientists had a hole in that spot where that limb could come out.

Khan forced himself to straighten his position after he got a clear view of the aliens. His insides were still churning, but he was managing to hold back the desire to vomit.

The same didn't apply to most of his companions. The recruits couldn't contain themselves and began to puke directly on the platform. Yet, a thin azure layer appeared whenever those substances tried to reach the white metal and burned them in an instant.

"The first teleports always broke because of this," Lieutenant Unchai whispered when he noticed that Khan was inspecting that scene. "Imagine billions of Credits wasted because the soldiers couldn't close their stomach."

A faint laugh came out of the Lieutenant before he made his way through the crouching recruits and jumped off the platform. One of the alien scientists stepped forward to greet the soldier, and the two exchanged a firm handshake and polite smiles.

"[It's a pleasure to be back here]," Lieutenant Unchai said in the Ef'i's language.

"No need to be so formal," The alien scientist replied in perfect human language. "Our alliance has lasted for centuries already. You are welcome here anytime you want."

Khan was still in a daze. The Ef'i moved and behaved like a human, but his physique made all those gestures odd to watch. Its tail even moved whenever it tried to express a new emotion.

'This one should be a female,' Khan thought while recalling the information found on the network. 'Our sexual organs aren't compatible, but I can differentiate them from the size of the chest. Female Ef'i usually have a smaller torso.'

Khan ignored why the network of the Global Army contained those descriptions, but he felt glad that he could recognize the sex of the alien thanks to them. He would be able to avoid making wrong impressions if a conversation with an Ef'i ever happened.

Lieutenant Unchai and the alien turned toward Khan when they saw him stepping off the teleport. His companions were still trying to stand, but he was only slightly pale after the process.

"You have a resilient one," The Ef'i exclaimed.

"He should have the highest attunement with mana among them since the others have yet to receive synthetic mana," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "Khan! Come and greet Tetli!"

Khan snapped out of his daze and marched toward the duo. He stretched his hand forward as a strange "[hello]" stuttered out of his mouth.

"That wasn't too bad," Tetli laughed while shaking his hand. "Try it again. Like this: [Heeeellloooo]."

Khan found the sharp change in her voice quite spectacular. Tetli went from having a harmonious human voice to the guttural sounds iconic of the Ef'i's language.

Khan nodded while committing to memory the sensations felt when he touched the alien's rough skin. He cleared his throat before trying to say the same word slowly.

Both Lieutenant Unchai and Tetli nodded when they heard Khan's second attempt. His accent was still off, but they could understand the meaning behind his word.

"You can proceed forward," Tetli eventually said while pointing at the exit from the circular all. "We'll take care of the other recruits."

"Thank you!" Lieutenant Unchai exclaimed while placing a hand behind Khan's back and pushing him toward the exit with him.

A long corridor that featured multiple body scanners and other scientists unfolded in Khan's vision. He had to go through that procedure again, but excitement inevitably began to build inside him.

Khan would be on a different planet once he exited that structure. He couldn't wait to go past that inspection and see the new environment with his own eyes.

"I thought you would be the thickheaded battle-oriented type," Lieutenant Unchai revealed as the duo walked through the scanners. "It turns out that you have something inside that shovel-shaped brain."

"I wish to become an ambassador for the Global Army one day," Khan whispered. "I know that my background isn't much, so I need to compensate by working hard."

"An ambassador?" Lieutenant Unchai gave voice to a surprised gasp. "That might take a long time. Still, it's far from impossible, especially if you show some talent in xenolinguistics."

Khan had revealed that information on purpose. Only Martha and Lieutenant Dyester knew about his goal, but he wanted to spread that idea inside the Global Army now.

Professor Norwell wanted to rope him into the Global Army, so Khan didn't want to give her too many hints. Instead, Lieutenant Unchai didn't seem to have hidden intentions. Revealing his goal to the soldier sounded like the best way to spread rumors among the higher-ups.

The duo crossed the last scanner before approaching the exit. Khan could already see barren red-brown ground past the few windows near the edges of the structure. His curiosity was about to explode, but Lieutenant Unchai suddenly placed an arm in front of him.

"They need to give you a pill to endure the new atmosphere," Lieutenant Unchai explained.

"Sir?" A human soldier who held a digital notebook called Lieutenant Unchai when he heard those words. "The boy doesn't need the pill. His attunement with mana is already past thirty percent."

Chapter 42 - Barren

Khan wasn't aware of the connection between mana and the foreign atmosphere, but he felt slightly disappointed when he heard about his attunement.

'Five months of training to gain a mere ten percent,' Khan sighed in his mind. 'Improving through meditations is so slow.'

Lieutenant Unchai didn't share his disappointment. He shot a surprised glance toward Khan before taking the digital notebook from the soldier's hands.

The Lieutenant read through the results of the scans while mumbling a few words. Khan didn't manage to understand much. He only heard the number thirty-one among those unclear lines.

Truth be told, Khan didn't have the time to check his attunement with mana in the past months. His schedule occupied the entirety of his days, and Lieutenant Dyester even took care of refilling his stash of lotions.

Khan didn't have any reason to visit the medical bay. He also knew that becoming a first-level warrior could take entire years, so he didn't bother to keep track of his attunement. After all, the first important checkpoint was already behind him. Other percentages had no meaning until he reached fifty percent.

"Did you say ambassador before?" Lieutenant Unchai asked while handing the digital notebook back to the soldier.

Khan limited himself to nod, and the Lieutenant wore a pensive expression while his hand reached his chin. The man sized Khan with his eyes while various thoughts filled his mind.

"Try to perform well in the semestral missions," Lieutenant Unchai eventually exclaimed. "There might be something for you if your talent doesn't drop."

Khan's eyes lit up. He didn't expect his faint hint from before to give results already, but he didn't refuse that outcome. Yet, his doubts about the alien atmosphere remained in his mind.

"Can I breathe Onia's air with thirty percent attunement?" Khan asked while turning toward the Lieutenant.

"It's not a matter of breathing," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "Your body has already gone past normal human limits at this point. The mana will naturally help you absorb what you need from the air. You also have lower requirements. Give it a few hours and you'll barely notice the difference with Earth."

Khan nodded, and the duo began to walk toward the exit. His excitement was about to burst out of his body when the metal doors slid open, but the first contact with the alien air ruined the moment when he stepped on the red-brown ground.

Khan bent his back forward as he gasped for air. He could sense his lungs expanding and shrinking whenever he breathed, but they didn't seem to provide any oxygen to his tissues.

Instead, he felt like a dense liquid was trying to fill his lungs and seal his throat. He was suffocating even with his breathing working as usual. The strangeness of the sensation and the fear felt in those moments were impossible to put into simple words.

However, his lungs slowly became used to that change. The liquid that seemed to fill his organs grew lighter and lost part of its density as Khan continued to breathe.

Some life eventually returned to his flesh. Khan still felt weak and out of breath, but he wasn't dying anymore. Moreover, his condition seemed to improve whenever he concluded a breathing cycle. His body was getting used to Onia's atmosphere.

"Welcome to Onia," Lieutenant Unchai exclaimed when he saw that Khan could straighten his back and focus on the environment. "The planet seems barren on the surface, but its underground world is rich in life and vegetation."

A red-brown spectacle unfolded in Khan's vision. His eyes went past the various black buildings that filled his surroundings. He focused on the environment outside of the settlement and saw a series of short mountains stretching in the distance.

The Global Army had built the camp on a plain that featured many pieces of cracked ground. The site's layout resembled Ylaco's training camp, even if it seemed to lack a few core buildings. It was also smaller, and a tall fence reinforced with mana encircled the various structures.

The ground and the mountains in the distance feature the same red-brown terrain. There didn't seem to any change in that environment.

'It's quite hot,' Khan thought while moving his eyes toward the sky.

Onia was far warmer than Earth. His uniform didn't seem to suit that hot environment. Sweat even accumulated on his back, but everything became meaningless when he noticed the two suns illuminating the sky.

"Don't turn yourself blind," Lieutenant Unchai shouted. "Onia only has two hours of darkness, and the days here last for thirty hours. The Ef'i have superior stamina due to the harsh conditions of their planet. They are quite strong."

"Stronger than humans?" Khan asked.

"We get stronger after the evolution," Lieutenant Unchai laughed. "You can say that humans are late bloomers. Yet, some of our talents can still rival the best Ef'i even before surpassing one hundred percent attunement."

Lieutenant Unchai couldn't help but glance at Khan when he said those words. Winning the tournaments on Onia was important for the Global Army, and finding new talents was vital for that part.

A jeep eventually ran from the other side of the camp and stopped in front of the duo. The soldier riding it jumped off and performed a military salute before climbing back into the vehicle.

Lieutenant Unchai entered the jeep and gestured to Khan to hop in. Khan sat with him in the backseats, but he still glanced toward the previous structure in confusion.

"Shouldn't we wait for the others?" Khan asked.

"They will be out for a bit," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "Tetli and the others can take care of them. I honestly didn't expect to have company during this part of the trip."

Khan limited himself to nod before continuing with his questions. "Where are we going?"

"This camp only has the teleport and a few structures meant for the other soldiers," Lieutenant Unchai said while patting the front seat. "We must go to another training camp. This place isn't suitable for recruits."

The jeep soon left the camp, and Khan didn't bother to question Lieutenant Unchai anymore. Onia's environment had captured his entire attention. That red-brown stillness was quite plain, but it gained a mystical vibe since it belonged to an alien world.

The car trip lasted for a couple of hours that Khan spent meditating once he grew tired of the environment. A larger training camp unfolded in his eyes once the group was about to reach their destination. The Global Army had built the site at the base of a short mountain, with some structures dug inside the red-brown rocks.

The camp didn't only feature the classic architecture of the Global Army. Humankind had moved toward functional but majestic buildings during the five hundred years after the First Impact. They had left behind part of their artistic sense to focus on the wonderful fusion between technology and mana.

However, some of the structures inside the camp had a completely different color. They didn't use the iconic black metal of the Global Army. They relied on the same green alloy around the teleport.

The style of the green buildings was also completely different. Humankind preferred smooth surfaces that featured multiple large windows, but the green structures had vast arrays of spike-like

items on their entire exteriors. Their windows were even fairly small. They seemed to have battle purposes rather than a purely aesthetic nature.

"Are we going to live with the Ef'i?" Khan asked when he finished studying the green buildings.

"Smart lad!" Lieutenant Unchai exclaimed. "The Global Army thought to use this chance to give you an idea of the Ef'i. Getting used to facing aliens early on is for the best."

'Lieutenant Dyester might have been correct,' Khan thought while Lieutenant Unchai exploded into a laugh. 'The Global Army might have planned to prepare us for the tournaments.'

Khan didn't mind those hidden intentions. He simply didn't like that his organization had to keep some evident purpose a secret.

The jeep entered the training camp, and Lieutenant Unchai and Khan jumped off the vehicle. The soldier in the car then did an inversion and left the site to return to his position.

"I'll show you where you will stay," Lieutenant Unchai announced. "There won't be lessons today, so you can rest and make yourself at home."

"[Look at them]!" An alien voice that spoke the Ef'i language suddenly resounded behind the two. "[The Earthlings have arrived]!"

Khan and Lieutenant Unchai turned and saw a tall Ef'i followed by a series of younger aliens belonging to the same species. His face expressed a bit of arrogance that the differences from the humans couldn't hide.

"[Teco]!" Lieutenant Unchai suddenly shouted. "[I didn't expect to find you here on my first day. Did you manage to produce some good students this year?]"

"[Our batches only get better]," Teco scoffed. "[The Ef'i don't get lazy after victories. Humans do]."

"[Why don't we test it out then?]" Lieutenant Unchai proposed. "[Your best against my best]."

Teco snorted before giving voice to a guttural sound. The tallest Ef'i among his group stepped forward and joined his fists to perform a polite salute.

"Go on," Lieutenant Unchai said while pushing Khan forward. "Go greet your opponent."

"Opponent?!" Khan asked in a surprised tone.

Khan didn't understand anything about the previous conversation. He even ignored the meaning behind those tones.

"The Ef'i take pride in their strength," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "The best way to win their respect is to face them in a fight. You wanted to become an ambassador, right? Use this chance to establish your first alien relationship."

Khan felt that everything was moving too quickly, but he didn't turn his back on the fight. He actually felt curious about his current power.

Khan stepped forward and placed his arms behind his back before performing a military salute. His eyes didn't move from the tall Ef'i during the process. He inspected his opponent from head to toe during those short seconds.

His opponent was two meters tall and was clearly a male due to his broad chest. He was still quite slender, but a few bulging muscles ruined his harmonious physique.

"What are the rules of the fight?" Khan asked.

"Knock him unconscious," Lieutenant Unchai explained.

"I meant about man-," Khan wanted to ask, but Teco suddenly gave voice to a guttural sound and suppressed his question.

The tall Ef'i immediately bent his legs and began to summon his mana. Khan could sense his power increasing. The alien was trying to perform a complete technique.

The instincts that Lieutenant Dyester had forced his body to memorize kicked in. Khan bent his legs and shot forward in an instant. He didn't even bother to try to summon his mana.

The Ef'i was still in the process of gathering his mana when a sharp pain spread from his abdomen. His feet also left the ground as he flew back into his group.

Khan had closed the distance between the two in an instant. His leg had landed on the alien's abdomen before he could complete his technique!

Yet, the Ef'i stood up and cleaned the blood that had appeared on the corners of his mouth. The alien had endured Khan's blow. He was ready to resume the battle, and an excited smile even appeared on his face.

Chapter 43 - Blood

Khan's battles after he had obtained mana had been completely one-sided. The bullies couldn't help but suffer severe injuries every time he hit them, while Lieutenant Dyester was simply unbeatable.

The tall Ef'i was the first opponent who could put up a decent fight, and Khan ended up feeling excited about it. The alien could show him his current limits and give him a clear idea of his current prowess.

'He definitely felt it,' Khan thought when he looked at the green spots of blood that remained on the corners of the alien's mouth.

The Ef'i gave voice to a few guttural sounds before patting his chest. Khan didn't understand what he said, but a clear word eventually resounded while the alien pointed at his face.

"Citlalli!" The alien shouted while pointing at his face multiple times.

Khan finally understood what he meant. The Ef'i was announcing his name, and Khan happily imitated his gesture.

"Khan!" Khan shouted while pointing at his face.

The two exchanged an excited smile before resuming their battle stances. Citlalli didn't try to summon his mana at that time. He bent his legs and stretched one arm forward. His claws grew by a few centimeters, and his tail arched until it pointed at Khan from above his shoulder.

Khan suddenly recalled about the Ef'i's pointy tail. He didn't forget about that limb, but he didn't consider that the alien could use it in battle until then.

'Their martial arts should be different,' Khan realized in his mind.

The different physique of the Ef'i opened the path for techniques that humans couldn't perform. Those aliens had access to normal martial arts due to their humanoid figures, but they could also go past them thanks to their additional features.

Khan inspected Citlalli's body before giving up on trying to understand his fighting techniques from those glances. He wouldn't need to find it out if he executed the Lightning-demon style correctly.

Khan took a deep breath as his body bent forward. He seemed about to fall to the ground, but his figure shot ahead when his knees were only a few centimeters from the red-brown terrain.

Faint afterimages materialized behind Khan as his light steps generated an incredible acceleration. He reached his opponent in an instant, but he suddenly pointed his right foot and twisted his ankle to rotate his body and shift his momentum on his rising leg.

The tip of Khan's foot dug the terrain as he performed a roundhouse kick aimed at Citlalli's stomach. The alien couldn't react to his incredible speed again, but determination appeared on his face when he noticed the arrival of the attack.

The claws coming out of Citlalli's naked feet stretched and curved until they pierced the terrain. Khan's kick landed on his torso at that point, and the immense power carried by his attack pushed the alien backward.

However, Citlalli pointed his sharp feet to avoid flying away. His claws dug the terrain and made him stop after sliding for only two meters. His limbs couldn't reach Khan at that distance, but the same didn't apply to his tail.

Citlalli's tail shot forward and aimed for the center of Khan's chest. That limb was slim and quick, and Khan felt forced to cross his arms to block it.

An immense force fell on Khan's arms and spread through his shoulders. His body inevitably slid backward, and a deep wound appeared on his right forearm.

'That's crazy sharp!' Khan shouted in his mind before taking a step back to exit the alien's range.

Khan inspected his forearm and found a two centimeters deep cut where the tail had hit him. Citlalli wasn't holding back his deadly force at all. Things might have gotten dangerous if Khan didn't manage to block the attack.

'Is he trying to kill me?' Khan wondered, but his expression froze when Citlalli showed a disappointed face.

The alien had seen the surprise and fear that had appeared in Khan's face, and the event let him down. Citlalli believed to have found a worthy opponent, but it seemed that Khan was only a scared kid.

'They don't simply value battles,' Khan understood after noticing that disappointment. 'They worship them!'

Khan then took another deep breath and let go of his restraints. He had aimed both times for Citlalli's torso because Lieutenant Unchai had only ordered to knock him down. Yet, his previous approach wouldn't work since the Ef'i's idea of battle was far different.

The fear, surprise, and excitement that ran through Khan's face disappeared. He abandoned every emotion as his expression grew cold.

The Ef'i might have trained Citlalli to consider every battle as a matter of life and death, but Lieutenant Dyester had done the same. Moreover, Khan had experienced a level of mental torture due to his nightmares that normal kids of his age couldn't even imagine.

Citlalli seemed ready for his first war, but Khan had already witnessed it every night of the last eleven and a half years. The Ef'i's honorable approach to pain came from the beliefs of his species, but it couldn't compare to Khan's mindset. He had accepted desperation as his normality a long time ago.

Khan shot forward again. He performed his usual acceleration, but Citlalli had grown used to that technique by then. His four eyes even allowed him to follow the quick movements of his opponent, and his tail promptly pierced the air to intercept the sprint.

Yet, Khan flowed into another attack when he noticed the incoming tail. His body had already begun to rotate, but he put more strength on the foot stabbed on the ground.

The tail pierced Khan's figure, but Citlalli suddenly realized that he had only hit an afterimage. Khan had jumped without interrupting his rotation. His body continued to spin mid-air and moved the power accumulated with his momentum toward his right leg.

Citlalli couldn't do anything to stop that attack. He had noticed the second technique too late. His four eyes could only watch as Khan's horizontal figure delivered a descending kick at the top of his long head.

The Ef'i gritted his teeth to endure the blow, but the kick inevitably flung him downward. His knees and palms hit the ground as everything grew confused in his vision.

Khan couldn't help but respect the Ef'i's resilience when he saw that Citlalli struggled to stand up while his body finished descending toward the ground. However, those thoughts only affected the back of his mind. His legs moved as soon as his feet touched the terrain.

A knee filled Citlalli's vision when he managed to regain some focus. The alien had just begun to straighten his position, but Khan didn't let him rest.

Green blood fell from Citlalli's nose and mouth as Khan's attack straightened his back and exposed his torso. Khan noticed the Ef'i's tail flying toward him with the corner of his eyes, but his experience told him that his next kick would land before it.

Khan bent his body backward to give power to his leg. His knee was already in the air due to his previous attack, so he only had to tilt his shinbone to make his heel hit the alien torso.

Citlalli flew backward again. The alien fell among his group, but Khan didn't let him go even at that point. He jumped among the Ef'i and stomped both feet on the chest of his confused opponent.

The other Ef'i didn't dare to affect the battle. Their companion was lying among them, and Khan was jumping on his chest, but they didn't move.

Khan didn't care about his surroundings either. Citlalli had decided to have a battle to the death, and he would happily play along.

Images of his nightmare flashed in Khan's vision whenever he jumped on Citlalli's chest. The alien spat green blood every time the entirety of Khan's body weight fell on his abdomen. His senses were about to give in, but the relentless assault suddenly stopped and gave him the time to breathe.

Khan found a sharp tail wrapped around his left arm. Teco had stepped in to interrupt the battle. Disappointment flashed on his face when the Ef'i glanced at his student, but that feeling didn't hide his respect toward Khan.

"Good battle," Teco exclaimed with a guttural accent.

Khan nodded and stepped off Citlalli. His aloof eyes fell on his bleeding opponent one last time before he turned and walked back to Lieutenant Unchai.

The Lieutenant patted his shoulder. Khan heaved a helpless sigh as he suppressed the violent images of his nightmare. He didn't lose control of his actions, but the coldness shown during the last part of the battle had scared him.

'I was ready to kill him,' Khan thought while mustering his courage to turn toward the alien group.

Citlalli had clearly deserved that beatdown, and the Ef'i even saw it as a necessary procedure due to their customs. Yet, Khan was a human, so his ideals were different. He didn't feel good after attempting to kill one of his future sparring partners.

Teco gave voice to a guttural sound, and the group of Ef'i quickly grabbed Citlalli to drag him toward one of the green buildings. Those young aliens nodded when they crossed Khan's gaze. They seemed unable to avoid showing their respect toward him.

Even Teco abandoned his previous fervor and exchanged a polite handshake with Lieutenant Unchai before following his students. The group left in a matter of seconds, and Khan soon remained alone with the soldier.

"Did I do well?" Khan asked as doubts raged inside his mind.

"You did well, kid," Lieutenant Unchai sighed when he saw Khan's conflicted expression. "The first contact with an alien species is always peculiar. Your first had to be the Ef'i, so you've learnt how reckless they are when it comes to battles."

"Are they all ready to die over these pointless fights?" Khan asked.

"They aren't pointless for them," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "Learn the alien traditions, but don't let them get to your head. You have only adapted to their culture. No need to overthink your actions."

Lieutenant Unchai then led Khan toward his habitation, but his mood didn't improve during the walk. A reoccurring question deafened the rest of his thoughts and forced him to accept the reality of his previous actions.

'What would I do in front of a Nak?' Khan wondered while moving to the foreign building and entering the first empty flat that he found.

Khan didn't want to think anymore. He only wanted to dive deep into his training and ignore the recent events until he understood himself better.

Khan had a lot of time for himself inside his new habitation. He didn't bother to study the insides of the black building due to his poor mood, but its style resembled his dormitory, so finding a flat wasn't an issue.

The building didn't even have soldiers patrolling its corridors, so Khan had only needed to find an empty flat before sitting on a bed and starting his usual training.

The other recruits didn't arrive anytime soon. Khan could focus on the mental training for his element. He had just completed the seventh exercise, so he had to repeat it without emotions to clear the eighth.

Khan studied a relatively large lump of mana inside his brain as he tried to think about many small hands meant to modify it. However, the process was far slower than usual since a faint azure barrier was isolating his target.

Every even mental exercise required him to repeat the previous lesson without using emotions. The process forced him to create a barrier made of thoughts and mana that isolated every feeling.

Only emotionless thoughts could affect the mana inside the barrier, but Khan's control over them was lacking. He was basically using less than half of his mind in the exercise, which inevitably slowed down the entire procedure.

Khan found it even harder to approach the exercise that morning. His barrier continued to open whenever he tried to manipulate the mana. Images of his battle against Citlalli appeared in his vision when the emotions invaded his thoughts. He saw himself jumping on the alien's chest and feeling nothing but coldness.

That interruption happened a few times before Khan gave up on his mental training. He would get nowhere until he fixed his mindset, but proper answers still struggled to arrive.

Part of him still belonged to a sixteen years old boy who wanted to live a normal life. Yet, there was a mature man who had become used to experiencing true desperation on the other side.

Boy-Khan wasn't ready to take a life. He only wanted to bathe in the wonders of mana and explore the universe. His desires were quite childish, but they were also appropriate for his age.

Instead, man-Khan went through the nightmare of the Second Impact every night. He had grown used to the sight of charred and maimed corpses. His life in the Slums had also forced him to develop a faint paranoia toward his peers.

Khan tried to sort his thoughts and find a middle ground between those two sides, but the quest appeared impossible. Moreover, his personality was naturally shifting toward man-Khan as his training and age advanced.

'Will I turn into a cold murderer?' Khan wondered while recalling Lieutenant Dyester's words. 'Do I already have that tendency?'

The aspect that made Khan hesitate the most was his lack of regret toward that trend. He could understand the negative features connected to a cold and uncaring personality, but everything seemed justified in front of his desperation.

Khan remained on his bed while his mind went through those chaotic thoughts. He didn't bother to meditate, and even his appetite struggled to arrive. Lunchtime had already passed, but he didn't feel like standing up and understanding how to find food in that alien training camp.

A familiar figure then walked past his flat. Khan only managed to catch a faint glimpse of familiar dark hair before a face decided to peek inside his flat.

"You are here," Martha exclaimed when she noticed Khan on the bed.

Khan inspected his friend. Martha was still pale even after many hours had passed since the teleport, but she could stand easily, at least. Also, excitement filled her face due to her first trip on an alien planet.

"What happened to you?" Martha asked when she noticed that Khan's mood was quite poor.

Martha didn't even hesitate to enter the flat and sit on Khan's bed. She felt comfortable around him, and the duo had never tried to move their relationship past friendship anyway.

"I fought against one of the Ef'i," Khan revealed while staring at the wall in front of him.

"And?" Martha asked as her eyes widened in surprise.

"And I beat him, hard," Khan continued.

"That's great!" Martha shouted. "You have already established a good foundation for your future connections on Onia. The Ef'i will continue to respect you for years!"

Martha almost couldn't believe that Khan had fought an Ef'i while she was recovering from the teleport, but she felt truly happy for her friend. After all, she knew how that feat could improve his path to become an ambassador in the future.

"I was ready to kill him, Martha," Khan added while keeping his voice down. "I think something inside me is broken."

Other recruits began to walk through the corridor connected to Khan's room. Many of them inevitably noticed the scene, and faint laughs escaped from their mouths when they saw the two sitting on the same bed.

Chatters resounded through the corridor. The special class would definitely keep that gossip alive for many months, but Khan and Martha barely noticed their noise.

Martha slowly realized that Khan was going through a difficult moment, and helplessness filled her mind when she understood that her words wouldn't do much in that situation.

She knew something that Khan had failed to realize during his days in the training camp. Man-Khan already had the mindset of an experienced soldier who had served on the frontlines, but that couldn't suit a boy.

"You are ahead of us," Martha eventually sighed and caught Khan's attention.

"We will all learn how to gain your mindset," Martha continued when Khan fixed his eyes on her.

"That usually happens during our first real battle, or when we take a life for the first time. However, all of us will inevitably reach your point."

Khan didn't answer. He continued to listen to Martha and review her words. There was truth in her lines, even if they seemed to carry a great sadness.

"Recruits always tend to forget that the Global Army is teaching us how to kill," Martha scoffed. "The known universe might be at peace, but we remain soldiers. Take Lieutenant Dyester, for example. The next crisis might be behind the corner, and we might end up in the middle of it."

"Should I just look at the positive side then?" Khan asked.

"I think you should find the path that doesn't make you regret things," Martha replied while putting her back on the wall and staring at the other side of the flat. "You have years to find your answers. We won't start to search for them until the traumatic event actually happens."

Khan continued to look at Martha's face before her words finally managed to seep inside his mind. He then released a meaningless growl while lying on the bed and stretching his legs on Martha's lap.

"Take these dirty things away from me!" Martha snorted while trying to move away Khan's legs, but the latter forced them to remain above her.

"Weren't you comforting me?" Khan began to laugh. "I'm comfortable now."

"Shut up and move!" Martha complained, but she eventually started to laugh too while fighting against Khan's legs.

"Fine!" Martha eventually gave up when she understood that she couldn't get rid of those nimble limbs. "Just for a few minutes!"

"We are lucky the other recruits have already gone past the room," Khan laughed while putting his hands behind his head and staring at the ceiling.

"You are actually enjoying this!" Martha pouted while pinching Khan's arm.

Martha suddenly noticed a red spot of blood when her move forced Khan to retract his arm. The cut caused by Citlalli's tail was still there, but the wound had started to close.

"Why did you worry so much about your intentions when the Ef'i wanted to kill you?" Martha asked as her hand gently touched Khan's forearm and kept it still to inspect the injury.

"It's nothing," Khan exclaimed without retracting his arm any further.

Some warmth spread inside his mind as Martha's fingers circled the edges of the cut. She appeared really concerned about the wound, and Khan couldn't help but stare at her serious face during the process.

"You are quite stunning," Khan eventually said in a plain voice. "How did you even end up taking care of me?"

Martha blushed and prepared herself to hit Khan, but her hand stopped when she noticed that he was wearing his serious expression.

"Try not to change when the trauma hits you," Khan continued. "I'll help you take care of that matter once it happens, but remain the same. It would be a pity."

Martha continued to remain stunned. Her hand was still on Khan's forearm, and faint tremors ran through it as she kept staring at those azure eyes. Yet, a sudden growl resounded from Khan's abdomen and ruined that romantic scene.

"Shut up, idiot," Martha said in a slightly high-pitched voice before retracting her hand and moving Khan's legs away.

The girl jumped off the bed and neared the entrance of the flat, but she stopped her tracks when she was about to return to the corridor.

"I know I can count on you," Martha whispered before shooting a glance toward Khan and leaving the room.

Khan remained alone inside the flat. Everything had grown colder after Martha had left, and the images of the battle against Citlalli reappeared in his vision. Yet, they didn't seem too grim anymore. Instead, Khan managed to see their positive side.

'I'm strong,' Khan realized in his mind before closing his eyes and going back into his brain.

The eighth exercise was waiting for him, and something told him that it would go far better now.

Chapter 45 - Training Hall

The recruits spent the first day on Onia inside their flats. Most of them had to rest to recover from the negative effects of the teleport. Some of the soldiers inside the camp even opted to bring food directly into the building since the younglings didn't have enough energy to stand.

Khan remained alone in his flat. The special class had the entire ground floor of the building for themselves, so some managed to claim rooms for themselves. Still, that mostly happened to the wealthy kids, while Khan's situation came from the gossips that ran among his peers.

The other kids wanted to give him the chance to remain alone with Martha if the situation required it. Of course, Khan didn't learn about that on his own. Martha had to explain it through a message.

The Global Army's network worked fine on Onia. The soldiers had occupied the planet for centuries already, so they had many structures meant for those services. Almost every training camp worked as a station for the signal.

Khan ate, meditated, spent hours in his mental training, and repeated the various forms of the Lightning-demon style inside his flat after sealing the entrance. His day went by quickly, and he soon hit the bed to return to his nightmare.

Khan had set the alarm early as usual, but his phone didn't have the time to ring the next morning since a loud siren echoed through the entire building and forced all the recruits to wake up.

'It's four am!' Khan shouted in his mind when his sleepy eyes fell on his phone. 'Wait. Do Earth hours even count here?'

Khan browsed through the various menus and discovered that his phone had already adapted to Onia's time. He could see that the device considered the days thirty hours long now, but the Global Army didn't use that additional time to let him sleep a bit more.

"All recruits must gather outside of the building in five minutes," Lieutenant Unchai's voice resounded through the entire floor. "Don't be late. I don't want to show you my punishments so soon."

The recruits didn't have much choice after those threats. Khan quickly donned one of the clean uniforms inside his flat and washed his face with a cold liquid in the bathroom that resembled water before diving outside the building.

Khan was one of the first to arrive outside. Lieutenant Unchai was already waiting for them in front of the building. His eyes moved between his phone and the recruits as he kept track of the passage of time.

One recruit ended up arriving a mere ten seconds after the countdown reached zero. She was a tall girl with long blond hair and a sleepy face that Khan vaguely knew as Iris.

"Do five laps around the camp," Lieutenant Unchai ordered. "Report to me once you are done."

Iris widened her eyes, but she didn't feel too saddened about that punishment. After all, a mere five laps were nothing for the body of someone with attunement past twenty percent. However, Lieutenant Unchai soon shattered her dreams.

"The Global Army considers the mountain part of the training camp," Lieutenant Unchai added in a severe tone. "Don't get lost. It's hard to find recruits on Onia. Only the Ef'i can differentiate between the mountains."

Iris' expression froze, and she even tried to complain, but no words came out of her open mouth when she focused on Lieutenant Unchai's stern face.

All the recruits remained silent during those seconds. None of them dared to exchange glances with the girl. Iris could only walk toward the exit of the camp and start her punishment.

"The environment on Onia is harsh," Lieutenant Unchai announced once he confirmed that Iris had started her first lap. "We are only four hours into the day, but the temperatures are already high."

Lieutenant Unchai pointed at the sky to emphasize his words. The light radiated by the suns made the scene feel like one of the hottest days on Earth, but that was only a regular early morning for Onia.

"Longer days might sound like more breaks in your lazy minds," Lieutenant Unchai continued, "But I only see them as a chance to train more. You must abandon your human schedules during these two weeks. You'll live as Ef'i and work harder than them."

"What about our Masters, sir?" Luke politely asked after performing a military salute.

"They are still handling the paperwork for the travel," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "You are completely mine for the next few days."

Luke's expression froze, but he didn't dare to show any unpleasant feeling. He limited himself to break his salute and wait for the Lieutenant to give orders.

"Your new schedule will feature physical training, lessons, and more physical training," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "Your Masters can take care of the second physical session once they arrive here, but you'll remain mine for the first. Is everything clear?"

The recruits shouted a loud "yes, sir" at the same time, and the Lieutenant nodded before pointing at a large building near the mountain.

"You'll fight there," Lieutenant Unchai. "I'll use the first week to evaluate, fix, and improve your combat style. The best of you will have the chance to fight against Ef'i during the second week, so work hard."

Excitement inevitably spread through the recruits. The various training sessions were nothing unusual, but the chance to fight aliens was priceless. That feat would end up on their profile and improve their value in the eyes of the Global Army.

"Khan has been kind enough to defeat the best Ef'i in the other group while you were out," Lieutenant Unchai suddenly announced. "The aliens can't wait to face you all, so work hard."

All the recruits immediately turned toward Khan. They still recalled how hard it had been to recover from the harmful effects of the teleport, but their companion had managed to fight and defeat one of the Ef'i during that time.

'Did he really need to say it out loud?' Khan sighed in his mind while forcing himself to ignore those glances.

Khan knew that Lieutenant Unchai didn't have bad intentions, but being at the center of the attention was quite bothersome for someone who spent most of his time training. His political skills were still too poor to handle all the wealthy kids.

"You have watched enough," Lieutenant Unchai announced. "Move! March toward the arena and start warming up! I'll reach you in a few minutes."

All the recruits started to walk toward the arena, and Lieutenant Unchai oversaw their march. Yet, he placed a hand on Khan's shoulder to stop him and separate him from the rest of the group.

Many noticed that scene, but they ignored it after shooting a few curious glances. Only Martha inspected that action a bit more, but she turned when Khan nodded at her.

"Do I get to skip morning training after beating the Ef'i?" Khan asked after the other recruits were far away.

"In your dreams," Lieutenant Unchai snorted while leading Khan toward a different part of the camp. "I can't put you against the other recruits until I understand how strong they are."

"Will I have to fight you?" Khan asked as his mind silently prepared him for a beatdown.

"I have something better," Lieutenant Unchai exclaimed while revealing a proud smile. "You have never been inside a training hall, right?"

Khan's eyes lit up before looking around in excitement, and his gaze soon focused on a large building in the distance since there didn't seem to be anything else relevant on his path.

The building was two stories tall, and part of its large base was inside the mountain. It didn't have any window, but faint azure flashes ran through its black surfaces.

Lieutenant Unchai led Khan inside the building and tinkered with a few menus after the entrance to register Khan's genetic signature.

Ample insides unfolded in Khan's vision. The corridor after the entrance could contain a group of thirty people, and the many halls connected to it seemed as big as the various basements in Ylaco's training camp.

"I bet you don't even know how the training halls work," Lieutenant Unchai sighed while leading Khan into one of the rooms.

Khan limited himself to shake his head. The amount of space available in those halls already outclassed the cramped area of the prisons of the camp. That alone made his eyes shine in excitement.

Still, the surprises were far from over. Lieutenant Unchai tapped his foot a few times, and a series of menus lit up on the floor. He browsed through them with his legs and eventually arrived at a label that said "free advanced combat training".

Lieutenant Unchai pressed that label, and a mechanical noise immediately spread inside a wall in the distance. Gears and drills moved on the other side of the black metal, and a cavity soon slid open.

A humanoid puppet slowly walked out of the cavity. Wires and tubes that contained azure energy detached from its body during the process before returning inside the wall. The hole then closed, and white writings appeared on the wall as a mechanical voice resounded inside the hall.

"Level zero," The mechanical voice announced while the puppet took a simple battle stance.

"It won't start fighting until you attack it," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "Defeating it will make the training program move to the next difficulty level. Don't hold back. The Global Army makes them to take blows."

Chapter 46 - Levels

Dark-silver metal made the entire exoskeleton of the puppet. The training dummy was a few centimeters short of being two meters tall, and it featured large spheres instead of fingers and hands.

White light shone from the puppet's joints and made it visible in the faint darkness of the training hall. The neon and the glow of the writing on the wall were the only forms of illumination inside the area, but they were bright enough to avoid any issue linked to vision.

"Can I break it?" Khan asked as his legs started to itch.

"You must to get to the next level," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "Don't bother thinking about the cost of these things. The Global Army will pay for everything during these two weeks."

"What level should I reach?" Khan asked while stretching his arms and legs.

"You must be a first-level warrior to handle the levels past ten," Lieutenant Unchai replied.

"Reaching that point means that you have achieved a competent proficiency level with your martial arts. Of course, that evaluation only involves the base techniques, not their version with mana."

"No mana then?" Khan asked as a tinge of disappointment seeped into his voice.

"The puppets capable of testing actual proficiency levels are far more expensive," Lieutenant Unchai announced. "The Global Army can't give them for free, especially for a recruit who can't control mana correctly. You have to stick to the base techniques this time."

Khan nodded and prepared himself to fight, but Lieutenant Unchai continued to explain the puppet's features. "The training program will analyze your fighting style and try to counter it as you advance through the levels. Its system contains hundreds of martial arts that reach up to fifty points, and it can mix them if needed."

Lieutenant Unchai's words were a sweet melody that entered Khan's ears. Lieutenant Dyester had stressed the importance of training halls, but Khan had never managed to understand how useful they were. However, everything became clear when he heard those explanations.

"The system resets every time you exit the training program," Lieutenant Unchai added. "I suggest you work your way through the various levels and learn the different functions before creating targeted exercises. You might be unable to cross the fifth level after starting from zero, but things can go differently if you go directly to that difficulty."

Lieutenant Unchai glanced at Khan to see if the boy had understood his words, and the latter nodded. Everything was quite clear, and Khan even tapped the floor to review the various options and commands that the training program had to offer.

Khan only had access to a few menus with his genetic signature, so browsing through them was extremely easy. The meaning behind Lieutenant Unchai recent explanation became clear after he reached the list of martial arts in the training program. The various levels became harsher depending on how much time the system had spent adapting to his battle style.

"I'll see where the system stops me before trying to reach my highest," Khan announced, and Lieutenant Unchai nodded at those words.

"That's for the best," Lieutenant Unchai continued. "Every martial art has positive and negative matchups. Try to focus on the overall level of the puppet to gain an idea of your proficiency. Remember that this only serves to give you battle experience in different fields. A lot will change once you start relying on mana."

Khan nodded before starting to jump on the spot. He was ready, and Lieutenant Unchai sensed his excitement. The soldier turned to approach the exit before giving some last directives.

"The training hall will automatically warn you when the lessons are up," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "You can spend as much time as you want inside here after them. I'll only bother you if some of your companions turn out to be suitable opponents or when it's time to fight the Ef'i."

"Can I order food from here?" Khan asked before the Lieutenant could leave the training hall.

"Just connect your phone to the floor," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "The soldiers can't bring much here, but I don't think that's an issue for you."

"Not at all!" Khan shouted, and his expression grew aloof when he heard the metal doors sliding behind him.

Khan took his phone out of his pocket and placed it inside an opening on the floor. Menus lit up there, but he ignored them for the time being.

Khan removed his shoes and took off the upper part of his uniform. His opponent couldn't die or suffer permanent injuries. He could finally go all-out without worrying about nasty consequences.

'Defeating level ten will put the proficiency of my basic techniques on competent,' Khan thought before taking a deep breath and bending forward.

Khan shot forward, deploying one of his best acceleration. The puppet began to move its arms around its chest to prepare for the imminent clash, but a kick landed on its head before it could even understand where Khan was aiming.

The puppet flew backward as the metal on its head bent. A heel-shaped mark had appeared on its face, and the writing on the wall immediately turned green.

'Did I win already?' Khan wondered, and the training program soon confirmed his guess.

The puppet crawled back toward the wall, which opened and started to modify its limbs and damaged parts. Khan could see many metal arms tinkering with the machine before the zero on the wall transformed into a one.

"Level one," The mechanical voice announced inside the training hall while the puppet walked outside the wall. "Enhanced reflexes."

A red light had appeared at the center of the puppet's face. A harmless beam shot out of that new feature and pointed at the center of Khan's chest.

'Is it scanning me?' Khan wondered, but he didn't let his doubts waste his time.

Khan shot ahead again and raised his leg to deliver a precise attack toward its head. However, the dummy managed to lift its arms and cover its face before the arrival of the kick.

'Still slow,' Khan thought while his raised leg continued to rotate instead of landing on the metal arms.

Khan's roundhouse frontal kick transformed into an airborne circular attack that used his other leg to hit the uncovered part of the puppet's head.

The attack flung the puppet away. Khan had amassed far more momentum while flowing in the second technique, and the metal carried proofs of its power. His shinbone had pierced the side of the dummy's head and had disfigured its face.

Even the red eye had broken after the kick. The puppet seemed unable to work properly while the training program announced that Khan had cleared the level. The dummy couldn't move back inside the wall due to the damages suffered in the exchange.

'Do I have to push it inside now?' Khan wondered, but a metal rope suddenly shot out of the wall and attached itself on the puppet's back.

The rope seemed to have a magnetic field that kept the puppet stuck to its surface. The gears inside the wall then spun to retract the cord and bring the dummy inside the workshop.

"Level two," The metallic voice shouted. "Enhanced reflexes, enhanced mobility, enhanced resilience."

The new puppet that came out of the wall was far different from before. It now had three red eyes, and new joints had appeared on its wrists, elbows, shoulders, and knees. Its dark-silver metal also appeared darker after the modifications.

Khan didn't bother to take a few steps back. Testing one of his most efficient techniques over and over again was pointless. He was there to improve, and that approach wasn't working.

His ankles twisted to make him sprint toward the puppet's side. The three red eyes followed Khan and made the dummy tilt its guard according to his position.

'He can follow my movements now!' Khan shouted in his mind when he saw that the puppet's actions had no delays.

His figure performed a sharp turn and made him approach the puppet frontally. Khan raised his leg to deliver a circular kick aimed at the dummy's head, but metal arms appeared on the trajectory of his attack.

Khan immediately flowed into another technique at that point. His waist spun until it faced the ground and altered the trajectory of his leg.

His attack transformed into a descending kick that aimed at the puppet's right leg. The sharp turn during his technique accumulated more momentum than before. Khan felt almost confident in cutting through the metal with that power.

Yet, the puppet suddenly raised its leg and made its metal shinbone collide with its leg. Khan's attack bent that limb, but the dummy seemed to have reinforcements in that spot.

The puppet didn't waste that chance. Khan was standing on one leg, and his almost horizontal body was facing the ground. His side was completely open.

The dummy's arms tilted forward as its torso bent. The metal spheres on top of those limbs were about to land on Khan's side, but the latter quickly pulled with the leg still connected to the metal shinbone.

Khan's leg arched until his foot touched the back of the puppet's legs and pulled it forward. The dummy inevitably lost its balance and began to fall on its back.

Khan put power on the foot connected to the floor to jump. His horizontal body spun mid-air as it crossed the puppet's body and delivered a kick to its face before it could complete its fall.

The entirety of the puppet's face shattered when it collided with the floor. Khan had stomped its head so hard that shards of metal and wires flew everywhere in the hall. Even the second level couldn't make him sweat.

Chapter 47 - Superior

"Level three," The hall announced. "Superior reflexes, superior mobility, superior resilience."

Khan noticed the change in the adjectives used to describe the features of the training program, and he immediately stepped off the scraps of metal to return to the center of the training hall.

The metal rope shot out of the opening in the wall and dragged the puppet inside the workshop. A few short cubical robots also came out of the cavity and cleaned the various debris left after the exchanges.

Khan didn't let those robots sway his focus. The training program had announced something different at that time, and it was even taking longer to rebuild the puppet. Something told him that the next level wouldn't be so easy.

The cleaning robots returned inside the opening as a tall puppet came out of the wall. The dummy still had its three eyes, but their red light blinked while they inspected Khan. Moreover, its shades had moved toward even darker colors.

The puppet immediately took a battle stance different from before. It stretched its front leg forward and lowered its body to improve its stability. One of its arms pointed toward Khan while the other waited behind the back of its head.

That was an obvious defensive stance, but the puppet had never taken such a complicated form before. The dummy had limited itself to raise its arms and prepare a counterattack in the previous levels, but things had changed in ways that Khan couldn't predict now.

'It has started to counter the Lightning-demon style,' Khan concluded in his mind before bending forward and sprinting ahead.

There was no reason to change his approach or study his opponent further. The Lightning-demon style focused on quick moves meant to take out enemies before they could deploy their techniques. Improvements and martial arts wouldn't matter as long as Khan succeeded in preserving the upper hand in the battle.

The puppet's guard had openings in its front leg, face, and side. Khan reached his opponent and pointed his left foot on the floor before spinning on his leg to perform a roundhouse kick aimed at the dummy's head.

The three red eyes continued to flash and inspect his movements. The puppet didn't miss anything even if Khan's speed went beyond what its structure could reach.

The puppet moved its rear arm on the kick's trajectory, but Khan promptly tilted his leg to aim for its exposed chest. Yet, the dummy suddenly bent its front leg and closed the distance from its opponent while its free arm shot toward Khan's face.

That move had been too sudden. The puppet had managed to reach Khan's speed since its stance allowed it to shift its weight forward in less than an instant and stretch its range by a full meter.

Normally, Khan's face was safe during his roundhouse kicks because his body tilted backward to give more power to his legs. However, the puppet had bent its stretched front leg to cover a lot of distance and reach otherwise protected body parts.

The metal sphere that the puppet had as a hand flew toward Khan's ear. The attack would hit at the same time as his foot, but Khan would definitely take more damage if he decided to trade blows.

His foot was also off-target now that the puppet had moved forward. Khan would only hit its arm, which wouldn't bring him closer to victory in the slightest.

'I'm still stronger!' Khan shouted in his mind as the leg on the floor bent.

Khan let himself fall. His kick lost power and only managed to make the puppet tremble, but his movement made the punch miss his face.

The puppet promptly lowered its arm in an attempt to follow Khan's face, but the latter twisted his ankle to perform a short jump and accelerate his fall.

Khan's body rotated mid-air. His back quickly approached the floor as his legs went upward. The puppet couldn't reach its opponent after that acceleration, but it still followed his fall to exploit that seemingly defenseless situation.

However, Khan quickly grabbed his opponent's arm and used it as a handhold. His shoulder withstood the entirety of his weight as he stabilized his rotation and pointed his feet on the puppet's rear arm.

Khan's back hit the floor, and he used that chance to pull the puppet toward him. The dummy bent forward before Khan released the power accumulated in his legs.

The puppet lost its foothold as Khan pushed it upward. The dummy ended up flying toward the ceiling, but it stopped before hitting the black metal.

Still, Khan spun while the puppet started to descend. His hands glued themselves on the floor as he rotated his entire body to deliver a roundhouse kick toward his falling opponent.

The puppet couldn't take any defensive stance in the air. It raised its arms to block the incoming attack, but its structure couldn't match the sheer might gathered in that kick.

Khan's heel landed on the puppet's arms and bent the dark metal that reinforced them. The limbs didn't shatter, but they didn't manage to remain in their position either. They crashed on the dummy's head while Khan continued to push it toward the floor.

Khan completed his move by sitting on the floor. His heel had never let go of the puppet during the technique. His attack slammed the dummy on the black metal and flattened its head.

The writing on the walls turned green, and the metal rope quickly shot out of the opening. Khan barely had the time to stand up before the puppet returned inside the workshop.

"Level four," The hall announced. "Superior body, medium-level martial arts."

The new puppet that came out of the wall was completely black, with azure neon blinking in specific spots of its body. A fourth red eye had appeared on its face, and lights flashed from those artificial organs.

The metal spheres were no more. Metal hands and fingers had replaced those parts, and the puppet didn't hesitate to raise them to take a simple defensive stance.

'Let's see these martial arts,' Khan thought before shooting forward.

He quickly arrived on the puppet and delivered a direct kick aimed at its chest. Still, the dummy's arms flashed and hit his limb while the foot landed on its body.

A sharp pain filled Khan's leg, but he gritted his teeth to complete his attack. The puppet flew backward, but it didn't fall. His kick had dug a foot-shaped mark on the metal, but the dummy had managed to land on its feet.

Still, a sense of numbness spread through his leg when he tried to bend it to flow into the next technique. Khan glanced at his limb and noticed that two holes had appeared on its trousers. One of them pointed at the lower side of his thigh, while the other was near the center of his shinbone.

'What's this?' Khan wondered as he stomped his foot multiple times to push away that numbness.

Khan's knowledge of martial arts was quite poor. He didn't know that some techniques could target his pressure points and temporarily affect his movements.

The situation left him speechless, but the puppet didn't give him time to think. The dummy had managed to endure the kick with its new body, so it could shoot directly toward Khan since the latter didn't attack.

Khan found himself on the defensive side for the first time since the beginning of the training program. The puppet was slower than him, but it still covered the few meters that separated it from him in less than a second.

Its metallic fingers shot forward. Those nimble arms resembled snakes that were about to bite his body. It was hard to keep track of them, but Khan's martial art had forced him to grow used to quick and sudden changes in his vision.

Khan's arms shot forward. His right hand failed to stop the enemy attack, and two metal fingers landed on his shoulder. However, he succeeded in grabbing the other metal wrist and prevent the other half of the technique.

A sense of numbness spread through his entire shoulder. Khan felt unable to raise his arm, and his left leg also struggled to follow his orders. Yet, the puppet was in his grasp now, and he didn't dare to let it go.

Khan pulled the puppet closer before using his numb leg to support his rising knee. A powerful blow hit the dummy's torso, but that attack didn't seem to be enough to knock it down.

The puppet tried to attack with its free arm, but Khan pushed it on the side without releasing his grasp. The attack missed his numb shoulder, and Khan could use that chance to lift his knee again.

Khan repeated the process multiple times. He had transformed that training program into a mere scuffle between brutes, but he didn't care as long as that approach could bring him to victory.

The puppet managed to deliver a few attacks from time to time, but Khan always hit its chest. It didn't take much before the dummy's movements began to slow down, and its neon started to lose their light.

The dummy went limp after Khan hit it with his knee for the twelfth time. He let his opponent fall to the floor while he stepped backward and decided to sit.

The writings on the wall became green, and the metal rope appeared again, but Khan shouted a command before the training program could step on the next level.

"Time-out!" Khan shouted, and everything stopped.

The gears inside the wall stopped turning, and the writings remained stuck on unclear letters. Khan could only see the faint number five hidden behind the disappearing green light.

Chapter 48 - Pressure Points

Khan inspected the collapsed dummy and the metal rope attached to its body before lying on the floor. He closed his eyes to enter the meditative state, and mana flowed from his nape to spread through the rest of his body.

The process hurt. Khan's flesh didn't want the mana to take over, but he had grown used to that pain. His mind remained steady as he pushed that energy forward and forced it to weaken the numbness that afflicted his leg, shoulder, and side.

Khan didn't remain in his meditative state for too long. The fifth level was waiting for him. He only wanted to restore his condition enough to approach the next battle.

'These training programs are so useful,' Khan couldn't help but exclaim in his mind when he exited his meditative state. 'They don't only force me to improve. They also allow me to face different battle styles. Nothing in the real world can make me gain experience so quickly.'

Khan didn't know that martial arts capable of targeting his pressure points existed before the previous battle. He was completely unaware of the existence of those spots even.

One incomplete training session with the program had been enough to expand his knowledge in ways that his usual fights against Lieutenant Dyester couldn't accomplish. Even his battle against Citlalli didn't give him that amount of experience.

Moreover, the training program's adaptive features had underlined the weaknesses of the Lightning-demon style. A martial art with seventy-eight points was clearly outstanding, but it had flaws that Khan couldn't help but notice after defeating the fourth level.

'My hands are kind of useless,' Khan thought without bothering to straighten his position. 'They help me balance and give power to my kicks, but I don't have many blows that rely on my arms. I guess only proper high-level martial arts don't have evident flaws.'

Relying mostly on his kicks wasn't an inherent weakness, but Khan understood that he could improve in some fields. His body was even quite strong compared to his peers, so limiting his fighting style to half of his limbs seemed a waste.

Memories about Martha's situation appeared in his mind during that reasoning. She also had a good martial art inherited from her family, but she had to improve it by fusing it with another style.

Khan believed that the same went for most soldiers. Lieutenant Unchai had stressed how every martial art had good and bad matchups, so the best approach was to fuse a few of them and obtain a complete set of abilities.

'Look at me,' Khan eventually thought while a helpless laugh escaped from his mouth. 'I have the chance to use a training hall freely, and my martial art is among the best for recruits, but I'm still unsatisfied. Not even six months outside of the Slums, but I've already lost my humbleness.'

Khan straightened his position and sat on the floor. He rotated his right arm to check his shoulder, and he also bent his leg for the same reason. The numbness had almost completely dispersed. He was ready to approach the fifth level.

"Resume!" Khan ordered, and the training program immediately activated.

The gears spun again and dragged the puppet back inside the workshop. The writings on the walls also moved to the fifth level, and the mechanical voice soon resounded in the hall.

"Level five," The training program announced. "Superior body, medium-level martial arts, superior aggression."

Khan's eyes sharpened at those words, but he didn't need to wait long before understanding their meaning.

The puppet charged ahead as soon as the wires and tubes detached from its body. It wasn't letting Khan gain the upper hand right away anymore.

Khan didn't let that sight scare him. He shot toward the incoming puppet and prepared for the imminent clash. Part of him even preferred that approach.

The puppet's arms shot forward and performed strange movements that tried to trick Khan's eyes. However, he disregarded them and crouched to slide under his opponent.

The dummy's attacks missed as Khan kicked its legs and made it fall forward. The two of them were close, so the puppet tried to stab its fingers toward him. Yet, Khan rolled on his back and pushed with his hands once his feet aligned with his opponent.

Khan resembled a spring when he used his arms to push his whole body toward his opponent. He didn't need to see the puppet to know where it was. There wasn't much that it could do while it was falling toward the floor.

The blow pushed the puppet away and made it fly for a few meters. Khan's feet touched the floor while the dummy was still mid-air, and his ankles twisted to make him turn in an instant and give him enough power to shoot toward his opponent.

The puppet quickly stood up, but Khan's kick arrived before it could resume any battle stance. His shinbone hit the dummy's head and flung it away again.

Khan chased after his opponent. The black metal seemed able to endure his blows now, but he would press forward until that material shattered.

His leg rose when the puppet entered his range. The dummy raised its arms to block the incoming kick, but Khan missed them on purpose. Instead, his descending blow made his heel and his opponent's foot collide.

The puppet's foot bent upward. It wouldn't be useful as a foothold anymore in that condition, but Khan lost his momentum after completing the attack.

His rear leg rose to deliver a kick on the puppet's side, but the latter disregarded the incoming blow and launched its arms toward him.

Khan's kick and the puppet's fingers hit at the same time. The dummy's side caved in, but its hands landed at the center of his chest and hit two different pressure points.

Khan found himself unable to breathe for a second. He struggled to maintain his balance, and the puppet didn't hesitate to exploit that chance. One of its hands clung on Khan's side while the other created a fangs-shaped figure with its fingers that flew toward his collarbone.

Khan pushed himself backward, uncaring that his balance was completely off. He fell on the floor and dodged the incoming attack, but the dummy promptly jumped toward him.

The puppet tried to slam its feet on Khan's chest, but the latter rotated to the side. The dummy's attack landed on the floor, and Khan used that chance to perform a sweep.

The dummy promptly jumped to dodge the incoming leg, but it didn't manage to perform it correctly due to the damage suffered by its foot. Only half of the puppet's body escaped from Khan's range, so his shinbone successfully hit its leg.

The power released by the sweep made the puppet rotate on itself and remain in the air. Meanwhile, Khan continued to spin until his leg returned behind him and became a suitable foothold.

Khan waited until the puppet turned upside-down mid-air before leaping forward and raising his knees toward its head. The dummy managed to protect itself with its arms, but their metal bent beyond recognition after the violent blow.

Khan planted his hand on the puppet's waist while both of them fell. He was ready to smash his opponent on the floor and overwhelm it with a relentless series of techniques, but a sense of numbness suddenly spread from his legs when they touched the black surface.

The puppet had hit the pressure points on his ankles during the fall, and Khan couldn't avoid losing his balance. He bent backward, but his hand promptly grabbed the dummy's leg and dragged it with him.

Khan gave voice to a battle cry as both his arms grabbed the puppet's leg and pulled until it slammed behind him. The dummy tried to point its arms on the floor to stand up, but their damaged structure made it lose its balance and fall again.

Khan rolled on his back. His ankles would be useless for a few minutes, so he had to use gravity to his advantage. His legs bent as he performed a handstand on the puppet's limb before moving the entirety of his body weight toward his knees.

Popping noises came out of the puppet when his knees hit its torso. Something had clearly broken inside the dummy, but it continued to struggle. Its arms were quite useless, but its fingers still worked, and they immediately tried to reach Khans' legs.

Khan rotated on his knees and delivered a hook to the puppet's head. The dummy tried to stand up and use its arms to protect its face, but Khan unleashed a rain of punches that barely cared about their targets.

Most of those attacks landed on the damaged arms, but some managed to reach its face. Moreover, those limbs continued to bend until the metal finally cracked.

Khan couldn't feel anything. The shards of metal were cutting his knuckles, but his punches continued to fall. He wouldn't stop until his opponent went limp.

The arms eventually broke and left the puppet defenseless. Khan punches could finally target its head without hindrances, and the battle ended in a few seconds. The dummy barely had a face anymore when the writings on the walls became green.

"Time-out!" Khan shouted without any hesitation.

The puppet had brought him to his limits at that time. His chest and ankles hurt, and his hands were bleeding. The battle had been relatively even, which made Khan worry about the sixth level.

'I'm almost completely certain that I can't surpass it,' Khan thought while lying on the floor.

There was a high chance that Khan would lose once the training program moved to the next difficulty. Continuing to fight would most likely lead to a beatdown. Recruits would usually stop there and call it a day, but Khan hesitated to make the system reset its data.

'I can learn what might cause me to lose in the future,' Khan thought as a helpless sigh left his mouth.

His mind had already understood which approach would provide the most benefits, and he could only accept that while he let his body recover. Escaping from pain now would only cut his gains short.

Chapter 49 - Life And Death

'I can't waste time meditating now,' Khan thought as a helpless sigh escaped from his mouth.

His chest hurt, his ankles were killing him, and his knuckles had many cuts that made them unsuitable for another battle, but the lessons would arrive soon. Khan actually expected the training hall to interrupt him in the next minutes.

'I'll just fix the ankles,' Khan decided before entering his meditative state and forcing the mana to expand toward his legs.

Khan didn't rely only on his nape at that time. Sparse lumps of mana had appeared in other parts of his body after five months in the training camp. Moving them through his flesh was troublesome, but some of them were closer to his ankles, so they were perfect for his needs.

The numbness that afflicted his ankles slowly dispersed, but that feeling was still there when he left the meditative state and struggled to stand up.

'This will have to do,' Khan sighed in his mind before giving the order to the training program.

A metal rope immediately shot out of the wall and dragged the broken puppet inside the workshop. Cleaning robots also came out of the cavity to remove all the scraps and shards from the floor. It didn't take much before the entire training hall returned to a perfect state.

Khan closed his eyes and took deep breaths as he waited for the arrival of the puppet. His mind was ready for the imminent beatdown, but he had no intention to go down easily.

"Level six," The training program eventually announced. "Superior body, superior techniques, superior aggression, battle instincts."

A clanging noise spread through the training hall as the puppet stepped out of the workshop. Khan opened his eyes and saw four blinking red eyes fixed on him. The neon had also turned red and had given a menacing aura to the dummy.

Khan mustered all the power he could find in his body to shoot ahead. His sprint was inevitably slower compared to before, but he still appeared quite fast.

However, the puppet seemed able to follow his movements perfectly. It raised its arms before Khan could reach it, and its fingers took fang-like shapes while its entire body crouched forward.

Khan raised his leg as soon as the puppet entered his range. He didn't dare to use potentially dangerous techniques like his roundhouse kicks. He limited himself to launch his foot forward while keeping as much distance as possible from the dummy.

His foot seemed about to clash with the puppet's face, but the latter suddenly bent on the side. Khan promptly spun his waist to turn his front kick into a circular attack that followed his opponent's head, but his leg never managed to hit its target.

The puppet's arms had never stopped moving. They had flown toward Khan's leg while the dummy bent on the side, and its fingers ended up hitting three pressure points.

The attack didn't only spread an intense numbness through Khan's leg. It also pushed it back to interrupt his technique. It seemed that puppet was able to match his physical strength in the sixth level.

Khan gave voice to a battle cry as an ugly expression appeared on his face. He gritted his teeth and frowned to endure the pain and jump forward by releasing the power accumulated in his rear leg.

His condition was far from optimal, and the puppet had even managed to neutralize one of his legs in a single exchange. He knew that the battle would be over right after completing that technique, so he couldn't let it end so soon.

The puppet's arms shot forward, but the suddenness of Khan's reckless action made it unable to launch precise attacks. Its metal fingers hit his abdomen and chest, but only one of them landed on a pressure point.

Khan lost his breath for an instant, but he didn't let that sensation surprise him anymore. His whole body was flying inside the puppet's guard, and his arms quickly grabbed its neck as he used his leg to cling on its chest.

The puppet didn't let that reckless attack disrupt its forms. Its arms shot toward the leg clung on its chest and turned it numb in an instant. Still, Khan endured the pain and began to assault its head.

Khan had relied on a sudden move that didn't follow any technique. His chances of winning that battle through martial arts were basically zero, so he had to do something that the dummy couldn't predict.

His fists slammed on the tough dark metal and began to bend its fabric. The puppet raised its arms and started to aim for the pressure points on his side, and Khan soon lost his balance as numbness spread through his whole torso.

Yet, Khan clung on the metal head with one arm and continued to use the other to throw punches. The puppet started to miss attacks since Khan was behind its head, but metal fingers still landed on his limbs and side from time to time.

Some of those attacks eventually hit pressure points. Khan felt his thumb going numb and threatening to release the grip on the puppet, but he promptly bent forward to regain his balance.

Still, that gesture exposed him to the blinking red eyes. Khan couldn't move as he wished in that position, so he didn't manage to avoid the metal finger aimed at the center of his forehead.

Everything went dark for an instant. Khan barely had the time to sense the cold sensation carried by the puppet's finger before his back hit the floor.

His senses slowly focused on his surroundings, and disappointment inevitably spread through his mind. He had fallen. The battle was over.

A dark figure appeared in his vision. Metal legs landed on his arms and locked him on the ground while threatening fingers fell toward his face.

Then, the fingers stopped. The puppet interrupted its attack as soon as it touched Khan's face.

"Defeat," The training program announced as the puppet straightened its position and stepped off Khan's arm to return inside the wall. "Analyzing performance. Do you require additional actions?"

"Send everything to my phone," Khan ordered. "I'll close my eyes for a while."

Khan didn't bother to think about the battle anymore. His whole body hurt, and only his meditations could make him able to stand in time for the morning lessons.

A sudden noise resounded inside the training hall before Khan could even begin meditating. He glanced at the wall and sighed when he read that the lessons would start in less than twenty minutes. Luck wasn't on his side that day.

Khan tried to stand up, but his body didn't follow his commands. His legs, sides, and right hand were still numb. Even his head hurt. Only his left arm worked properly, but that wasn't enough to bring him to the lessons.

'How mad can they even get if I skip these lessons?' Khan wondered while his eyes closed. 'This is the sixth month. They won't have anything related to mana.'

Khan was only justifying himself in his mind. He had already understood that he was in no condition to move. Meditating was the only process that could restore his body enough to make him walk.

Time always moved quickly during the meditations, but it only seemed to last one second for Khan. He had started to use mana to disperse the numbness in his body, but a voice suddenly reached his ears and forced him out of his training.

"I should have seen this coming," Lieutenant Unchai scoffed while standing next to Khan.

"I just went a little overboard," Khan said in a fake sleepy voice. "Can I marry this training hall? I think I am in love."

Lieutenant Unchai shook his head, but a laugh escaped his mouth and ruined his pretense. The soldier didn't manage to hide the faint respect that had appeared inside him, so he tapped the floor to change the topic.

The summary of Khan's performance appeared on the floor, and Lieutenant Unchai's face froze when he read through the various details. Khan also turned to look at the various writings, and a pleased smile inevitably spread on his expression.

'This is so detailed,' Khan thought before reading the summary. 'Good execution of the techniques, incredible resolve, good instincts.'

Each of those labels led to a different menu that explained the reasons behind that evaluation. It even featured key moments that had led to that assessment.

Lieutenant Unchai studied everything. He didn't let a single label go and inspected every key moment recorded by the training program. His hand ended up covering his mouth while he read through the various descriptions, and his confused words failed to reach Khan's ears due to that cover.

"How does it look?" Khan asked while turning his head to stare at the soldier standing next to him.

"Sad," Lieutenant Unchai said in a plain voice.

Khan's eyes widened. The training program only showed positive evaluations. A few labels did have excellent grades, but that came from Khan's overall inexperience. After all, he had only trained for five months, even less if he considered the actual time with the Lightning-demon style.

"You are good, really good actually," Lieutenant Unchai continued without glancing at the boy lying at his side. "You are progressing far faster than I imagined, and you didn't even have access to these tools before. Still, I'm worried about this resolve of yours. You shouldn't treat a training program as a matter of life and death."

Chapter 50 - Pens

Khan fell silent at that remark. He knew exactly what Lieutenant Unchai meant, but his real character wasn't something that simple pretenses could hide, especially with the summary in front of them.

"You aren't dumb," Lieutenant Unchai sighed. "You try to appear naive and stupid, but that's not your real nature, isn't it?"

Khan opened his mouth, but no words came out of it. His experience in lies and pretenses was useless when Lieutenant Unchai could read what had happened in the fifth level.

"You could have stepped away here," Lieutenant Unchai pointed at the green sign marking the fifth level. "Instead, you chose to jump in a battle that you couldn't hope to win, and you didn't even rest properly before it. I guess you still wanted to make it to the lessons."

Khan turned on his back. He didn't know what to say, especially when the people around him showed concern.

"Guess what?" Lieutenant Unchai snorted. "You only hurt yourself and failed to attend the lessons on time. You are lucky that these are mere general courses, or maybe you have chosen to rest for that very reason."

Khan gulped, and Lieutenant Unchai finally decided to look at him. He wanted to maintain a stern expression, but he could only shake his head at the sight of the injuries.

Khan's body was full of red bruises. His skin carried the marks of the clashes with the metal fingers. Multiple holes had even appeared on his trousers.

"Did you learn something at least?" Lieutenant Unchai asked.

"I have a lot to improve," Khan promptly replied. "I'm not talking only about the executions of my techniques. I mainly lack battle experience, and the nature of my martial art doesn't help in the matter."

"What do you plan to do about it then?" Lieutenant Unchai continued with his questions.

"Fight with as many different martial arts as possible in the fifth level," Khan explained, "Test the sixth level with favorable matchups after training for a few days, and see how far I can push my limits."

"That's the correct approach," Lieutenant Unchai nodded. "However, it's clear that you are a danger to yourself, so I'll set a few rules."

"I have only gone overboard, sir," Khan attempted to appease the Lieutenant's anger with polite words. "It won't happen again. I was so excited about the training hall that I couldn't hold back, but I know my limits now. Don't limit my time here."

Khan was obviously worried that the Lieutenant could limit his time inside the training hall due to his reckless approach, but the soldier only smiled when he saw the regret in his face.

"I won't," Lieutenant Unchai announced, "But I can't give complete freedom to someone who has no care for his own body. I'll give you one last chance before applying proper limits to your time here."

"I won't disappoint you, sir!" Khan happily shouted, but the soldier's smile suddenly vanished.

"You can't be late to lessons anymore," Lieutenant Unchai ordered. "I'll let today pass, but punishments will arrive if you fail to attend them regularly."

"I won't miss a single day!" Khan shouted again.

"Good," Lieutenant Unchai exclaimed. "Go now. You can still catch the second hour of chemistry."

Khan's expression froze, and Lieutenant Unchai did his best not to explode into a laugh. Instead, he proceeded to explain the real meaning behind his previous words.

"I'll let today pass," Lieutenant Unchai explained. "I didn't say that you could skip today's lessons altogether."

Khan stared at the Lieutenant before glancing at his body. Everything still hurt, but his limbs had started to regain some power. He couldn't move properly, but he was a bit better.

Khan glanced at the Lieutenant again and understood that the soldier had no intention to let the matter go. He seemed ready to glare at Khan with his severe gaze until the boy left the training hall.

"I'll leave now," Khan whispered while turning on his belly and pushing with his left arm.

He had to perform multiple slow movements to get back on his feet. Khan pointed his knees, then raised one leg before spreading his arms to control his balance while lifting his whole body.

A sense of dizziness spread inside his mind when he went back on his feet. Something inside Khan told him that it was too early to stand up, but he suppressed that feeling and turned toward the exit.

"What about your phone?" Lieutenant Unchai asked while pointing at the corner of the training hall. "How did you plan to reach the building with the lessons without it?"

Khan inspected Lieutenant Unchai's stern face before moving toward his phone. He supported himself on the wall and gave voice to a faint groan when he bent to pick his device, but he managed to maintain his equilibrium during that walk.

Then, Khan finally left the training hall and proceeded to walk alongside the wall of the corridor to exit the building. His phone was already on the menu that showed a blueprint of the camp with all the various activities. Finding the way to the lessons wasn't a problem.

"You forgot your uniform," Lieutenant Unchai's voice suddenly resounded from behind him, and Khan suppressed a loud curse.

Khan was still shirtless and without shoes. He had completely forgotten about the rest of his uniform since he was using most of his concentration to remain on his feet.

Lieutenant Unchai had no intention to bring those clothes to Khan, so he had to walk back inside the training hall and crouch again to pick them up. He almost fell during the process, but the soldier didn't mock him.

"I'm off then, sir," Khan announced while suppressing a few grunts while he wore his uniform and supported himself on the wall to handle his shoes.

Khan managed to get out of the building without interruptions at that time. He even felt slightly better after going up and down through the corridor. His ankles still hurt, but they had regained most of their steadiness.

The training camp wasn't big, but Khan still took a while to reach the building where the lessons happened. He walked quite slowly, and his destination was near the center of the site.

The hot environment didn't help his struggle. The two suns were higher in the sky now, and the temperatures had risen. The red-brown ground radiated scorching sensations that managed to get past the sole of Khan's shoes and tried to force him to walk faster.

Khan couldn't comply with that instinct. His legs weren't able to accelerate in that situation, so he had to endure the heat accumulated on his feet while he made his way through the camp.

The temperatures completely changed once Khan stepped inside the building. The metal floor was cold, and the air flowing inside the corridors relieved him from the struggles of his recent march.

Khan felt tempted to sit in a corner and meditate. His mind seemed unable to accept that he had to go through hours of boring lessons, but he feared Lieutenant Unchai's threats too much to skip them.

His priority was to use the training hall as much as possible since the benefits connected to that technology were simply massive. Spending a few hours listening to boring lessons was a fair price to pay for his current benefits.

Khan found the room meant for his lessons in an instant, and he slowly slipped inside it while an unfamiliar professor read through notes on his interactive desk. A large hall with hundreds of stands unfolded in his view, but his eyes only searched for his friends.

Some of the recruits sitting on the stands noticed Khan moving silently on the staircases that ran among the seats, and a hand eventually rose from the crowd. Khan's eyes lit up when he saw Martha and an empty chair next to her.

"What has even happened to you?" Martha asked in a worried tone, but she found it hard to suppress her laugh when she inspected her friend.

Khan had a large red spot at the center of his forehead. His uniform was untidy and full of holes. He didn't even tie his shoes.

"The training halls are amazing," Khan announced while keeping his voice down. "I don't know how I'll survive once this trip is over."

"I don't know if you'll survive the trip," Martha joked about his state. "The Lieutenant has given you the chance to use a training hall then. That's great. We did nothing but perform our techniques on dummies and spar a little."

"Did you win?" Khan asked while revealing a curious smile.

"Of course," Martha replied while wearing a proud expression. "Everyone was too scared to fight for real, but I suspect that Lieutenant Unchai will start punishing them this afternoon."

Khan nodded, but two shadows suddenly appeared in the corner of vision. His hands instinctively shot forward since his mind was still in battle mode, and his grasp closed on two digital pens.

Khan raised his eyes and noticed that the entire class was staring at him. Even the professor in the distance couldn't help but show his surprise at that scene.

'Did he throw them because we were talking?' Khan wondered before standing and walking down the staircase to give the pens back to the professor.

Then, he climbed the steps to return to his seat. A faint smile appeared on his face after confirming that his ankles were far better now, but he quickly wore a regretful expression since the professor was still staring at him.

"You are the kid who defeated the Ef'i, right?" The professor asked, interrupting the silence that had fallen in the hall.

Khan nodded, and the professor couldn't help but reveal a proud smirk. He picked one of the pens that Khan had brought back and stared at the boy for a few seconds before resuming the lesson.