

Chaos' Heir 61

Chapter 61 - Knife

The situation was tragic in the crash site, but some awkwardness had inevitably fallen among the awake group. Khan had to rip the recruits' uniforms apart to create bandages and tend some injuries, so everyone was partially naked.

Khan had a better time ignoring Reebfell's uncovered skin and exposed sports bra. His mind was forcing his emotions in a part of his brain that didn't affect his body. Also, that wasn't his first time seeing women in that state anyway.

The Slums didn't give Khan the chance to have relationships, but he had lived among complete poverty. Torn clothes were the norm there, so he had often seen women roaming the narrow streets and going to work with little more than a few rags on them.

Moreover, everyone knew the locations of the brothels, and the hookers didn't even try to hide their bodies. Khan had often walked past completely exposed chests that attracted many men willing to trade their meals for a few hours of pleasure.

The same didn't apply to Flurris and Reebfell. They didn't complain about Khan's actions, especially after he had saved their lives, but their eyes often fell on their companions to snatch quick peeks.

Flurris was quite evident in his attraction toward Reebfell. She was as tall as Khan, and her sports bra didn't manage to hide her well-developed chest. Her long blonde hair and large green eyes were even perfect for the slender body and firm curves that the training of the Global Army had forced her to obtain.

Flurris wasn't ugly either. He had an average face, with short black hair, dark eyes, and thick eyebrows. It was clear that a beard had even started to grow on his chin, but he seemed to shave often.

The boy was taller than Khan and had a decent layer of muscles. His chest was quite hairy, but his broad shoulders gave a mature vibe to his figure. However, Reebfell barely looked at him. Her eyes seemed unable to leave Khan and his scarred chest.

'It's almost time to wake up the other two,' Khan concluded in his mind after spending a few hours meditating under the heavy rain.

Khan quickly inspected the two recruits before moving to the duo sleeping under the vehicle. Their condition was getting worse, especially when it came to the girl's hand. A dark-red shade had appeared on the tip of her fingers, which forced Khan to consider a harsher approach.

'Don't tell me that we have to amputate her hand,' Khan wondered before standing up to check the two unconscious recruits.

"Ylaco, right?" Reebfell asked as soon as she noticed that Khan was on his feet. "I think we should drop these codenames. You know, in case some of us don't come back."

Khan showed a confused expression, but Flurris quickly supported the girl's argument. "The survivors must warn the families about their dead descendants."

Understanding dawned upon Khan at that point. That topic made sense, and he didn't hesitate to follow their suggestion. "I'm Khan."

"Dorian Aiyti," Flurris announced while slapping his chest in pride and moving his gaze toward the girl next to him.

"Cora Ommo," Reebfell exclaimed without even glancing at Dorian. "Just Khan?"

"I'm from Ylaco's Slums," Khan promptly replied. "Dorian, you seem to be fine now. Help me with this girl. She must wake up and meditate. I think she might lose her hand."

Dorian and Cora widened their eyes when they learnt about Khan's background. Every large city had Slums around them, so they could immediately understand his situation. Yet, they couldn't explain how he could be so strong with the evident lack of backing.

"Dorian?" Khan repeated, and the boy snapped back to reality before standing up.

Cora imitated Dorian, but both Khan and the boy shot a confused glance toward her. She was still tending her bruises and cuts, and her help appeared unnecessary in the matter.

"How do you think she'll react in front of two half-naked boys?" Cora explained, and Khan promptly moved to the side to make room for her.

Dorian and Cora walked toward Khan's position, but only the girl crouched next to him. She blushed a little when her naked shoulder touched Khan's, but she remained focused on her task. Meanwhile, the other boy remained behind them to oversee the situation.

Cora lightly slapped the girl a few times, but she increased her strength when she failed to wake up. The unconscious recruit eventually opened her eyes, and a painful scream immediately left her mouth.

"Calm down!" Cora shouted while trying to restrain the girl, but the latter was in too much pain.

She struggled to get out of Cora's grip, and her eyes often fell on her broken hand. Her mindset didn't improve when she gained a clear understanding of how bad its condition was, and her screams became louder after that.

"Move aside," Khan whispered while placing a hand on Cora's uncovered waist and pushing her away.

Cora slightly jumped when she sensed his firm palm pushing her away, but she complied with his orders. She waited for Khan to grab the screaming girl's elbows before moving to her legs and keeping them still.

Khan dragged the girl under the heavy rain and shook her a few times until she decided to suppress her pain for a few seconds. She sobbed as her tears mixed with the falling water and her bloodshot eyes focused on Khan.

"You need to meditate now," Khan explained in a steady voice. "Your hand is in bad shape."

Khan didn't bother to spend time explaining the crash or his other hypotheses. He only wanted the girl to be combat-ready as soon as possible and leave the area.

The girl seemed to calm down after his words. She nodded, and Khan slowly left her elbows. She shook when her injured hand fell to the side of her body, but she managed to sit and enter the meditative state after taking a deep breath.

Khan sighed and turned toward the boy. Cora moved farther away and left her spot to Dorian, who carefully grabbed the unconscious recruit's arms from areas that didn't feature injuries.

Khan nodded and began to slap the boy. The latter woke up quickly, and his first reaction was to throw his legs in the air. One of them hit Dorian's side, while the other wanted to aim for Khan's face.

"Calm down!" Khan shouted while grabbing the boy's ankle before the kick could reach his face. "We crashed, the mission is over, and you are injured."

The boy's ragged breath slowed down as he moved his eyes among the three recruits and the crash site. His head eventually performed a nod, and Khan let his leg go.

The boy inspected his left side and noticed the many injuries and bandages. His eyes quickly went on Khan and the others before he nodded again and closed his eyes to meditate.

'Finally a smart one,' Khan exclaimed in his mind.

"Let's rest a little longer," Khan ordered. "You can't fight right now, and I can't handle all the threats hidden here by myself. I'll definitely need your help."

Dorian and Cora nodded before sitting and closing their eyes to meditate. Both of them understood that their struggle to survive would start once everyone was ready, so they had to abandon every distraction.

Khan also sat to meditate. His shoulder still needed care, but it got better with every training session. He guessed that everything would be perfect after a week, but he hoped to regroup with the Lieutenants before that.

Hours passed under the heavy rain. The group of recruits didn't have food, but the falling water seemed drinkable. Khan even tried to taste a few drops to see if they caused strange reactions inside his body, but everything seemed fine.

Managing the hunger wasn't an issue for Khan, but the other recruits' stomachs inevitably started to growl after meditating for so long. Yet, they could only endure that feeling and continue to heal their bodies with mana since they had nothing else at hand.

The world eventually went dark, and the insides of the jungle became even harder to inspect. Khan and the others had to stay close to keep track of their position, and their heightened senses couldn't do much in that environment.

'We must wait until the sun is up again,' Khan concluded while inspecting the darkness. 'Exploring during the night is pure madness.'

The other recruits also woke up when they sensed that Khan had started to inspect the perimeter again. That gave the two unknown kids the chance to introduce themselves and group up to make a point of their situation.

"We must regroup with the Global Army," George Ildoo announced after Khan explained everything. "I hope your attunement with mana is high enough to make you last on Istrone without breathing pills."

George Ildoo had a mature vibe around him. He was shorter than Dorian, and his body was slender, but his sharp eyebrows and calm gaze made him appear stronger than the boy.

The rain forced his long black hair to fall on his azure eyes, but he promptly created a bandana with pieces of his uniform to keep his gaze clear.

"We mus-," Ethel Fensee began to speak, but the pain coming from her hand forced her to stop for a second. "We must hurry. The Global Army technically controls Istrone, so the Kred will aim to destroy its bases."

Ethel was shorter than Khan. She even looked younger than her companions. It was clear that her body had yet to develop fully, but her short brown hair gave her a soldier-like appearance.

"We should take care of your hand first," George pointed out. "You can't move in this condition."

"Wha-!" Ethel spoke, but her pain forced her to stop again. "What can we do about it? Even my mana can't fix it."

Khan had kept track of the condition of his companions during his breaks. Dorian and Cora were mostly fine by now, and George had stabilized his most severe injuries. He was even suppressing the pain released by the other wounds during the meeting.

Instead, Ethel didn't improve. Her bruises and small cuts had mostly healed, but her right hand didn't recover at all. It was actually getting worse, and the dark-red shades were stretching past the wrist. Black spots had even appeared on the tips of her fingers after those hours.

"I have a bit of medical knowledge," George announced. "Your hand is too far gone. It's developing gangrene that will spread through your arm. Your mana might slow down the process, but you'll never get better until we remove it."

"You are talking about my hand here!" Ethel shouted.

"One hand is better than your life," Khan commented while scratching the azure scar on his chest. "I bet that the Global Army will even give you a good prosthesis once we get back to our training camps."

The recruits fell silent when Khan spoke. Ethel and George had learnt about his background during their introduction, and they didn't take much to connect the azure scar to the Second Impact. After all, the reappearance of the Nak had shaken the entire world.

"But-," Ethel whimpered as another wave of pain spread through her body. "It's my hand!"

"Keep your voice down," Khan reminded her while glancing at the dead Tainted bear in the distance.

The corpses of the pilots and the dead Tainted animal seemed to remind Ethel about the gravity of the situation. She was only a burden in that condition, and her chances to survive were even quite low due to the constant pain released by her hand.

The best approach was clear in her mind, but tears still flowed out of her eyes. Ethel was only seventeen, but she had to prepare herself to lose such an important part of her body.

"How should we cut it?" Dorian asked. "I've seen some sharp slabs, but I don't know if they'll be enough."

"I think I can handle that part," George exclaimed before closing his eyes and starting breathing at an odd rhythm.

Everyone felt confused in front of that scene, but no one spoke. George had only shown a mature personality until then, so he had earned a bit of trust.

Khan and the others grew suspicious after minutes passed, but an azure light suddenly appeared between George's hands and made them gasp in surprise.

The light condensed and morphed while changing color. It grew darker and obtained silver shades as it transformed into a small knife.

Chapter 62 - Guard Duty

Khan and the others remained speechless in front of George's ability. They had understood what the boy had done, but the event was still too surprising to put into words.

George had activated a spell. His mana had taken the shape of a small dark-silver knife. The weapon had clear ethereal features, but none of the bystanders dared to underestimate its power.

"Don't look at me like this," George exclaimed as a weak smile appeared on his face. "I need complete calm and entire minutes to cast this simple knife. My mana capacity doesn't even allow me to materialize it more than three times a day, so it hardly feels like an achievement."

George's words didn't manage to suppress the others' amazement. He had been a recruit for as long as them, but he could already cast spells.

"What element are you?" Khan asked as evident curiosity filled his mind.

"Spirit," George revealed before deciding to explain a bit more when he saw that the answer didn't seem to satisfy his companion. "It's pretty rare, but also rather plain. It's one of the most flexible elements, but that feature depends on the user. I've trained with swords during my life, so this is the only shape that I can create."

Khan remained surprised at how different the elements could be. Lieutenant Dyester's words made more sense in his mind after hearing George's explanation. Only someone who shared the same type of mana could know how to use it. The behavior of that energy could simply vary too much.

"It's stable now," George suddenly continued while grabbing the knife. "You should probably find something to cauterize her forearm before I cut her hand."

Khan looked around the crash site. Everything was drenched due to the incessant heavy rain. He knew how to start a fire with random tools, but he couldn't find anything to burn.

Dorian and Cora seemed completely useless in that situation. They imitated Khan, but they didn't come up with anything to help in the matter.

"You can use the almost intact engine to heat a slab," Ethel explained while suppressing the waves of pain running through her body. "Just tear it apart and bring it here. I'll tell you what to do."

Khan immediately stood up and moved toward the wreckage. The left engine had lost its external circular layer, but the wires in its insides appeared in one piece.

'I should probably tear the whole thing from its base,' Khan concluded since he didn't know what parts he had to preserve.

Mana flowed into his legs as his body crouched. Khan delivered a few kicks at the bent base of the troop carrier and continued until his foot pierced the metal. He didn't always manage to activate the techniques correctly, but his success rate was above eighty percent.

Khan repeated the process until the whole engine hung from a small piece of metal. He pulled the entire thing at that point while tilting the device on both sides until the slab gave in.

Khan then brought the entire engine back to his group and dropped it among them. He had initially failed to notice their astonished expressions, but they became impossible to miss after getting rid of the large machine.

"What is it?" Khan asked.

"Did you just dig a hole in a troop carrier with your legs?" Dorian asked.

"I used mana," Khan honestly replied. "It has even taken a while."

"That's what they are sayin-!" Ethel explained before her pain interrupted her line. "Perfect executions should be quite rare, but you have a high success rate. Also, you don't look tired at all after performing so many techniques."

"My attunement with mana is pretty high," Khan tried to play it humble. "That wasn't even a battle, so I could focus easily."

"What about the Tainted bear?" Cora asked.

"Luck," Khan promptly explained before changing the topic. "What now?"

"There should be a circular piece," Ethel explained. "You have to rotate it when I say so. Hopefully I can redirect all the involved wires outside and don't activate the flying device."

Ethel bent forward and frowned whenever her hand moved. She used her left arm to tinker with the various wires of the engine and took most of them outside. Then, she ordered to get a suitable metal slab.

'The teams appear very balanced,' Khan thought when he inspected Ethel and George.

The two recruits had initially been in the opposing team. They both had talents that shone in that difficult situation, and their mindset was also generally mature.

Instead, Dorian and Cora didn't seem to have any special talent or favorite subject. Khan had yet to see them fight, but George could literally cast a spell. They couldn't be better than him.

'The Global Army has probably put weaker recruits in my team to balance me,' Khan thought while Ethel continued to give orders, and Dorian executed them. 'The other team must have had stronger recruits for the same reason. It's a pity that one of them has suffered a major injury.'

Dorian began to rotate the circular piece of metal. Energy accumulated on the device and flowed toward the wires at that point. Sparks came out of those cables, and Cora placed a metal slab over them.

Khan promptly took Cora's hands and pulled them closer. The girl jumped again at that sudden physical contact, and her face became red when she saw Khan ripping off part of his trousers.

However, everything became clear when Khan took her hands from the slab and covered them with the fabric. Cora had forgotten to protect herself while heating the piece of metal.

Ethel, George, Dorian, and Khan pretended not to notice Cora's evident blush, especially since they were about to cut one of their companion's hands. The situation was tragic. Some of them even cursed in their minds when they saw that Cora could waste time thinking about that stuff.

Khan glanced at George. It was time to amputate Ethel's hand, but the two boys reached a silent understanding when their eyes met. It was clear that they were the strongest of their group, so it was up to them to return to the plain.

"It's better if you bite something," Khan said while tearing a piece of Ethel's robe and folding it.

The girl didn't show any shyness when Khan uncovered even more of her body. She even opened her mouth when he neared the piece of fabric to her face. Her mind was elsewhere. She was doing her best to muster her courage before the procedure.

"Ready?" George eventually asked when he saw that the metal slab in Cora's hand had begun to change color under the relentless attack of the sparks.

Ethel nodded before stretching her arm. George grabbed her forearm and placed his dark-silver knife right above her wrist. Then, he pushed the weapon down, and the blade severed Ethel's arm without meeting any resistance.

'Powerful!' Khan commented in his mind.

Cutting a human arm was hard, even with sharp blades. Yet, George had barely needed to put strength in his movement to sever Ethel's hand.

Ethel gave voice to a grunt, and tears quickly followed. She continued to scream while her teeth bit hard on the piece of folded fabric and her left hand covered her mouth to suppress her noise.

The magic knife dispersed as George grabbed Ethel's injured arm and forced it closer to the scorching slab. The girl wasn't in control of her actions, and she opposed the body with kicks and pulls.

Cora's hands trembled when she saw the bleeding arm. The girl froze and found herself unable to push the scorching metal forward, but Khan promptly grabbed one of her wrists to help her.

Khan also grabbed the bleeding arm and helped George getting Ethel closer to the scorching slab. The two eventually met, and a sizzling noise resounded among the heavy rain.

Cora almost puked when that noise and Ethel's suppressed screams reached her ears. She had to close her eyes and let Khan guide her through the process.

"You can drop it now," Khan eventually whispered, and Cora saw that her arms pointed inside the engine among the recruits now.

The girl gave voice to a short cry when she sensed heat going past the protection on her hands. She instantly dropped the metal slab, and she instinctively hid her face on Khan's side. Her fingers also tried to stab his abdomen and back as she clung to him.

Khan almost lost his composure, but a helpless expression appeared on his face when he heard Cora's sobs. The last part had been too much for her. She had tried to suppress her emotions until now, but she was only a seventeen-year-old girl whose world had turned upside-down.

"You can't fall apart yet," Khan sighed while gently patting the back of Cora's head. "We have a long way to cross, and dangers might be waiting for us. Put your emotions on hold until we get past this."

Cora began to calm down under Khan's caresses. The girl eventually left his side and sniffed one last time before nodding.

"Thank you," Cora whispered while closing her eyes and moving on her side to try to sleep.

George dragged Ethel next to her and let her sleep by her side. The girl had fainted after the procedure, and only a long night of rest could help her with the trauma of losing her hand.

"Should we establish guard duty?" George asked while turning toward Khan.

Khan took out his phone, and a few calculations happened in his mind. The device had synchronized with Istrone's time after the teleport, so its hour was still accurate. Khan didn't know how long its battery would last, but the group could use the alarms for now.

"Let's wake everyone up before dawn," Khan ordered. "I want Ethel to spend a few hours meditating before starting the march. Walking at night is out of the question, so we have to use every hour with the sun to get closer to the plain."

"Who wants the first round?" Dorian asked before glancing at his two companions and heaving a helpless sigh. "I'll take it, but my phone is broken."

"Don't worry," Khan replied while setting the alarm and placing his phone among them. "I'll meditate a bit more before sleeping. Shout if you see something off."

"I'll do the same," George announced before nodding toward Khan when the latter shot a worried glance at him. "I still need to recover, and we need power more than ever now."

Khan couldn't change George's mind, and the trio soon created a simple schedule for the guard duty. Dorian then started his task while Khan and George began to meditate. Still, the duo exchanged a few words when their companion jumped on the vehicle to gain a complete view of the crash site.

"How strong are you?" George asked without opening his eyes.

"I'm strong," Khan replied.

"Some of us won't make it," George added.

"I know," Khan whispered. "I'm no stranger to death."

"But can you leave someone behind if the situation requires it?" George continued.

Khan didn't answer anymore at that point. He didn't want to let others die, but he wouldn't lose his life to play hero either. Still, revealing that information to George could lead to adverse situations, so he preferred to leave the boy in the dark.

Chapter 63 - Failure

The group went through an uneventful night, and Khan woke everyone up a few hours before dawn. His phone had lasted for the entire guard duty, and he had taken the last shift to make sure that the others wouldn't lose track of time even if his device turned off.

The recruits' condition was far better after a long night of sleep and multiple meditations. Dorian and Cora almost appeared at their peak when the sun rose, and George also felt far better. His left side was still a mess, but it didn't seem to hinder his movements.

Ethel was Khan's main concern, but the girl's complexion had improved after removing her wounded hand. Her mana didn't have to slow down the gangrene anymore, so it could focus all its efforts on healing her body. She was far from ok, but she could stand and walk without slowing down her teammates.

"We have to move now," Khan ordered while pointing toward the direction that he had committed to memory after the crash. "The plain is in that direction."

The recruits followed Khan's hand, but they didn't see anything peculiar when they looked at the jungle. The traces of the crash had disappeared under the trees' stretched branches and thick vegetation born due to the mana flowing through the ground.

"Are you sure about that?" Dorian asked. "Everything looks the same for me."

"I memorized the spot before taking you out of the troop carrier," Khan revealed. "That's the right direction. Not getting lost is up to us."

"Some of our phones are still working," Cora said while keeping her voice down. "The compass should be active since the devices aligned with Istrone's magnetic field."

Cora felt awkward due to her previous actions. She had completely lost it after cauterizing Ethel's arms, and her mind had yet to recover. Also, she had basically exposed her feelings, which made her shy toward her teammates.

"For how long can we rely on them?" Khan asked when he noticed that Cora seemed to know a bit about those devices.

"The battery won't be a problem," Cora explained with the same tone as before. "Our phones only need one day under the sun to fully charge, and they can last for a bit more than a week if used correctly. The sparse rays that pierce the crowns should prevent problems."

Khan and the others instinctively lifted their heads. The trees' crowns were thick and left almost no room for the sunlight, but some ray still managed to reach the ground.

'What if it rains all the time?' Khan wondered.

The rain had stopped after the long night, but Istrone seemed to experience that bad weather often. The thick vegetation couldn't only come from the mana in the end.

'We must hurry,' Khan concluded before tinkering with the phone and finding the compass.

His new knowledge about the devices didn't change the team's situation. They had to regroup with the Global Army as soon as possible since the forest might hide dangers that they couldn't face. Spending time in the wilderness only increased their chances of dying.

Khan didn't know much about compasses, but he soon understood that using them wasn't too hard in his situation. He didn't have to learn Istrone's cardinal directions. He only needed to make sure that the arrow on the screen remained in the same spot while traversing the jungle.

The group quickly began to move through the wilderness. Khan and Dorian took the lead of the team while George remained at its end. The two girls were in the middle since they had yet to become combat-ready.

Everything looked the same in Khan's eyes. The plants and trees seemed to repeat themselves in his vision. The only proof of his correct direction was the compass depicted on his phone.

Istrone appeared empty. Khan had never been in an environment full of vegetation before, but he had heard about it from documentaries and other shows. He knew that a forest on Earth would normally have many animals, but the alien planet didn't respect that rule.

'Even the Slums had cockroaches and rats,' Khan cursed in his mind. 'How can this planet have nothing at all?'

The foreign environment didn't make sense in his mind, but he didn't dare to share his thoughts with his teammates. The group had silently decided to limit their noise to avoid attracting threats, and the lack of the heavy rain made them even more careful about that approach.

The jungle was silent, and only the cracking noise of the roots breaking under the recruits' feet resounded in the air. The vegetation was too thick to allow wind in its insides, so the group couldn't even hear the fluttering of the leaves and plants around them.

The complete silence was deafening. Khan and the others had only doubts in their minds, and the lack of noises made them louder. It was impossible to avoid thinking about the countless things that could go wrong in their journey, but they had to suppress them anyway to pay attention to the environment.

The recruits only knew that their direction was on point. Everything else was a mystery, starting from the most worrisome features of the whole situation. There was a chance that the rebels had captured the Global Army's headquarters, which would leave Khan and the others without a destination.

"Stop," Khan whispered, and his word reached even George in the back of the group due to the complete silence around them.

Khan had sensed something while moving through the jungle. It was a familiar sensation by then. Two masses of wild mana were moving among the trees ahead, but they had stopped when the recruits halted their steps.

'They know we are here,' Khan quickly concluded before turning toward Dorian.

Khan didn't know how strong the boy was, but it was better to learn about his prowess now that he could handle the threat on his own. Making plans would become far easier afterward, and the experience might even benefit Dorian.

"There are two Tainted animals ahead," Khan whispered while lowering his body. "They know we are here, but they are hesitating. The mutations must have worked pretty well for them."

Tainted animals usually fell prey to their aggression, but the two creatures in front of the group were showing signs of intelligence. That behavior broke the pattern and led Khan to believe that their mutations had led to stable forms.

"What should we do?" Dorian asked while imitating Khan.

The boy's martial art was completely different, but he instinctively imitated Khan's actions due to his anxiety.

"I'll quickly take one out," Khan explained. "You take care of keeping the other busy until I arrive. Of course, kill it if you can."

Dorian gulped, but he forced himself to nod. A real battle was finally in front of him, so he had to deploy all the teachings that his Master had forced him to memorize.

"I'll give the order," Khan continued. "Be sure to keep up with me."

Dorian nodded, and the tension in the air intensified as Khan started a countdown. Even the three recruits behind him felt anxious about the imminent battle.

The countdown eventually hit zero, and Khan shot ahead. Dorian quickly imitated him, but disbelief appeared in his eyes when he stopped seeing his companion.

Khan was too fast, and that feature became even more evident during a fight. His sprints were one of the Lighting-demon style's core aspects, and his speed reached insane levels during those techniques.

Khan's skin burnt due to the friction with the stale air. His body could barely endure the incredible acceleration gained during the sprint. Still, he had to keep his eyes open to avoid all the roots and hindrances on the uneven terrain.

Two large figures quickly unfolded in his vision. A Tainted bear and a Tainted wolf-like creature were standing in a spot that didn't feature many trees. It seemed that they had chosen a battlefield that would benefit their size, but Khan was going too fast to let those thoughts enter his mind.

Khan didn't have much time to choose his target. It would take him less than an instant to land on the two Tainted animals, and he had to use part of that time to complete his technique.

His eyes and body quickly turned toward the strange wolf. The creature had two rows of teeth on both sides of its mouth and a forked tail, but it appeared frailer than the bear.

Taking out one Tainted animal with a single blow would significantly simplify the battle, and Khan didn't hesitate to pursue that approach.

Khan planted his right foot on the ground when he arrived in front of the two Tainted animals. His leg dug the terrain as his body spun and deployed a roundhouse kick aimed at the wolf's head.

The attack landed on the creature before it could do anything about that sudden threat. Even the bear remained still when Khan's figure materialized in its vision. Both animals had only seen a shadow even if they had prepared for the incoming opponents.

'Dammit!' Khan cursed in his mind when he saw the wolf flying away and releasing a trail of blood from its nose.

Khan had become aware of something tragic after completing the technique. He had executed everything perfectly, but he had lost control of his mana at the last instant.

The wolf had flown away due to the momentum accumulated during the inhuman sprint, but his technique didn't express its full power. The animal's head would have exploded otherwise.

Chapter 64 - Exploration

'I have been too confident in my ability,' Khan quickly concluded in his mind when he realized that he had failed to execute his technique.

The Tainted bear didn't give him much time to think. The animal recovered from its surprise and raised its paws to launch an attack toward its opponent.

However, Khan's emotions were still in a separate part of his brain. His surprise and disappointment in front of the failed technique didn't slow down his body. His leg was already in the air, and his shinbone was even pointing at the bear's side.

Mana flowed through Khan's body according to the teachings of the Lightning-demon style. The bear's paws were getting closer to his head, but his eyes barely registered them. His mind could only think at the instructions that he had reviewed and practiced countless times already.

The bear's paws filled Khan's vision. The sharp claws descended until they were at a mere inch from his face, but the whole creature disappeared when he completed his technique.

A loud noise spread through the area as the bear slid on the ground and created a long hole before slamming on the nearest tree. The plant shook to no end as the beast crouched on its trunk, and a cloud of blue leaves fell after the impact.

The Tainted wolf returned to its feet and fixed its angry eyes on Khan. Its nose still hurt, but taking care of its opponent had the priority.

The creature gave voice to a loud howl before charging ahead. Khan prepared for the imminent impact, but a battle cry suddenly resounded in the area before Dorian ran past him to face the wolf.

Dorian's posture was clearly off, and sweat already covered his body. He wasn't trying to perform any special technique. His assault was a reckless charge driven by fear and panic, but those emotions didn't make him forget his task.

The wolf quickly changed its target and leapt toward Dorian. Its teeth stabbed the boy's shoulder, but they didn't dig his skin too deeply due to the pain that spread through its mouth after the attack.

Dorian barely felt pain in his frenzied state. His mind only registered that the one-and-a-half-meter tall wolf was on him before his fists started to slam on its figure.

Khan almost felt bad about Dorian's Master after seeing those pitiful attacks, but the boy completed his role with his messy approach. The two Tainted animals couldn't work together anymore.

The Tainted bear roared as Khan turned toward the creature. It seemed that the tinge of intelligence from before had disappeared. The huge animal fell prey to its aggression and went on its four legs to charge toward Khan.

Blood flowed out of the creature's mouth. The previous technique had hurt its insides in ways that normal animals and humans couldn't endure. Yet, the mana flowing through its body allowed it to launch a reckless offensive that Khan welcomed with calm eyes.

'I got too cocky before,' Khan thought as the bear's charge slowed down in his eyes. 'Mastery doesn't come after a few good days of perfect executions. My proficiency will increase only after these techniques won't require me to concentrate anymore.'

Khan took a deep breath and let the bear get close. The huge creature leapt toward him once he entered its range, but its claws didn't manage to hit anything.

The bear grew confused even in its frenzied state. Khan's figure vanished as its body pierced it. The boy had moved so quickly that its eyes still saw his afterimage.

A faint pressure then appeared on its head. The bear couldn't see what was happening there, but the trio in the distance witnessed the entire scene.

Khan seemed to have teleported on top of the bear's head. The tip of his left foot touched the creature's forehead as he stood above it.

Khan felt weightless. His body seemed able to use the very air as footholds with his faint steps, but even mana couldn't make him ignore gravity. Still, he had no intention to remain in that state forever.

The mana in Khan's body suddenly fell and converged toward the tip of his foot. The bear sensed an immense force pushing it down and slamming its head on the ground.

The attack was so sudden that the head dug the ground before the rest of the body could follow it. A cracking sound eventually resounded in the area when the bear's belly landed on the terrain, but Khan's foot continued to pierce downward.

A wet sensation enveloped Khan's foot when the ground managed to stop his attack. He took his leg out of the hole and noticed that a dark-red liquid and other slimy materials had covered everything under his ankle.

The Tainted bear didn't move anymore. The attack had crushed its skull after giving birth to a spectacular scene.

'The other now,' Khan turned and shot toward Dorian without bothering to inspect the situation behind him beforehand.

Vague images appeared in his vision, but they didn't stop Khan from focusing on his target. The Tainted wolf and Dorian were still stuck in a messy grapple that didn't seem to lead anywhere, and their situation made it hard for Khan to intervene.

The wolf had its teeth stuck inside Dorian's shoulder. An abrupt attack could worsen the boy's injuries. Khan even risked hurting his companion if he delivered a proper kick to the creature, so his approach couldn't follow his usual style.

Luckily for Khan, Lieutenant Dyester had gone all-out to pick an excellent martial art. The Lightning-demon style had earned seventy-eight points, so it featured techniques useful in every situation.

Khan stopped when he reached Dorian. His body seemed to move slowly in the boy's vision, but he soon linked that impression to the effects of a technique.

Khan was moving slower than usual, but he was still quite fast. That apparent slow-motion came from the peculiar flow of the mana inside his body. The energy wasn't accompanying his rising leg. It was actually trying to push it in the opposite direction.

Air slowly flowed out of Khan's mouth as he placed his foot on the wolf's head. He didn't put any power into that move, but a loud noise still followed that action.

Dorian's eyes widened when blood started to flow out of the wolf's face. The creature even went limp and hung from his shoulder after the attack. The boy quickly grabbed its head to throw it to the ground, but pure disgust filled him when he sensed that the creature's skull had gained the same texture as a jelly.

The wolf's corpse fell on the ground as Dorian let go of its head. The boy held his hand as his breath grew ragged, but Khan promptly squeezed his arm to make him focus on something else.

"It gets easier," Khan explained before turning to the three companions that had just come out of the trees. "I've never seen such calm Tainted animals."

"They probably are the result of some experiment," George suggested. "The Kred might even be involved. I've read that their connection with nature can unlock fields unknown to humans."

George managed to suppress his amazement after exchanging a glance with Khan, but the two girls couldn't do the same. Ethel stared at him with wide eyes before shaking her head and regaining her concentration, but Cora appeared completely in a daze.

"Wake up," Ethel suddenly whispered while lightly hitting Cora's side with her elbow. "We have to move."

Cora snapped back to reality at that point, and an evident blush appeared on her cheeks. Khan pretended not to see that event and shot a glance at Dorian's shoulder before ordering to resume the march.

The group walked for all the hours with the sunlight, but they had to stop once heavy rain arrived and blocked their only source of illumination. They had managed to march for almost a quarter of a day before Istrone decided to hinder their vision, and Khan could only order to stop at that point.

A few training sessions and the guard duty made the group go through the night quickly. They didn't speak much due to the unsettling hunger accumulating in their minds. Sleeping was the only approach that temporarily suppressed that feeling.

The rain was still falling the next morning, but it wasn't as heavy as the previous day. The clouds past the trees weren't even completely dark either, so the recruits could see the path ahead and resume their march.

An uneventful day went by, but the group got lucky at that time. The weather never worsened, so they could walk for thirteen hours straight without taking any break.

The effort pushed their bodies to their limits. Exhaustion wasn't a problem, but their intensifying hunger was dulling their senses and slowing down their movements.

Only Khan appeared unaffected. He filled his stomach with the falling water and endured his hunger perfectly even after almost three days of complete starvation. Yet, it was clear that his teammates needed a solution to that issue.

None of them knew much about Istrone's vegetation, so they could only test the plants blindly. The recruits chose to use Dorian as a guinea pig and feed him different roots after removing their most hideous parts.

Most of the tests didn't go well. The human body rejected most of those plants, but some didn't cause any reaction.

The group took note of the harmless plants and started gathering their roots before feasting. Ethel became the official supplies carrier of the team since her condition wouldn't allow her to fight for a few more days, but there was a limit to how many resources she could hold with a single hand and the lack of a bag.

Dorian skipped the guard duty that night since his body had yet to expel all the toxins eaten during the tests. Nothing serious happened to him. He only experienced severe diarrhea that his mana managed to fix in a few hours.

The next day featured some illumination again, but rain still fell. The group felt better after taking care of their hunger, so they marched at a good pace through the jungle, hoping that they could return to the plain without meeting any danger.

Yet, Khan had to stop his companions after marching for a few hours. A strange sensation that he couldn't completely describe had suddenly reached his mind and had alerted his senses.

"How are you feeling, George?" Khan whispered while trying to understand what was happening among the trees.

The strange sensation told Khan that the danger didn't come from Tainted animals. He needed another reliable fighter in that unknown situation, and Dorian didn't fit those requirements.

"I can fight," George replied in a firm tone before drawing a thick and long branch from a hole in his trousers.

The boy had picked that branch in the past days, and no one had questioned him about that action. Everyone could understand that it had something to do with his martial art.

"Dorian?" Khan asked.

"I'm ready," Dorian answered while trying to imitate George's tone.

"Cora?" Khan continued to question his group.

"I'll follow you closely but remain hidden," Cora said with a slight tremor in her voice. "I'll jump out and support you if the situation goes out of hand."

Khan nodded even if curses resounded in his mind. Cora's role was quite important, but he didn't know if the girl would freeze in a real battle. She could do the same during her task, but she wouldn't be in the way at least.

"Follow me," Khan eventually whispered before crouching and moving through the trees.

A few figures soon appeared behind some large trunks. Khan recognized two bear-shaped Kred standing around three fainted humans. His eyes couldn't help but widen at that point. Luke was among that group.

Chapter 65 - Surprise

The Kred exchanged growls that Khan couldn't understand. Those noises were perfectly clear due to the deafening stillness of the jungle, but the aliens weren't using words. They sounded like animals exchanging a deep and complicated conversation.

'They didn't notice us,' Khan thought even if the event left him surprised.

That jungle was the Kred's native environment. It felt strange that Khan had managed to sense the two aliens and get that close without alerting their senses. After all, no one in his group knew how to move silently, and they had stopped at only ten meters from them.

Khan wanted to believe that his group had gotten lucky, but the nature of the situation didn't make him feel like that. Luke and the other two recruits didn't feature heavy injuries, but flexible roots tied their hands and legs.

The three recruits were prisoners, which put Khan into an annoying situation. He had to decide whether to attempt to save those three or avoid the issue altogether.

The Kred seemed unaware of Khan's group, so running away was an option that he didn't dare to disregard. The aliens' prowess was an unclear variable that he couldn't underestimate.

Doubts filled Khan's mind while his companions remained silent. They were waiting for his orders, and tension inevitably built among them.

Only George could consider all the available options like Khan. The other recruits in their group had immediately thought that a rescue mission would start once their leader came up with a plan.

'Kred have better bodies but struggle to increase their attunement with mana,' Khan reminded himself while inspecting the area. 'The Ef'i are a stronger species, and I've defeated them, but they look like adults.'

It was hard for Khan to judge the actual age of the Kred. Their inhuman features didn't show marks that he could recognize, but their aura lacked any childish vibe.

The Kred appeared mature, determined, and driven. Their inhuman eyes carried no mercy when they stared at the fainted recruits under them. They didn't waver as they coldly inspected the young prisoners.

'Facing them is madness,' Khan eventually concluded in his mind.

His opponents could have years, if not decades, of training more than him. They might be experienced soldiers who had already gone through many deadly battles. The two bear-shaped Kred might be as strong as Lieutenant Dyester, which would leave Khan no chance to succeed in an eventual rescue mission.

"Let's leav-," Khan turned and began to give his order, but his eyes widened when he saw that a third bear-shaped Kred was silently approaching his group from behind.

Khan and the alien looked at each other for less than a second, but that moment felt like an eternity. The two went over countless ideas in the span of an instant before reacting to the surprising event.

The Kred began to roar. Its hairy mouth opened and started to give voice to a low cry, but Khan put everything he had in his bent legs and reached the alien one second after its warning spread into the environment.

Dorian, George, Cora, and Ethel divided Khan from the Kred, but his faint steps barely affected them when he walked on their shoulders and heads.

Khan flew after walking over his companions. His airborne figure appeared in front of the alien with a knee pointed toward its open mouth. He had taken only one second to complete the technique. His mana was already in the right place. The sudden danger had allowed him to complete his fastest execution yet.

The Kred's eyes widened as its body bent backward, but it didn't seem to have the power to dodge Khan's attack. His knee hit the alien's nose and made it cave in until it reached its forehead. A cracking noise even resounded from its skull, but Khan didn't hear it due to the grunt that followed the interruption of the warning cry.

Khan directly flowed into another technique. His attack had pushed the Kred backward, but his knee was still attached to its face. He took a deep breath as mana gathered in his torso before falling toward the tip of his joint when he exhaled.

The Kred's vision had grown blurry after the first attack, but it could sense that a massive weight had suddenly appeared on its face. Still, everything was happening too quickly. The alien tried to raise its clawed arms, but the back of its head hit the ground before it could even attempt to touch Khan.

The ground shattered as Khan slammed the tall alien down and forced the entirety of his bodyweight to converge on his knee. His leg dug the terrain as he continued to push the Kred downward. The crash made a lot of noise, but Khan could only think about defeating that opponent now.

The noise alerted the other two Kred and forced the four recruits to turn. Everything had happened too quickly for them too. They realized the nature of the threat only when the tall body of the alien appeared in their vision.

'Can I really defeat them?' Khan wondered while rolling on his back to exit the hole created by his attack and turn toward his astonished companions.

The Kred didn't move anymore. Khan had clearly beaten it, but he didn't know if he could accomplish the same feat without taking the aliens by surprise. Still, another issue appeared in his mind when he realized that escaping would cause other problems now.

'We can't lose our path,' Khan understood in his mind when he saw two tall figures moving quickly among the trees.

Escaping when two natives were on his tracks was hard, but Khan could pull it off with his speed. However, he risked getting lost in the process, and no compass could help him if he walked out of his path.

Fighting seemed the only chance at that point, but his companions had yet to understand what had happened. Khan's sudden actions had made them turn toward him and show their back to the other aliens. They didn't know that the Kred were already on the move.

"Behind you!" Khan eventually decided to shout.

The four recruits turned and noticed the two tall bear-shaped Kred hurrying toward their position. Their size didn't seem to be a hindrance in that thick vegetation.

George was the first to react to that threat. He was already wielding his branch, and his mind had been ready to fight since the group found the Kred.

George took a deep breath as mana flowed out of his body and entered the branch. The greenish weapon began to radiate a faint light while the boy sat on his knees and acted as if he was sheathing a sword on his side.

Dorian quickly stood up and prepared himself for the imminent impact, and Cora imitated him while using her body to hide Ethel.

Khan made sure to reinforce the mental barriers on his emotions before shooting ahead. He circled the group and prepared himself to support George since he had the highest chances of delivering a proper attack to the Kred. Yet, he slowed down on purpose to make the two aliens clash on the group.

One of the Kred quickly approached George and waved both its arms toward his head. However, the alien promptly retracted them when the boy drew the branch by his side and swung it in the air.

The Kred's reaction had been almost immediate, but the tip of George's branch had managed to hit its targets anyway. Two superficial cuts opened on the alien's forearms, and red blood started to flow out of them.

Dorian charged ahead once the second Kred became too close. His palms slammed on the alien's chest to push it, but the latter didn't budge. Instead, it delivered a swift attack with its left arm that flung the boy away and opened four deep cuts on his side.

Khan arrived at that point. The injured Kred shot an angry glance toward George, but a kick landed on its side and forced its body to bend unnaturally.

George didn't miss that chance. His branch promptly slashed at the Kred's head, and a long injury opened on its face. The weapon even cut part of its exposed hairy chest and made dark-red patches spread from those spots.

Khan jumped to rotate his body mid-air and slam his heel on the back of the Kred's head. The impact made the alien fall forward and gave George the chance to launch another attack. However, the boy lost his concentration, and his branch broke when its tip touched his opponent's chest.

Khan prepared himself to launch another attack, but he stopped when he noticed that the Kred had fainted. His eyes moved toward the other alien at that point, and he found it waving its arms toward Cora.

The girl seemed to panic when the two massive clawed arms swung toward her, but her body instinctively moved to accompany the alien's attack.

The claws stabbed her side, but they didn't dig too deeply. She imitated their movements and rotated behind the Kred once it completed its attack.

The Kred felt surprised in front of that strange technique, but Cora shared its emotions. Her breath became ragged, and pure fear appeared on her face when the creature turned toward her.

However, a figure suddenly materialized above the Kred's head. Cora saw Khan rotating in the air before slamming his heel on the alien's forehead.

The attack stunned the Kred and allowed George to reach its position. He still wielded his broken branch, but the weapon didn't fail to pierce the side of the alien's chest at that time.

The alien spat blood, but Khan's shinbone suddenly slammed on the side of its head. Its jaw broke after the technique, and the alien fell to the ground. It was still awake, but it seemed unable to stand up.

Chapter 66 - Daughter

'Did we win?' Khan wondered as a tinge of excitement managed to seep past his mental barrier.

Khan almost couldn't believe the recent event. The three huge Kred appeared threatening and scary, but they were all lying on the ground now. A team made of inexperienced recruits had defeated them in only a few exchanges.

The third Kred struggled to stand up, but it seemed unable to restore its balance. It pointed its huge arms and knees on the terrain, but it always fell, and a puddle of blood eventually gathered under its figure.

Khan took a deep breath to force his emotions away and handle the situation coldly. He quickly grabbed Cora's shoulder and lifted her arm to inspect her injuries.

The girl blushed when she sensed Khan's gaze on her uncovered side. The Kred's claws had pierced part of her sports bra, and Khan even touched the areas around that spot to inspect her injuries. However, he quickly let her go when he noticed that they were nothing more than superficial cuts.

Ethel shook her head when she saw Khan turning toward Dorian without saying a single word to the embarrassed girl, but Cora glared at her to make her stop. Khan noticed that reaction, but he completely ignored it to inspect the wounded boy.

Dorian had been the only one in his group to endure the direct attack from one of the Kred. He had managed to sit on the ground after the clash ended, but a large bruise had appeared on his whole right side.

Moreover, four deep cuts had appeared on that injured spot. Blood flowed out of them and created red trails on his back, but the bleeding didn't seem to be a severe issue.

"Start meditating now," Khan ordered before turning toward George. "Can we do anything else for this injury?"

George shook his head before glancing at his broken branch and throwing it away. The images of the fight were running through his vision during that peaceful moment, and they put Khan above him in terms of battle prowess.

That conclusion disappointed George. He had acted humbly before, but he felt quite confident in his ability. His entire training camp on Earth knew about his talent with mana, but Khan's battle

prowess had reminded him that his skills were useless if he couldn't deploy them during an actual danger.

Yet, George quickly put away his feelings and focused on his surroundings again. Having such a strong teammate was a good thing in that tragic situation. Khan could be the key to save everyone's life.

"Cora, untie the three recruits and wake them up," Khan continued with his orders. "Ethel, grab something useful to tie the aliens. George, guard these two a bit. I'll go take the other."

No one spoke after the orders. Everyone got to work while Khan crossed a few trees to return toward the first alien.

The first Kred's head was inside the ground, and the same went for part of its shoulders. Khan had slammed it hard on the terrain, so debris and plants had ended up covering part of its body.

Khan crouched toward the hole to check the alien's condition, but his movements froze when he saw that a puddle of blood hid its face. The wet surface even lacked bubbles. The whole scene depicted complete stillness.

Khan's eyes slowly moved toward his left knee and saw that a large dark-red patch and fur had tainted his skin. His hands then slowly grabbed the Kred from its shoulder and lifted it out of the hole.

The puddle released disgusting noises while Khan lifted the Kred and lay it on the intact ground. He could see its crushed head at that point, but his attention moved to its broken nose and mouth.

The mental barrier that kept his emotions away struggled to remain intact while Khan inspected the alien. Its forehead, nose, and upper side of the mouth had caved in, but that scene carried a feature that made his thoughts freeze.

The Kred wasn't breathing. No air moved the wet fur on the sides of its nose, and the same went for its mouth. The alien had died in the last exchange.

Khan timidly stretched a hand over the alien's nose and mouth, but he didn't sense anything. It didn't matter how many times he inspected and tested the scene. His seemingly frozen mind could only reach one conclusion. The Kred was dead, and he had killed it.

Lieutenant Dyester's voice inevitably resounded in his mind. Khan heard the soldier say "murderer" in that complete silence. That word echoed through his frozen thoughts and became the only noise in his ears.

'Put it away,' Khan ordered to himself. 'Hide it in the corner of your mind. Reinforce the mental barrier. You can't fall now.'

The mana in Khan's brain moved as he gave himself orders. He reinforced the mental barrier learnt in his training before creating a second layer on top of it.

That method didn't seem to be enough to keep locked away the tumultuous emotions trying to take control of his mind. Khan had to create a third layer and add a fourth before his thoughts grew calm.

Pure emptiness filled Khan's mind now. He could think and create plans, but he felt devoid of everything. He was nothing more than a puppet ruled by survival instincts and simple thoughts, but that was fine by him.

That emptiness was better right now. Khan couldn't sort his emotions in that situation. Surviving had to come before the cracks in his personality.

Khan searched the Kred's robe. The alien was wearing a simple layer of fabric that covered its belly and thin trousers with no pockets. There wasn't anything useful there, so he quickly stood up and left the area.

"Where is the other?" George asked when he noticed that Khan was back.

Cora was tying the two Kred to a tree under George's strict supervision. Meanwhile, Ethel was talking with the three recruits in a different spot. Luke and his group were awake, and pure happiness filled their faces.

"She isn't a problem," Khan announced while moving his gaze toward the two prisoners.

"She?" Cora asked when she noticed that Khan had stopped addressing the Kred as a simple alien.

Khan had discovered the Kred's sex during the inspection, and his mind didn't allow him to consider her as a simple opponent anymore. Even his mental barriers couldn't help him with that.

"Did you let her go?" Cora continued when Khan failed to answer her.

"Enough questions, Cora," George suddenly exclaimed. "Finish tying them up and help Ethel. I bet she desperately needs you."

Cora felt confused at that sudden burst. She glanced at Khan's aloof gaze before nodding and hurrying with her task. Then, she straightened her position and walked toward Ethel to help her handle the three recruits.

Khan and George exchanged an understanding gaze before nearing the two aliens tied to the tree. A quick inspection revealed that they weren't carrying anything either, but that process allowed the boys to understand their sex.

The male among the two growled when he opened his eyes and noticed the two boys glancing at him. The cut on his face had stopped bleeding by then, but a deep mark remained and gave his expression a threatening appearance.

"Dorian, you can leave if you want," George explained. "You might not want to see what's about to happen."

"Don't worry about me," Dorian replied while interrupting his meditation and moving his eyes toward Khan. "We are at war, right?"

"What do you know about the attack?" Khan asked the male Kred. "Is this another rebellion?"

The Kred roared, and Khan didn't manage to understand anything from those animal cries. Still, the alien often glanced at his fainted companion with an expression that seemed to express worry and anger.

Khan crouched toward the female Kred. George's branch had broken after the mana inside it dispersed, and the blood flowing out of her broken jaw had eventually forced her to faint. The bleeding had yet to completely stop even, so the other alien had reasons to be worried.

The male Kred's roars became louder when Khan approached his companion, but he barely looked at him. Khan limited himself to grab the fur on her forehead and lift her face to inspect her injuries.

The female Kred woke up during the process, and growls immediately came out of her mouth. Yet, her broken jaw released a wave of pain when those vibrations ran through it.

Khan let her go and stood up again. He had to make the aliens talk, but they appeared pretty resolute.

"How do we know that they can speak our language?" Khan asked while turning toward George.

"Istrone isn't like Onia," A familiar voice resounded from behind the three boys, and Khan couldn't help but nod when he saw Luke walking toward them.

The boy and girl in his group followed closely behind, and Ethel and Cora made sure that the new group didn't fall due to their exhaustion. Everyone had gathered around the tied Kred now.

"Humans and Ef'i have a peaceful and respectful relationship," Luke explained while nearing Khan and patting his shoulder, "But the Kred are different. Istrone is under the strict control of the Global Army after the last rebellion. All of them must learn how to communicate with humans."

"You understand what we want then," Khan continued while turning toward the two prisoners. "Tell us what you know, and we'll spare your lives."

The male Kred snorted and spat toward Khan, but he sidestepped the grume of saliva. Instead, the female alien growled again before trying to gaze past the recruits.

"Are you looking for something?" George asked, and the male Kred promptly glared at his companion.

That gesture wasn't enough to stop the female Kred. Her worry increased, and faint understandable sounds eventually came out of her broken mouth.

"Whele ish she?" The female Kred asked in a young voice. "Wheke ish ay dauthel?"

The broken jaw made it hard for her to speak, but the group understood what she meant. The third Kred was her daughter, and Khan felt his mental barrier tremble when he heard that.

George glanced at Khan from the corner of his eyes while Cora directly stared at him. Everyone soon understood that only he had the answer to that question, but his cold face didn't show any hint.

Chapter 67 - Execution

Khan was already struggling to dehumanize the Kred. He couldn't see them as simple enemies anymore after discovering their sex, and realizing that they had families added blows to his mental barrier.

Khan wasn't only a murderer anymore. He had destroyed a family, just like the Nak had done to him during the Second Impact.

'Concentrate, dammit!' Khan cursed in his mind. 'They have attacked first anyway. Keep your cool.'

Khan maintained a cold expression while the group turned toward him. Raging emotions wanted to fill his brain, but he slowly pushed them back during his silence. His eyes didn't waver during the process either. They remained on the two aliens who had inevitably started to look at him after noticing the reaction of the other recruits.

"Tell us everything you know first," Khan eventually said in a plain tone. "We'll talk about your daughter after that."

The male Kred roared again before turning toward his companion. It was clear that he didn't want to reveal anything about the situation, but the female alien's determination was on the verge of crumbling.

"I ant to see ay dauthel fist," The female alien said and revealed her resolve to share information, but Khan couldn't show any flaw in his pretense.

"Your story first," Khan repeated.

Desperation appeared on the female Kred, and tears even fell from her animal eyes. She turned toward her companion, and sad cries came out of her mouth.

She seemed to beg her companion, and the latter was clearly struggling to preserve his resolve. The male Kred's expression remained stern for a few seconds before slowly relaxing to wear a sad face.

"Do I have your word that you'll let us talk with our daughter afterward?" The male Kred asked in a raspy voice while turning toward Khan.

A hammer hit Khan's mental barrier and made it tremble to no end. The three Kred belonged to the same family, and the two in front of him sounded quite young.

Khan didn't know much about the Kred's anatomy, but part of his thoughts inevitably started wondering about their customs and growth speed.

How young were they when they set up families? How quickly did they obtain their iconic tall bodies? How old was the Kred that he had killed?

"How old are you two?" Khan couldn't help but ask when one of his many doubts seeped past the mental barrier.

The two Kred and his companions didn't understand the reason behind that sudden question, but the two aliens couldn't remain silent in that situation.

"In Earth years?" The male Kred asked before quickly calculating his age in his mind. "We are both twenty. Our daughter will be ten soon."

Khan knew that his values couldn't apply to that alien species. The three Kred had mature bodies even if they were pretty young. It seemed that they only required ten years to develop completely, which made even the dead daughter an adult.

However, the differences between the two species didn't change the reality of the facts. Khan had taken a life who had barely been in the world for ten years. That realization forced him to fall silent and reinforce his mental barrier again while his companions shot confused glances toward him.

"You have my word," Khan eventually announced. "You'll both see your daughter if you tell us everything you know."

Something broke inside Khan when he said those words, but his mental barrier held strong and kept the part of his mind in control of his actions calm and cynical.

The male Kred appeared disappointed when he inspected Khan's cold expression, but a glance at his tied partner's begging face forced him to pursue that approach. He had to cooperate for the sake of his family.

"The three of us are simple foot soldiers," The male Kred revealed. "We only know that some of the rebellious factions have decided to strike back to restore Istrone's independence."

"Why would you rebel again?" Luke asked. "Didn't you learn your lesson forty years ago?"

"The ground still carries the scent of our fallen," The Kred said as growls fused with his human words. "Humans might be able to move on easily, but our planet doesn't allow us to forget. This debt will remain as long as Istrone lives."

George and Luke exchanged a meaningful glance before turning toward Khan. That story wasn't going anywhere. It explained part of the Kred's mentality, but it didn't help the recruits at all.

"Tell me about your targets and other useful details," Khan ordered. "How many Kred rebelled? How many of you are patrolling the jungle? Why did you attack innocent recruits instead of taking the battle to the real culprits of your suppression?"

"None of you is innocent," The Kred scoffed. "You thrive by feeding on Istrone's natural resources. You pillage our planet and exploit our teachings to destroy nature. This ground is our future, and you are destroying it. We have only decided to pay you back with the same approach."

There was an immense gap between their species. Simple words couldn't make them reach an agreement. The Global Army had a financial approach to war, especially in the last years, but the Kred saw defeats as curses that remained stuck to their very species.

That feeling wasn't reasonable. The Kred could actually smell the scent of their fallen, according to the male prisoner. Istrone constantly reminded them of their defeat, and Khan could relate to that situation. He experienced the same reminder every night.

Khan could understand that the Kred wouldn't stop rebelling as long as Istrone continued to drive them crazy. He wouldn't either if he were in their situation, but his task wasn't to relate with the aliens.

"Targets, number of rebels, and troops deployed in this area," Khan reminded the Kred with his emotionless voice.

"I already told you that we are mere pawns in this rebellion," The male Kred replied as a tinge of anger seeped into his voice. "Our role was to take care of all the human survivors and use them to bargain with the Global Army."

"Where did you have to bring them?" Khan asked.

"Nowhere," The Kred snorted. "There has never been a fixed gathering point. We had to keep an eye on them until our leaders showed up."

"Leaders?" Khan continued to question the alien. "Also, I don't care if you don't know the exact number. Just give me a rough estimate."

The Kred was losing his patience under the storm of questions. His partner was growing worried about their daughter, but the answers never seemed enough to Khan.

"We resemble animals on Earth, right?" The Kred eventually asked. "Those like us are rebels. Our connection with the planet is stronger, so we have it harder resisting the desire to fight."

"Only those that look like you?" Khan asked.

"Yes," The Kred sighed. "We don't have prejudices, but we still divide ourselves into factions depending on our aspect. Some of them knew that the attack was coming, but none cooperated."

Luke and George revealed a grim expression. The situation was worse than they had initially thought. Istrone seemed to have many rebels, and some factions had even decided to remain silent about the attack.

Traitors could lurk everywhere. Istrone wasn't a safe destination anymore. The entire planet had become a battlefield, and the Global Army had yet to learn about that.

"There can't be many of us here!" The Kred shouted when he saw that the recruits were losing interest in him. "I bet that only a few groups of Kred and Tainted animals are patrolling the crash areas. I know that the leaders didn't expect many of you to survive."

"Why are you dodging the questions about the leaders?" Khan asked.

"Because e can't sheak about hem," The female Kred suddenly revealed before receiving a glare from her partner.

"She is telling the truth," The male Kred sighed after staring at his partner for a few seconds.

"Recognizing our state as underlings puts mental restraints on our minds. We can't say much about them."

Khan turned toward Luke, but the latter shrugged his shoulder. The recruits didn't know how true those words were, but they had no way to prove them.

The interrogation was over. The Kred had revealed everything they knew. The attack didn't seem to aim to capture specific bases of the Global Army. It was a pure act of revenge dictated by the very planet.

"Can we see our daughter now?" The male Kred asked. "We told you everything we know! Please!"

"You all go ahead," Khan whispered while turning toward Cora, Ethel, and the two new recruits. "I need to speak with them in private."

Cora and Ethel didn't like that decision, but they still followed Khan's orders. Instead, the other two recruits seemed about to complain, but the two girls promptly stopped them and pushed them away.

Khan took a few steps back, and the three boys followed him until they reached the spot with the third Kred. Dorian and Luke's eyes widened at the sight of the corpse, but George's gaze barely flickered.

"We all know what we have to do," George exclaimed while they remained around the corpse.

"How long will it take before they free themselves? We can't risk having two angry Kred behind our back."

"Can't we take them as prisoners?" Dorian asked. "They can guide us, and the Global Army might even manage to learn something with proper interrogations."

"How do you plan to convince them when their daughter is dead?" Luke sighed. "They have decided to join a rebellion because the planet told them so. What do you think will happen when they learn about this?"

"There are two of them," Khan coldly announced. "Only two of us have to kill."

Those words forced the three boys to think about the actual act of killing someone. That feat sounded easy in their minds, but the resilient and huge bodies of the Kred told them otherwise.

"I-," George began to speak, but he had to stop and take a deep breath before proposing his idea. "I can fill two branches with my mana and turn them into sharp weapons. That should be enough to pierce their heads."

Luke nodded toward the boy. A clean kill was better than a gory beating. However, they had to decide who would perform the actual deed.

"Khan, did you kill this one?" Dorian asked as a tinge of shame appeared on his expression.

"I'll kill one of them," Khan exclaimed to put an end to the hesitation that was filling his companions. "You decide who has to take care of the other. I won't force this on you."

"There's no need to force it," George sighed. "I'll make the weapons anyway. I'll take care of the other."

Khan and George exchanged a nod before the latter approached the nearest tree. He didn't need to find special branches at that time. Two random ones would be enough for the task.

George ripped two short branches and closed his eyes. The blue leaves on those greenish items fell as his mana flowed inside their insides and strengthened their structure.

A faint dark-silver halo came out of the two branches once George completed the technique. He handed one of them to Khan, who didn't hesitate to wield it, and the duo slowly turned to get back to the prisoners.

Luke and Dorian followed the two recruits out of respect for their task. The Kred began to complain and growl when they saw the group returning with two glowing branches, but the recruits ignored them.

The scene didn't promise anything good, but their words didn't seem to reach the four recruits. The four boys approached the tied aliens with slow but firm steps. There was evident hesitation in their eyes, but they didn't stop anyway.

"Keep their heads still," George ordered, and Dorian and Luke crouched next to the aliens.

The two boys grabbed their heads and made them turn toward their friends. Khan and George could point their enhanced branches at the center of the prisoners' forehead at that point. Everything was ready for the actual killing.

George, Luke, and Dorian began to exchange glances. Their hesitation was about to take control of their actions. None of them had the guts to take part in that execution, but Khan suddenly shouted to restore some firmness in their hands.

"Now!" Khan shouted before pushing his branch forward.

George almost panicked, but he imitated his companion, even if his eyes closed at the sight of the red blood. The other two boys also turned their faces away from the scene, but they couldn't do anything about the disgusting noises that reached their ears.

Chapter 68 - Destination

The group resumed their march after dealing with the Kred. The new recruits had the chance to introduce themselves, but the conversation stopped there since the team's mood was as heavy as it could get.

The two recruits' names were Abel Tairnu and Jill Ranster. The boy was as tall as Khan, while the girl was shorter. They both had black hair, respectively long and short, and their bodies appeared quite frail even after six months of training.

It was clear that the Global Army had used those weaker recruits to balance Luke's talent and wealth. The boy had gotten quite strong after his time on Onia. He wasn't like Khan and George, but he surpassed the average by a lot.

Khan and the others didn't explain what had happened to the two prisoners, but the other recruits understood anyway. They had even talked among themselves and heard the Kred's pleas, so everything was quite clear in their minds.

Still, no one dared to say anything about the matter. Some felt glad that the Kred were dead, while others realized how scary their companions could be. After all, they had to sleep alone and without supervision with recruits who could deploy lethal force. Being worried about their safety was only normal, especially when it came to the girls.

Panic and desperate situations could lead to disgusting outcomes. Ethel and Jill tried to distance themselves from the boys since they were aware of that fact, and they even warned Cora about that issue.

However, Cora trusted Khan too much to decide to take precautions against him. She didn't even care if some of the boys snored loudly during the night. She felt safe next to him, and she even tried to walk close to him during the march.

Khan was far from ok. Yet, his face didn't show any emotion even after days passed from the events with the Kred. He appeared cold, detached, and confident, which only increased his status as a group leader.

George, Luke, and Dorian wore similar expressions during the travel. Some of them were only trying to imitate Khan, while others were really managing to suppress their emotions.

The interactions among the group grew scarcer as the days passed. They didn't talk, and they even ignored the suppressed sobs of some of their companions when the night arrived. The roots could provide nutrients, and the bad weather gave water, but all of them were reaching their mental limits nonetheless.

The cooperation among Khan, Luke, George, and Dorian grew tighter and smoother. Killing the Kred had created a bloody connection that they couldn't ignore. The four boys instinctively relied on each other whenever a Tainted animal or other issues appeared on their path.

Ethel, Jill, and Abel remained apart, at least mentally. Knowing about the killing had created a wall among them even if some agreed with the four boys' decision. Yet, their lacking battle prowess demoted them to mere walking backpacks for supplies. Khan and the others didn't even trust them for the guard duty.

Only Cora tried to act as a bridge between the two groups, but her efforts didn't lead anywhere. She even managed to muster her courage and talk with Khan multiple times during the days, but she didn't manage to achieve anything.

The main issue with that division was the acceptance achieved by the various recruits. All of them could understand that the current layout of the group expressed its full potential, and no one was willing to change anything since everything was going smoothly.

The lack of communications ended up benefitting Khan. No one dared to bother or contradict him. His new companions didn't even try to question him about the azure scar on his chest. He could wholeheartedly focus on maintaining his mental walls.

Cora was an issue that Khan did his best to ignore. She wasn't annoying. Actually, her concern and efforts were quite heartwarming, but Khan couldn't let her behavior endanger his mental barrier. He went along with her and made sure to reassure her about her state, but their interactions stopped there.

The anxiety among the group began to build as more days passed inside the jungle. Their phones were still working, but they had crossed the one-week mark by then. Only a few rays of light had reached the surface in that period, so the devices felt ready to turn off.

The many days of travel had even created doubts among the group. Some recruits started to think that they had lost their way at some point, and the deceiving scenery of the jungle didn't help their mindset.

All the trees looked the same after more than a week of travel inside the jungle. Gaining familiarity with the environment made them doubt their path. Every bush could represent an already crossed area, but they could never confirm if their worries were real issues or simple tricks of their minds.

The heavy atmosphere among the group ended up preventing internal fights. Everyone remained silent even if doubts filled their minds. The recruits limited themselves to follow Khan, whose determination appeared unbreakable.

The doubts, worries, and heavy atmosphere vanished when a large plain unfolded in their vision. The familiar metal landing areas brought immense joy to their minds. They had done it. The recruits had returned to their starting point.

Yet, the area was empty. Khan didn't even manage to sense anything. The complete stillness that had filled most of his days of travel covered the spot and brought a new wave of worries to the group's mind.

"Where is everyone?" Dorian asked while keeping his voice down.

"We should check the teleport," Khan ordered.

All the recruits had reached Istrone through the same teleport. The location of their training camps on Earth didn't affect the matter, so Khan's group had a vague idea of how to return to the structure. The vegetation on Istrone had already changed by then. The recruits couldn't find anything familiar in the path that they had originally taken to reach the plain, but they knew the general direction of the teleport, and that was enough.

The group had to rely on their compasses again and work together to ensure that they covered all the possible areas where the teleport could be. The changed environment played with their memories, so they could only overcome the issue through many attempts.

Resting at night remained mandatory under Khan's leadership, but the group managed to find the building with the teleport in only two days of exploration. Yet, their hopes shattered when they saw that the structure featured large holes and many crumbled walls.

It was clear that the Kred had assaulted the building, but that knowledge didn't help Khan's group. They were out of options now. They didn't know anything else about the planet.

"What now?" Ethel asked, giving voice to the question in everyone's mind.

The recruits turned toward Khan, but he had no plans or answers for them. He had hoped that the plain and the teleport could be valid destinations, but the rebellion seemed to have spread more than expected.

Still, his senses suddenly warned him about masses of mana moving at some distance from the building. Khan could identify them as Kred even if he couldn't see the actual source of that power from behind the thick layers of trees, but he also noticed that something was off.

The Kred weren't alone. Other fainter presences moved behind them. The pace of the group was even slow, which made Khan consider a few possibilities.

The fainter presences didn't belong to Tainted animals, but they didn't seem Kred either. Khan couldn't get closer for fear of exposing himself, but he had an idea that sounded quite reasonable.

Istrone didn't seem to have a fauna, so Khan could only think about one type of living being that didn't belong to Kred and Tainted animals. There was a high chance that the aliens in the distance were dragging humans.

"Follow me," Khan suddenly whispered before crouching. "Try not to make sounds, and make sure not to bump into me. I don't know if this will work, but I can't think about anything else."

The recruits had doubts, especially since they couldn't sense the Kred hidden by the trees, but they decided to follow Khan's orders anyway. He was the only one who could save them in that desperate situation.

Khan began to follow the Kred. He moved slowly among the trees and made sure to keep enough distance from the aliens. He remained at the edges of his mental range, accelerating and holding his steps according to the movements of the group ahead.

The group had to advance like that for hours, and they couldn't stop even after the night fell. Khan had officially forced his companions outside of every known path, but his teammates were too desperate to mind that.

Khan suddenly stopped at some point, and George inevitably slammed into his back. The same happened for the recruits behind the boy, but everyone managed to maintain their balance and avoid creating unnecessary noises.

Khan's sudden actions came from the arrival of an area completely devoid of trees. The forest stopped and created an empty zone that featured only short vegetation and a narrow cave that seemed to lead underground.

The faint figures of a bear-shaped Kred who dragged two young humans inside the cave had appeared in Khan's eyes during the abrupt stop. He didn't know what that structure contained, but it looked like a gathering point for prisoners.

Chapter 69 - Cave

Khan stopped sensing the Kred and humans once they entered the cave. Istrone's ground created a wall that his senses couldn't pierce. The darkness of the night also hindered his vision and prevented him from gaining a clear understanding of the whole area.

Only the faint azure lights running through the ground and some glowing plants illuminated the area and created shadows that Khan could study. Still, they weren't enough to allow a proper inspection of that empty spot in the middle of the forest.

Some of Khan's companions had noticed the Kred entering the cave with the prisoners. They didn't see much, but they managed to confirm that Khan wasn't leading them across the jungle blindly.

The scene made them reach similar conclusions that they didn't hesitate to whisper among the group. There was a high chance that the cave was one of the locations meant to hold the survivors of the attack.

Another realization quickly followed that understanding. The Kred didn't explain much, but they had given important information that the recruits could connect to that scene.

Only the leaders of the rebellion knew where to bring the prisoners, which implied that the cave had more than simple foot soldiers. That structure would probably contain strong Kred.

"We have to go in, right?" George asked after the group remained silent for a while.

"We must save the others!" Luke exclaimed while keeping his voice down.

"I agree," Dorian added. "We can't leave them there."

The other recruits remained silent since it wasn't their role to make decisions in the group. They had different views about the issue, but they waited for Khan to make a decision. Their only option was to follow him.

Khan remained silent while those words reached his ears. Saving others wasn't even close to being a priority in his mind, but he was out of options. He didn't know anything else about Istrone, and hiding wasn't really a possibility due to the foreign environment.

The humans and aliens inside the cave could reveal a path that his poor knowledge ignored, but an eventual raid required thorough preparations.

"Let's remain here for a couple of days," Khan ordered. "We need to study their routine before attacking."

"Days?" Luke asked. "People might be dying there!"

"The forest isn't safe for us either," George added. "You are the only one who can sense the Kred hiding among the trees. We'll be in the dark whenever you lose focus."

"I won't," Khan replied with his firm voice. "Everyone will remain inside the range of my senses, and we'll alternate ourselves to spy the cave. I'll handle the guard duty on my own."

"You can't stay awake for so long right before attacking!" Cora exclaimed while keeping her voice down, but everyone could sense the worry in her tone.

"She is right," George continued. "You are the strongest among us. You should be at your peak before the attack, not the opposite."

"I can handle it," Khan revealed, "And I will. We don't have other options, so let's skip the complaints. We'll have time to worry after we return to Earth."

Khan didn't give anyone the chance to argue, but the recruits slowly understood that the situation was quite helpless. Attacking the cave blindly was too reckless, and only Khan's senses could ensure their safety during the inspection.

Khan gave a few instructions before leaving the edges of the forest and moving in a spot at the center of his companions' activities. He could cover the kids busy with the surveillance and those tasked with gathering roots from there, so he sat on the ground and began to meditate.

His senses had grown sharper after spending so long in the jungle, and the constant suppression of his emotions made him quite responsive to the fluctuation of the mana in his surroundings. Khan could meditate without lowering his guard, but his task didn't allow him to do anything else in that situation.

The other boys and girls had to study the cave and gather food without alerting the Kred moving through the area. Khan wouldn't normally trust all of them for those tasks, but that had to do due to the helpless situation.

The group began their silent surveillance of the cave while Khan didn't move from his spot. No one spoke, and those spying on the target did their best to avoid making noises.

Cora took care of bringing food to Khan every few hours, and the latter often forgot about thanking her since his mind was elsewhere. He paid attention to the surrounding area even while munching roots and moving mana through his body.

The girl didn't mind that lack of attention. Her worries about Khan even intensified as time passed. His companions could sleep and rest, but he had to remain alert for the whole time to make sure that no Kred approached their position.

Khan spent two days in that condition. He had sensed Tainted animals, Kred, and fainter presences getting close to his position, but none of them had threatened to discover the group. He had never needed to alert everyone to force them to change location.

Two days of surveillance weren't enough to understand the complete behavior of those living inside the cave, but that time had to do. Khan's resilience was inhuman, but it had limits that a longer time in that condition would definitely make him reach.

"Multiple groups of Kred go out before dawn," George listed what he had learnt in the past days once the group gathered. "Many of them return empty-handed late in the night, but some bring prisoners. Others even carry corpses back."

"We attack once they leave then," Khan quickly concluded before glancing at the openings in the blue crowns above him.

His phone had died since heavy rain had never stopped falling in the last two days. The group still had a few working devices, but they preferred not to waste their energy to check the hour.

The almost two weeks spent in the jungle had made them grow used to Istrone's time, so they didn't have any problem keeping track of the passing hours. The recruits had even learnt how to alternate the guard duty without using alarms in the last period.

"Do you want to rest for a few hours?" Luke asked once Khan lowered his gaze. "The Kred have already returned inside the cave. We can handle the surveillance without you for a bit."

"Let's not take risks," Khan replied. "Focus on preparing. The attack will start in less than four hours."

The order forced all the recruits to realize that the beginning of the mission was close. Many of them closed their eyes to meditate and bring their condition to the peak, while others made sure to relieve themselves before the attack.

Tension accumulated among the group as time passed. Every minute felt like an eternity in their minds, and that feeling even interrupted their meditation multiple times. Only the four boys involved with the execution of Kred managed to remain calm and prepare themselves correctly.

The sky past the blue crowns grew brighter as dawn approached. Small teams of Kred began to leave the cave and disperse in the jungle to resume their daily patrol, and Khan made sure that none of them walked toward his direction.

The group waited until the morning arrived before leaving the forest and approaching the cave. Khan obviously led the group, and the other recruits created a line behind him as per his instructions.

The lack of information concerning the insides of the cave had prevented the group from creating a proper plan. Still, they had gone through some possible situations before leaving the forest. They had decided how they would react to specific issues beforehand to avoid freezing in front of the actual danger.

Khan was in front of the group because his attacks were incredibly fast. He could take care of any threat before eventual alarms and warning cries rang.

George followed closely behind him while wielding a thick branch already empowered with mana. His role was to deal with the enemies that Khan failed to handle or crossed.

The recruits behind George had the same task. The group's priority was to move forward, even at the cost of running past some opponents. Everything would be fine as long as one of the kids in the line took care of them.

Khan didn't show any hesitation when he reached the entrance of the cave. The narrow passage went downward and didn't feature stairs, but it had rocks that could become useful footholds.

The lack of enemies past the entrance made Khan descend through that unstable path right away. His agility allowed him to go through that narrow passage in no time, and a long tunnel unfolded in his eyes once he landed on stable ground.

Blue and purple plants filled the insides of the tunnel and illuminated it with their faint glow. Khan could see everything perfectly, and he didn't fail to notice a few holes dug on the walls.

Khan approached the holes while his companions descended through the entrance, but his eyes grew colder when he inspected their insides. The cavities weren't big, but the Kred had managed to store human corpses inside them anyway.

All the recruits ended up inspecting the holes as Khan walked forward. He even had to stop at some point when he heard Abel puking in the corner of the passage.

Jill and Ethel made sure to remind Abel about their situation, and the boy quickly suppressed his retches to proceed with the mission. His complexion had paled, but a newfound determination had appeared on his expression. There seemed to be even hatred on his face now.

The passage led to another descending path that ended up in a large hall filled with glowing plants and holes. Still, those cavities featured wooden sticks arranged to create what seemed to be the bars of a cell.

Khan peeked inside one of the cells and noticed that it contained a young girl tied with a few roots. Her eyes slightly opened when she saw the boy, but Khan promptly put a finger in front of his mouth to make her remain silent.

The faint sound of steps then echoed from the end of the hall. Khan turned and saw that a tall figure had appeared in the passage that connected the cave to the next area, and his vision immediately grew blurry.

Khan didn't hesitate for even an instant. The mana flowing through the many plants around him dulled his senses, but he didn't fail to link that tall figure to a Kred. He shot forward and arrived in front of the alien before it could open its mouth in surprise.

Chapter 70 - Prisons

The bear-shaped Kred tried to growl and launch a warning cry, but Khan's foot slammed on its throat before any noise could come out of its mouth. A snapping sound echoed from its neck, but it didn't manage to get past his mental barrier.

The alien began to fall, but Khan promptly grabbed it and put it on the ground while limiting the noises in the process. The Kred exhaled its last breath in his embrace, but he suppressed everything and turned to look at the passage.

The cave descended again, but Khan could see the shadows of tall figures created by the glowing plants. None of them seemed aware of the intruders, but taking eventual opponents by surprise would still be tricky since there was only one way.

The other recruits quickly reached Khan and ignored the corpse next to him. Their eyes tried to fall on the dead Kred, but they forced them to remain on their leader.

"There are others down there," Khan whispered before turning when he saw that his companion nodded.

They had prepared for that situation. They didn't need to add other words.

Rescuing the starved and weak recruits inside the cells was pointless since they wouldn't be able to help in the battle. Khan decided to shoot ahead and enter the second hall at full speed to take care of every threat before dealing with the prisoners.

A hall identical to the first unfolded in his eyes, and Khan only had the time to notice the lack of other tunnels before focusing on the four bear-shaped Kred in the area.

His vision was blurry, but he managed to stop in front of the first Kred and deliver a roundhouse kick with his right leg that slammed the alien's face to the wall.

The wall caved in and released a noise that alerted the other aliens. Growls began to resound through the hall, but Khan was already on the move again by then.

Khan quickly approached the second Kred while it was busy turning toward the invaders. A kick landed on its side, but the attack only managed to push it into the wall.

Khan had failed to deploy mana correctly, but that realization didn't slow down his movements. He promptly left the second alien in its place and shot deeper into the hall to approach the third.

The Kred had begun to move toward the invaders by then, but the third alien suddenly saw a shadow materializing in the air. Its eyes soon managed to identify Khan's rotating figure, but a descending heel filled its vision before it could raise its arms to block the attack.

The heel hit the Kred at the center of its forehead and made it fall on its back. Khan had executed the technique correctly at that time, but the third alien seemed more resilient than its companions since no cracking noise followed the impact.

However, Khan didn't stop for even an instant. It didn't matter if his opponents survived or not. He had to press forward and deal with every alien on his path. His companions would deal with the Kred who managed to remain awake after his blows.

Khan reached the last Kred in an instant. The fourth alien had to spend some time to stand up, but its guard was in place by the time its opponent arrived. Its arms were ready to stop the incoming kick aimed at its head, but Khan's leg became blurry right before the impact.

Khan's heel suddenly hit the Kred's right foot. He had decided to perform a feint since the alien was ready to block his attack, but he flowed into a second technique after his blow hit his target.

Khan's figure rotated and went airborne as he jumped on the Kred's foot to deliver a circular kick aimed at its head. His leg was barely visible while it cut the air to reach its target, but a clawed hand suddenly appeared on its path.

"You are too cocky," The Kred growled in a deep male voice while showing a cold smile.

The alien had managed to grab Khan's right leg and stop the attack. Khan couldn't avoid that from his airborne position, and his body quickly tensed in a desperate attempt to use the Kred's hand as a foothold to deliver a second kick.

The Kred blocked the second kick too. His grasp on Khan's ankles tightened, and his claws even stabbed his skin. Red trails started to flow out of the injuries, but Khan didn't give up.

Khan tensed his abdomen and crouched toward the Kred while pointing his fingers toward the animal eyes. He couldn't deploy proper punches without the help of his legs, but he knew that he could do a lot of damage if his attack hit.

The Kred snorted and turned to slam Khan on the wall. Tremors ran through his body after the impact, but the alien didn't let him go and continued to wave his arms to make him crash on every surface.

Blood accumulated in Khan's mouth as the alien continued to play with him. He was nothing more than a child in the Kred's grasp, and his consciousness even threatened to fade as he continued to slam on the wall and ground.

'The thumbs!' Khan shouted in his mind before crouching toward the alien again.

His target wasn't the alien's head at that time. His hands went for the clawed thumbs holding his ankles.

The Kred slammed Khan on the wall again, but he endured the pain as his hands reached the furry thumbs. Khan mustered all the strength that his body was capable of at that point and lifted the fingers to create an opening in the alien's grasp.

Khan pushed from the alien's thumbs, and his legs slid over the sharp claws as they existed that firm grasp. Four deep cuts opened on Khan's ankles and feet in the process, but he finally freed himself.

Khan jumped backward as soon as his feet touched the ground. He didn't manage to control his movements due to the panic that was trying to fill his mind, so he ended up slamming on one of the cells behind him.

The impact destroyed the wooden bars and made Khan fall inside the cell. His mental barrier quickly fended off the emotions that were trying to take control of his movements. Even the pain radiated by his injured legs remained outside and didn't affect his thoughts.

The Kred didn't immediately jump on him. He remained near the wall at the end of the hall and wore a cruel smile.

Khan tried to straighten his position, but his hand suddenly touched soft fur. He turned, and a familiar figure unfolded in his eyes.

"You shouldn't have come," Lieutenant Sehlolo sighed while looking at Khan.

The wolf-shaped Kred didn't feature any injury, but her military uniform had broken in many spots. Khan couldn't see her stars anymore, but he also noticed that she didn't have roots restraining her legs and arms.

"Did you think you could rescue your friends?" The male Kred sneered. "Even your Lieutenants turned their backs on you!"

Khan moved his eyes back on his opponent at that point. He noticed that the Kred's foot was almost completely fine. His previous attack didn't manage to break its bones.

"How strong is he?" Khan asked without turning toward Lieutenant Sehlolo.

The answer scared Khan. Lieutenant Sehlolo was a second-level warrior and first-level mage, but she was in prison. In theory, her warden had to be stronger than her.

Yet, Khan had learnt how scary warriors could be after training with Lieutenant Dyester. His Master was so strong that a single attack could make him faint, but the alien didn't even come close to him.

"I'm what you earthlings call a first-level warrior," The Kred laughed while pointing his clawed forefinger toward Lieutenant Sehlolo. "She had to be in charge of this prison camp, but her determination crumbled at the last second. She is nothing more of a coward who chose to seal herself behind bars."

"Why don't you help us instead of remaining here?" Khan asked while turning toward the Lieutenant.

"Kids have died because of me," Lieutenant Sehlolo said while dodging Khan's gaze. "I didn't know. How can innocent blood wash our grudge clean? I don't want to have anything to do with this rebellion anymore."

"Your decision will only make more of us die," Khan coldly added.

"I've made up my mind," Lieutenant Sehlolo replied while turning her head to face the back of the cell. "I can't spill blood anymore."

'She is useless,' Khan cursed in his mind before taking a deep breath and exiting the cell.

His feet hurt when he straightened his position, but he ignored the pain to focus on his opponent and surroundings. His companions were fighting the two weaker Kred, and they appeared close to defeating them. It wouldn't take much before they could come to Khan's aid.

Instead, the strong Kred didn't move. He was waiting for Khan to make his move while wearing his cruel smile.