

Out For Karma: Naruto

#Chapter 11: The Forest of Death - Read Out For Karma: Naruto Chapter 11: The Forest of Death Chapter 11: The Forest of Death

Standing next to his teammates, Riku looked at the area he would live in for the next five days.

'Training ground 44.' he mused with apprehension.

The Forest of Death seemed every bit as intimidating and gruesome as its name implies. Huge trees up to perhaps sixty feet at the very least. Very large and thick, to the point they would need multiple dozen people to circle the trunk of one of them. Surprisingly that wasn't the worst of his day so far. No, the worst was the first exam. A 'simple' written test. Each team had to cheat to get the answers of the ultra hard test by copying some else that got the right answers. Each time you got caught cheating you lost points and if you got caught five times, you and the rest of your team were disqualified. Harsh but fair in Riku's opinion. After all a team was as strong as its weakest link. It was also basic intel gathering, nothing that difficult. Riku had not bothered with that, however, he could answer the questions by himself. He had answered all the nine questions available and had to wait for the tenth one. It turned out to be a joke from the head of the T&I. There was no answer to write. Participants just needed to have the balls to stay. Then again, failing the 'question' was the impossibility to ever become a chunin. A very good fear motivator to break the most weak minded. Riku had been lucky that Yuuna and Gou are so confident in their skills that failing the tenth question didn't even cross their mind.

While the test had been shitty, Naruto passing it with a blank answer sheet (Yuuna was seated right next to him)made him want to bash his head against a wall. The idiot not only turned everyone in the room against him when he loudly introduced himself and insulting everyone, right before the exam, he also spat his usual spiel about not needing shit (like becoming chunin) to become Hokage. While his conviction was admirable and calmed down the few elements that were hesitating in giving up or continuing, in the room. It showed to Riku that Uzumaki Naruto had not progressed one bit since graduation and most importantly was still a naive immature five year old child. Something that was hammered on when Naruto made another brainless declaration about the Forest of Death not being scary and a joke right in front of the protector for the second exam.

'That idiot is going to get himself killed. All this potential wasted.'

Back to the situation at hand, Riku pondered for a moment what to do. Thirty teams had passed the first test. Fifteen of them were given an Earth scroll, while fifteen others

got a Heaven scroll. Of course no one but the team members and the protectors knew what kind of scroll a team got. Mentally, Riku reviewed the test.

*'Passing condition: get to the tower at the center of the forest with at least one Heaven scroll **and** one Earth scroll and thus within five days.*

Rule#1: everything is permitted. Capture, killing, torturing. Nothing was off limits for a team to get the other scroll they were missing.

Rule#2: You can't get out of the forest until the five days are over.

Rule#3: You're forbidden to look at what's inside the scrolls.

There are so many tacit rules that it's not even funny.'

"Earth to Riku!" Yuuna called out smacking his shoulder with her hand.

"Yes?"

"She wants to know if you have a plan. You're the strategist of the team, remember?" said Gou.

"Oh, yes, I was thinking about it."

"And?"

"We're... and I mean Konoha shinobis are more restricted than teams from other villages in a way."

""What do you mean?""

"Konoha is the most represented during this test with more than a third of the teams. Morality would... oblige us to, if not help, at least leave alone our comrades unless we have no choice. That's also means, we can't torture or kill them, which honestly is fine with me but-

"Yeah, we're limited to what we can do against other Konoha-nin." Yuuna said, but Gou had his piece to say too.

"And that is if other Konoha teams respect that in the first place. Numbers should have been our advantage but it seems the opposite."

"Correct. Let's start with identifying our enemies."

"Everyone, that's not us." interjected Yuuna.

"I agree."

"I agree too but I was talking more about the way to handle them. Suna is officially our ally, we can't just kill them even if we're allowed. Kusa, while neutral, we have a good relationship with them. Ame is... under an isolationist politic so I'm putting them in the 'potentially hostile' category. We could capture or kill those ones. Finally Oto."

"Let me guess, hostile?" the girl rhetorically inquired.

"After their display attacking one of ours just before the first test, they are to me."

"Oh, they are, there is no doubt about it. Remember my B-rank that turned into A-rank?"

""Yeaaah?""

"It was because of them. Whatever their intentions are, they're not good for Konoha."

"Kill on sight then." said Gou.

"Yes. Though let's not rush them mindlessly. And do keep in mind that while Konoha's relationship with Suna and Kusa is positive it doesn't automatically means-

"They won't kill us if they could."

"Yes, Gou. Spot on. Now I would advise you to be careful in the way you act inside the forest. Since this place is our testing ground you can be sure that there is a surveillance system to evaluate our performance." Riku announced and pointed discreetly at a camera placed at the top of a steel pole that served as support from the thick metal fence that surrounded the whole forest.

"Got it. What about food? Do we have to forage or..."

"No, I got everything I need. Enough for a week of food for the three of us."

An alarm echoed through the speakers above the gate leading inside the forest. Knowing that the test had officially begun, the team went through the gate. Riku immediately made a shadow clone and let it scout ahead.

"There will be two main reactions for the participants. Either burrow themselves and gather information or food or go straight to the tower and ambush anyone having the same idea. The latter will be a bloodbath, the former is better but ill advised."

"What's your third option then?" Inquired Yuuna.

"We keep moving unless we sleep. As soon as we get a full two sets of scrolls we're going to the tower, perhaps three."

“Why more than one set?” Gou asked.

“In case we encounter a team stronger than us. We may negotiate a scroll for our lives. It may not work but again it may.” Yuuna answered.

“Yes but also in case one of us... That way we each have a set and can go on to the next stage. Now the sun sets in six hours. Less since the trees are so tall. I suggest when visibility starts to lessen we make cam-”

He stopped himself when the team heard several explosions coming from North-East of their position. The way the kage bunshin went.

“Memories?” wondered Gou, looking at Riku.

“None.”

“So your clone is still kicking and may have defeated a team already. What orders had you in mind when you made it?”

“If he fights and survives, to retreat to our current location.”

“We should meet it halfway then change direction to throw off any other team that the fight may have attracted.”

Both Yuuna and Riku agreed with Gou’s idea and went with it. Five minutes later, they encountered the dirty blonde’s clone which was covered in blood.

“The Suna team next to us got ambushed and killed by an Ame one. Just as they were winning I swooped in and killed them with explosive shurifuin. Two of the Suna-nin were dead and the third is going to die soon, couldn’t help with his wounds.”

“Scrolls?”

“Two heavens, sadly.” The clone replied to the ravenette and presented the two scrolls from his back pouch.

“It’s fine. Maybe we can negotiate with another Konoha team that got two Earth.” she answered softly and handed the scrolls to Riku who put them in his book of seals.

“We should move.”

Once again Gou got the right idea.

They spent the next six hours going deep into the forest, until they reached the river coursing through the Training ground. That gave them a better idea of their location. They didn't meet any team during this time but had to fight the fauna a couple of times. The first time was a small pack of giant wolves who was quickly dispatched. Yuuna had used a Katon jutsu to block their way forward but also their path of retreat with a wall of fire. That gave Gou the opportunity to get the attention of the beast and act like a tank. With Riku supporting him from the back with shurifuin and wind laced kunais the pack quickly went down. So fast that Riku took more time sealing the pack for emergency ration than killing them. They quickly bolted out of the location however. They didn't want the blood to attract a strong predator and for them to still be there.

Their second experience with the beast of training ground 44 was a twenty feet long flesh eating centipede spitting very corrosive acid on top of his very sharp and lethal thousands of legs. The worst was that it was fast. In the end, Yuuna, who was completely disgusted by the thing, used her more powerful fire jutsu that Riku amplified with his great breakthrough. The insect burned to a crisp very quickly to everyone's relief.

'You're not sealing that for an emergency ration!'

Yuuna had been quite vocal about the way the centipede made her feel. A sentiment that Riku shared. He wasn't a fan of most insects. Too many eyes or legs for him to not get a chill of revulsion when he saw one.

Their night had not been peaceful. One team had tried to attack them in their sleep. Thankfully, Riku had rigged the entire area with flashbangs. Most of them had been triggered and incapacitated the assailants enough that the dozing Yuuna and Riku had enough time to wake, catch their bearing and help Gou in dealing with another team from Ame. This time they got an Earth scroll.

Riku had a clone gather the remaining flashbangs tags, while he sealed their entire camp back into a storage seal. With how much light and noise was produced in the activation of their defense system, they couldn't stay where they were anymore. The good news was they all got at least a few hours of sleep. Riku got two, since he took the first shift, Gou, three and Yuuna five. They were not back to a hundred percent but they would manage. Riku may have had only two hours of rest before but he could make a shadow clone to take his place for a bit. Their new location was further up the stream, closer to the tower. This time they made a fake camp on the ground but slept way up in the trees. When dawn came, there had been no new attack.

It was just past noon when they arrived at a peculiar scene. A huge bloodthirsty black bear had cornered an examinee against a small cliff. She had long hair, red like blood and wore a kusagakure head protector. Reacting on the spot. Riku channeled wind chakra into two kunai and in a burst of speed cut the hind legs of the bear. The bear's mobility now impaired, the dirty blond jumped onto its back and severed the arteries in its neck before plugging the kunais into its eyes and reaching its brain.

“Are you alright?” he said to the girl from the top of the dead predator’s head.

“I... I...”

Riku sighed. The girl was clearly in shock. He couldn’t really blame her, she had been alone against a mountain of a bear. Getting down from his prey, he slowly approached the genin.

“Hey, it’s alright. It’s dead.” he said then kicked the bear in the head. “See? You’re not endangered anymore. Now take a big breath.”

He got her attention and began to take a big breath of air then exhaled for a few seconds. He repeated the process until naturally the girl imitated him and began to calm down.

“I... Thank you. You saved my life.”

“It’s fine. Konoha and Kusa may not be allies but they do have a good relationship. I couldn’t ignore your situation. That makes me wonder why you’re alone though. Are your teammates-”

“They were killed by a whole group of those bears. I barely escaped but this one chased me.”

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Don’t be! They were assholes! They used me as bait!”

“Er... Congratulations then?” he said and he could hear from a dozen feet away both Yuuna and Gou facepalm at his words.

“...”

“...”

“I- I mean. You won’t be used as bait anymore!”

“But now I’m alone to survive this forest!”

“Er...”

“We may be able to help with that.” Yuuna’s voice was heard.

Both she and Gou entered the area and joined Riku. They were on their guard though. The red head may be alone but she could still wound or kill one of them.

"We're on our way to the tower. We may escort you there if you give us your scroll."

"DEAL!" the kusa-nin shouted. "Although... one of my teammates had the scroll. It's probably inside one of the bears' stomachs now."

"Do you remember their location?" inquired Gou.

"Yes, they are ..." she began then stopped. "What assurance do I have that you won't kill me once I give you the location?"

"None. Though we are Konoha-nin also known as peaceful fools." said Gou.

"And we already have a set of scrolls to pass the exam, we just want more in case we encounter an unexpected situation." Riku revealed, making Yuuna frown. He was giving away important intel to perhaps an enemy and she didn't like it.

"We also outnumber you. We could get the information forcefully." the ravenette said.

"That's... fair I suppose. I... I'm a sensor, a good one. I can help with staying clear of other teams or ambushes."

"Really? You're the only member of your team left." noted Yuuna with a hint of suspicion in her voice.

"Because they never listened to me! I was just a last minute addition to their team and I'm more of the support type than a fighter. Those brain dead idiots thought I was useless since I'm not that good in a fight and so not worth listening to."

"Ah! Meat heads. Only good for being fodder." Riku said and both Gou and Yuuna agreed. "I guess we have a deal then? For real this time."

"I... Yes, not like I have much of a choice."

"You do have a choice but yes it isn't much of one. This is Tanaka Yuuna, Akiyama Gou. I'm Warudo Riku, nice to meet you...?"

"Karin. Uzumaki Karin." The girl answered with her name and shook Riku's hand.

"Uzumaki? What's an Uzumaki doing in Kusa?" the dirty blonde inquired.

"Hmm.. Live there? Why? Shouldn't I?"

"Well, not really my business but after Uzushio's fall in the second Shinobi World War. Uzumaki survivors scattered in the wind. Since Konoha was Uzushio's sister village, they offered them asylum. That blond loudmouth that yelled during the first test? He's Uzumaki Naruto."

“He doesn’t look like an Uzumaki, he’s blond, not a redhead.” replied Karin with a frown. The idea that she had family was left but that it was Naruto less so. She didn’t like how stupid he acted.

“I don’t know anything about that. Maybe one of his parents was blond?” said Riku, not revealing that Naruto was probably a real Uzumaki because of his massive chakra reserves. The Uzumaki were known for that, their longevity and their affinity with fuinjutsu as far as he knew and Naruto fit at least one of the criteria on top of having the clan’s name.

“That’s... possible. Are there any more Uzumaki?”

“Not that I know of, sorry.”

“Oh. I see. That’s... fine.”

The conversation stopped there and Karin led Team Hinae towards the sleuth of bears. It seems they were lazing around in a very small clearing. Gou believed they were taking a nap because they were done eating. That made sense to Riku who took out four Kunai, coated them with chakra and aimed for the bears’ heads. In one throw all the targets were killed.

““Not it.””

Riku turned toward Yuuna and Gou with an expression of betrayal. Both were grinning like loonies for pulling one over him. Why? Because now Riku had to gut the beasts and find the scroll. Of course the said scroll was found in the last bear’s stomach and by that time Riku was covered in grime, blood, viscera, bile and shit.

“I hate you, guys.” he cursed reproachfully.

He could have used a shadow clone but that wasn’t worth the waste of chakra. The good news that came out of this awful experience was that they got a second Earth scroll.

“What do we do? Go for a third or...”

“I think we’re good to go to the tower. We wanted at least two sets and we got them. No point in staying in this forest anymore. Besides...”

“We have Karin to escort there.” Gou finish Yuuna’s reasoning.

“Fine by me.”

What Gou didn't say was that Karin could turn their cloak if their team encountered enemies and the fight didn't go well. Or teamed up with another Kusa team. It was better and more prudent to finish the exam quickly.

As such Team Hinae made a bee line for the tower, Karin guiding them with her sensory abilities. They still kept their guard up, just in case the girl would lead them into a trap but she proved herself trustworthy when she redirected the team to another path when she sensed an ambush up ahead. Ambush that Riku confirmed with a kage bunshin.

He had to admit, Riku liked Karin, she was a bit shy because of her less than desirable situation but was quite nice to talk to. She was interested in iryo ninjutsu and he found in her a good conversationalist. Their talks shifted from the medical field to other subjects and he had a lot of fun discussing those. Among one of them was Karin letting it slip that she hated Kusagakure to the core. Riku made a mental note of that, and wondered if the Hokage would be interested in having another Uzumaki in the village. Karin was no genius but she was very smart and very knowledgeable. She also was a sensor, a rare thing in the shinobi world and of course had loads of chakra. His estimation was about twice as much as he did. At the minimum.

They reached the tower when the sun began to set. Solving the riddle on the wall of the tower, Team Hinae opened at the same time a scroll of each type which summoned their team leader.

"Good work Team!" the Hyuga exclaimed with pride. "I knew you would pass."

"“Thanks, sensei”" / "Thank you, Hinae-san."

"And.. who are you, young lady?" she asked Karin who was standing at the side.

"She's Uzumaki Karin. We... mutually helped each other to get here. Speaking of."

Riku opened his book of seals again and released another set of scroll and handed it to Karin who was surprised.

"Why?"

"Yeah, Riku, Why?" Yuuna asked, not happy about what he just did.

"I felt like it. It's not like we need them anyway and even though the gesture is small it's a good way to further the good relationship between Konoha and Kusa, right?"

Hinae nodded in agreement with Gou, leaving Yuuna to sigh in exasperation but not pursuing the topic further.

"I... Thank you." was all Karin said and went to the side to unravel the scrolls.

“What now, sensei?” Gou asked.

“Now? You’re staying in the tower until the end of the test in three 82 hours. There are rooms for each team, a cafeteria and a training area.”

“Can we go back to the forest to help our fellow leaf-nin?” Riku asked to his team leader’s appreciation.

“Unfortunately no. The test is over for you and doing otherwise would simply disqualify you and the rest of the team.. Although... any traps or jutsu left behind do not count.” she answered and looked at Riku’s shadow clone that was still there.

Riku grinned and gave some shurifui and seals to his clone, who went back to the forest.

“You do know that they will be our competitors, right?” Yuuna reminded him.

“Yes, but I prefer fighting a comrade in the finals than an enemy nin. Beside the more leaf-nins in the final the stronger the village will appear to our clients.”

“That’s true. Well thought, Riku.”

That being said, Hinae shushed away and let her team enter the tower to get some rest.

Meanwhile the shadow clone made his way through the dense flora. He encountered a team from Taki making camp. One of them was on watch duty and it had been fairly easy to knock him out after avoiding the traps the team set. Quickly he proceeded to put paralysis seals on the sleeping genin and became rummaging through their belonging to find a Heaven scroll. With the limited supplies his boss gave it, it had no remorse helping itself to a few weapons (kunais and shurikens) in the possession of the down team.

An hour after its heist, the clone heard a big commotion from the west of his location. Curious, it went to have a look and possibly create some chaos and help Konoha. The situation was better than expected. Team 7, 10 and Team Gai had a nasty encounter with the one team from Otogakure. The leader of the latter exchanged their scroll for their lives as one of his teammates had an arm dislocated and wasn’t ready to fight any more and they were outnumbered 3 to 1. OT his disbelief Naruto and Sasuke agreed and told them to scram. The clone however did not share his former classmates' idea. In a flash, he threw an explosive shurifui towards the down member of the Oto team with one hand while he threw two wind coated kunais with the others towards the other two members. The shurifui obliterated the head of its target and the kunais lodged themselves into a temple and a neck. In one action The entire team from Oto was dead.

“WHAT THE HELL?!” yelled Naruto as the clone landed on the ground.

“What?”

“WHY DID YOU KILL THEM?!”

“Because they’re shinobi from an enemy village, duh.”

“THEY SURRENDERED!”

“That just meant they would have to take down twice as many teams as they originally needed.”

“They were not out of the test because they had no more scroll, Naruto. And with most teams in this test being from Konoha, letting them live would have put our comrades in danger, dumbass.” Shikamaru explained, cutting short Naurto’s next yell.

“Why are you even here anyway?”

The clone turned to look at Sasuke who asked him the question. It was obvious to the dirty blonde that the Uchiha went through some shit, with his dirty and damaged clothes and the tired expression on his face.

“I’m scouring the forest to help Konoha teams if I can.”

“Very kind of you but extremely arrogant. Do you think yourself so strong that you can ditch your own team for this?”

The clone turned left this time to look at Hyuga who was flanked by a mini-clone of Maito Gai and a girl with her hair buns making him think of a panda.

“Considering my team passed the exam eight hours ago with five scrolls... **Yes.**”

The hyuga scoffed, not believing for a second the clone’s words. Most of the other genin present, who knew how good he had been at the academy, thought that he was probably telling the truth. Except one.

“LIAR!”

“Excuse you?” The clone replied to Naruto’s outburst.

“There is no way you and your team got five scrolls! My team only got one and we’re the best! Besides, if you did pass the test you wouldn’t be here!”

“The best losers, you mean.” Saying this, the clone picked up two heaven scrolls from his back pouch, shutting up Naruto on the spot. “Also I’m just a shadow clone. Boss is getting some rest inside the tower.”

“Shadow clone? How do you know that jutsu? That’s Naruto’s!” Sakura questioned.

“That moron couldn’t create a jutsu to save his life. The Niidaime was the one who invented it.”

“HEY!” shouted Naruto but got ignored.

“Well, that was nice and all but I have other teams to help soooo bye!”

“Wait! Can you give us one of your scrolls?”

For the third time the clone turned around to face his interlocutor. Yamanaka Ino.

“Hmm... considering you guys are a bunch of ungrateful bags of dicks... No?”

“I and my team said nothing to you!”

“That’s true I suppose.” he answered and tossed her one of the heaven scrolls.

Just as he was about to leave, ignoring Ino's ‘thank you’, he dodged a kick to the head, courtesy of one Uchiha Sasuke. Immediately he jumped backward and stuck an explosive tag to the scroll then tossed it at his assailant that caught it. The smirk of the ‘Last Uchiha’ didn’t last long when he noticed the glowing tag. Quickly, he threw it away and the scroll exploded.

“Once a loser, always a loser, Sasuke. Bye.”

With that said, the clone shushined away, back to the tower, hoping it would have enough chakra to reach it and give back the supplies it had on itself.

Chapter 12: Culling the weak

The clone had made it back to the tower with almost no chakra left. Riku commended him on the sporadic use of the shushin. A jutsu that he learned from the Konoha library but used quite a bit of chakra. He picked up the supplies he had shared then went back inside the tower to find his team or Karin. Whoever he found first. From there he spent the remaining time of the test, either talking with the redhead, planning with his team or studying the two remaining chapters of his intermediary level fuinjutsu manual.

As more and more participants reached the tower, Riku noticed Jonin senseis arriving too but more importantly, the Sandaime. He quickly made a beeline for the old man.

“Hokage-sama, good morning!” he greeted and received a smile in return.

“Good morning to you too, Riku.”

“Do you have a few minutes to talk, it’s rather important?”

Hiruzen looked around and saw some genin still coming inside the tower. Turning to Riku he nodded.

“I found an Uzumaki in the forest. She’s from Kusa.”

“Really? That’s excellent news! I’m glad to hear that some of them are still alive.”

“I... have no opinion on that however from what I understood by talking with her, she hates her village. I’m not sure but I think they’re responsible for the death of a loved one and they’re not treating her very well. So I was thinking...”

“That Konoha would offer asylum?” the old man finished his train of thoughts.

“Yes. She’s smart, interested in iryoninjustu and also a very good sensor. She perked a bit at the knowledge that there was another Uzumaki in the village even though I’m quite sure she finds Naruto... quite loud.”

“Hmm...”

Hiruzen didn’t give an answer straight away but he did seriously contemplate the idea. The Uzumaki clan had been one of the most powerful in the Elemental Nations, rivaling the Senju and the Uchiha. They had made their own village and only got defeated because Iwa, Kumo and Kiri made a joint assault on them at the start of the second shinobi war with the purpose to weaken Konoha by taking down their foremost ally. Having one more member to perhaps revive the clan could be a great boon for the village for multiple reasons. One of them was the way Riku had spoken about Karin. Hiruzen had not missed that the genius liked the girl in some way and having her in the village could help tie him down. He didn’t give a straight answer however.

“I will think about it.”

“Thank you, hokage-sama.”

With that said, Riku bowed and left the Hokage’s side to go back to his team. As the clock in the hall rang, signaling that it was 9:00am and that the test was over. Jonin-sensei ordered their genins to gather in order in front of the Hokage while they joined the military leader’s side. Once everyone was in position, Hiruzen revealed the true nature of the last test. A public tournament where the genins would be able to display their skills in front of many nobles and other clients. In a way it was a very controlled and small war to show which village was stronger than the other. The better a genin will do, the more their village would gain in reputation and clients.

“So only the winner of the tournament can become chunin?” asked one Inuzuka Kiba.

“No. Being a chunin is not just about strength so all genins may be promoted or none. You may lose the first round but display enough skills and qualities to be promoted.” Riku answered before the Hokage could.

“That is correct. Now-”

“My apologies for interrupting, Hokage-sama.”

That was what Gekko Hayate said when he appeared in a shushin in front of Hiruzen, and reminded him that there were still too many participants for the final stage of the exam. Some people came from far away and they couldn't have too many matches in one single day. Thus preliminaries would be needed to cut in half the current number of genins which was twenty two. It turned to twenty one when Yakushi Kabuto, a guy trying for the seventh time his luck, forfeited. Apparently he didn't feel well enough to fight. Riku recognized him as the guy that got attacked by Team Oto before the start of the first test. With one less participant, their number was odd and so one genin would get a free pass to the final stage.

Afterwards, Hayate invited the genins and their sensei to vacate the hall since it would be the arena where the fight took place and to instead get up the first floor, giving a top down view to all the fights. The contestants were determined at random and displayed on a big screen at the end of the wall, behind where the Hokage had stood.

“First match: Uchiha Sasuke vs Akimich Choji.”

‘Well, that one is an easy one. Sasuke will trash Choji.’

Riku thought as he leaned forward onto the rail in front of him. He had been right, less than five minutes later when Sasuke overpowered a very reluctant Choji who despite his sensei's bribe for food had not the heart to fight.

“Second match: Hyuga Neji vs Hyuga Hinata.”

“Shit.” Hinae let out and her team turned towards her.

“Bad matchup for two member of your family to fight sensei but-”

“It's not about that, Yuuna. Neji... has a bone to pick with Hinata.”

“Who in their right mind would hate that girl? She's the kindest person I have ever met!” Riku exclaimed in disbelief.

“Hinata is from the main branch and Neji from the side branch... Side branch members are... Servants and are forced to obey the main branch.”

“Forced? As in sla-”

“Yes. As such many in the side branch resent the main branch. Especially Neji since he blames Hinata for the death of his father.” the jonin explained.

“He’s arrogantly delusional isn’t it?” remarked Riku.

“In a way... yes.”

“Why does he blame her? What happened?” inquired Yuuna.

“Almost ten years ago, a diplomatic envoy from Kumo came to the village to negotiate peace. Only his true intention was to kidnap a Hyuga from the main branch and bring them back to Kumo so they could get the Byakugan. Short story short. The Kumo-nin kidnapped Hinata and got himself killed. Kumo played the victim and asked for compensation or else war. Neji’s father, also Hinata’s uncle, was the one who got the blame put on and paid it with his life.” explained Hinae.

“So Neji is an asshole that bullies an innocent Hinata because he can’t strike at the ones who put the blame on his father and because she’s weaker than him. Do I get that right?”

“Yes, Riku. You do.”

“...Hinae-san, would you be upset if I kicked his ass if I’m ever matched against him?”

“Had it been anyone else from my family I would have said yes. But Neji’s obsession towards Hinata makes it an exception.”

Without saying anything more, the group of four simply watched the match. Match was a big word though. Despite Hinata’s vaillant effort and (to Riku’s surprise) courage and confidence in herself from the cheers of Naruto, Neji completely dominated her. It was obvious he was the greater practitioner of the gentle fist, the Hyuga Clan personal taijutsu style. The Hyuga boy didn’t stop there however and tried to kill his own cousin with a strike to the heart. He was barely stopped by most Jonin of the rookie genins. Hinata was quickly evacuated to the hospital. Riku had no doubt that her situation was dire with all the blood she had let out on the floor. Ignoring Naruto's grand proclamation of kicking Neji’s ass, Riku turned to Hinae.

“Forget about kicking his ass, Hinae-san. Given the chance, I’m going to cripple that little traitor.”

The seriousness and dare she say, murder, she saw in Riku’s eyes, made Hinae internally flinch. On one hand, Neji was part of her side of the family, on the other, Hinata despite being from the main branch, didn’t deserve such treatment. Especially when the only thing she wanted with her family was to unite both branches. With her heart in conflict she gave no answer to the dirty blonde.

“Third match: Uzumaki Naruto vs Warudo Riku.”

“YESSS!” Naruto yelled, while Riku sighed tiredly. Yuuna gave him a few comforting taps on his shoulders and a few words.

“At least you get an easy and quick fight.”

“I suppose.”

Jumping over the rail, Riku fell a dozen feet and landed without problem on the ground then made his way near Hayate who had been acting as referee for the preliminaries since the beginning.

“You’re going down, Riku! There is no way you can beat me!”

“Yeah, whatever. I’m ready, proctor.” Riku said and took the classic academy taijutsu stance.

When Hayate started the match. Naruto made two shadow clones and tried to overwhelm Riku with the numerical advantage in a Taijutsu confrontation. Riku simply threw kunais with explosive tags with enough chakra to push back Naruto a few feet from the shockwave. The kage bunshins were dispelled by the explosions and Riku was free to charge forward and give a good beating to his opponent that had not quite yet recuperated. One punch went to Naruto’s right kidney and an elbow to his left temple, sending him flying away another few feet but to the side this time. Believing that Naruto was knocked out, Riku relaxed his stance and began walking out of the arena, all the while waiting for Hayate to call out the match in his favor. He ignored Karin’s and Yuuna’s yells to ‘watch out’ and kept walking, feeling the detonation of another explosion which this time sent Naruto forward and way past Riku; all thanks to a previous exploding tag he had left on the ground just in case. Yet, it wasn’t over for the orange clad midget who stood up with difficulty but determination in his eyes.

“It’s good for you to be determined, Naruto, but there comes a time when giving up is necessary.”

“Never! I’m never giving up! I’m going to be the greatest Hokage! I can’t give up here!”

“You do know that the chunin exam happens every six months, right? Losing here is not the end.”

“I don’t care!”

Naruto charged again but this time, Riku didn’t take him down immediately, he targeted the kidneys once more, but also the ears, jaw, eyes and nose. So much so that he was sure Naruto had a severe concussion with how much his brain had been shaken up.

Proof of that was Naruto going down and barfing everything in his stomach onto the ground.

“Proctor, anymore and-”

“I’M NOT... DONE!”

For the third time Naruto picked himself up from the ground. He was completely exhausted, with a swelling eye, a broken nose and a few missing teeth.

“Now you’re just embarrassing. Me, yourself and every shinobi in the room. You’re on your last leg and I’m not even done warming up.”

“I’m... going to...”

Riku didn’t even bother listening to the drivel his opponent was saying. Instead he made the hand seals for the chakra scalpels and swept behind naruto. He swung his hands perfectly and cut Naruto’s ligament in his knees. The effect was immediate and Naruto fell down on his face, unable to keep his body standing.

“Naruto, you’re a genin now. An adult. It’s time for you to stop spouting bullshit like a five year old playing ninja. In other words: Grow up.”

With that said, Riku dispelled the chakra scalpels and laid a heavy punch on Naruto’s head which knocked him out.

“Winner: Warudo Riku.”

Not wasting time, Riku got back up to his team who congratulated him half heartedly. It’s not like he had tried hard for his win and he didn’t begrudge them for that.

“That was...” Yuuna began but couldn’t find the right words to describe what she was thinking.

“I know.” he replied, looking down at Naruto being evacuated.

“And right after making a scene about how he would kick Neji’s ass.” Gou added.

“The worst of it? He **has** the potential for it. He’s just too stubborn to change himself to be a great shinobi.”

The matches went on and on. The blonde wind user from Suna easily defeated the weapon mistress in Neji’s team. Then Kiba and Akamaru were soundly beaten by the blonde’s teammate. He was using both poison and puppets and got Kiba good. The match lasted less than five minutes. The next match was actually Shino versus Yuuna.

“Now, who is lucky? Be careful though.”

The girl nodded and left for her match. Shino had been clever by sneaking his bugs from behind Yuuna to drain her of her chakra but she kawaremi a bit to the side behind him. The genins present wondered how she moved that far that fast while the Jonin had their mind blown by seeing someone using nothing for a substitution. Riku was quite proud of Yuuna for finally being able to switch with a small pocket of air.

“She must have practiced in secret.” he thought because the last time he saw her use the kawaremi like that she was failing.

From her position, she quickly fired two fireballs. The swarm of bugs did not completely dodge and was damaged badly, while Shino had to get rid of his coat lest he’d burned to death. Acknowledging he couldn’t win, the Aburame forfeited. When Yuuna came back, Gou and Riku high-fived her.

The next two matches were a joke. Sakura got trashed by an older Konoha genin with more joints than normal and right after Ino was one hit knocked out by Gou who simply was too fast for the Yamanaka to use her clan secret technique. The penultimate match was Karin versus the joint guy’s teammate. It was clear that the young genin from Kusa was no physical fighter when she tried to put some distance with her opponent and threw some shurikens and kunais. The much older Konoha genin dodged them all and in a burst of speed went behind Karin and grabbed her in a full Nelson. Everyone thought ‘this is it’ yet nothing happened. The young man simply held Karin and waited.

“Are you... Are you seriously draining my chakra?” the redhead said in disbelief.

“Yes! I’ll drain every single drop until you faint!”

Riku snorted at the smug tone his fellow leaf-nin used then facepalmed. He tried very hard to not laugh but couldn’t help himself.

“He’s soooo going to die.” he commented.

“Why?” Hinae inquired.

“Because she’s an Uzumaki, Hinae-san. I doubt his body will be able to handle all of Karin’s chakra before exploding.”

“Oh... Yeah, he’s fucked.” The Hyuga jonin swore to her students’ shock. She had heard awful tales from her father about how killing yourself would be faster than to challenge an Uzumaki in a chakra contest. At least you would die with dignity in the former case.

Down to the arena, the draining continued without interruption until the leaf-nin finally understood that something was wrong.

“What the... HOW?! How do you have so much chakra?! That’s... That shouldn’t be possible!”

Karin was done with the leech stuck to her back and tried to get free since he was distracted. Unfortunately his grip was too strong and that pissed her off even more. To Riku’s surprise, something unexpected happened. Faint golden chains sprouted from her back and pierced her opponent’s torso prompting him to release Karin on the spot. She quickly got away from his range and as if she always knew how to use them (despite the evident surprise on her face that she didn’t know she could do that), she raised him in the air and slammed him down hard against the ground. She did it a second time and a third, then retracted her chains. Hayate went to check the young man, shook his head and declared Karin the victor by K.O. .

Up into his personal space, Hiruzen nearly had a stroke at what he saw.

“We need her in Konoha! We can’t let Kusagakure have the adamantine sealing chains!”

His eyes following the redhead, he began to plan on how to get her into the village. If the reasons he already thought of made it a boon for Konoha that admittedly could be missed, the chains made it mandatory.

Riku caught Karin’s eyes as she made her way upstairs and gave her a thumbs up for her victory. She gave him a joyful smile in return, replacing the frown she had until now. He wanted to speak with her a bit but the last match of the preliminaries was announced.

“Tenth match: Gaara of the desert vs Nara Shikamaru”

“I FORFEIT!”

It was a surprise for no one that Shikamaru gave up right off the bat. Everyone had acknowledged that Gaara with his sand was utterly dangerous. Riku had heard the tale of Team 8 (or more accurately from Kiba) how the redhead from Suna was a complete bloodthirsty psychopath. The tale of how he literally crushed a team of Ame-nin was quite gruesome.

With the preliminaries over with a mini-Maito Gai (who went by the the name of Rock Lee) crying in a corner for not being able to show his spring of youth (whatever the hell it was to Riku) the eleven contestant for the final stage of the chunin exam were decided. Another draw, this time from a box with numbered paper inside, paired ten genins against each other plus another freebie. One by one genin were called in an alphabetical order to pick a number.

“Akiyama Gou: #10

Gaara of the desert: #6

Hyuga Neji: #3

Kankuro of the desert: #5

Rock Lee: #11

Tanaka Yuuna: #9

Temari of the desert: #8

Tsurugi Misumi: #4

Uzumaki Karin: #7

Warudo Riku: #1

By default Uchiha Sasuke gets #2. As such the opening matches are as follows.

First match : Warudo Riku vs Uchiha Sasuke.

Second match: Hyuga Neji vs Tsurugi Misumi

Third math: Kankuro vs Gaara

Fourth match: Uzumaki Karin vs Temari

Fifth match: Tanaka Yuuna vs Akiyama Gou

The freebie goes to... once again Rock Lee.”

Hayate was done with his announcement and Sarutobi Hiruzen made his own. to Riku’s delight and most of the genins (with the exception of Lee) they had a month to prepare for their match.

It was with great anticipation that Riku left the tower with his temporary team.

Chapter 13: Evaluation

The day after the second stage of the chunins exam, Hiruzen summoned the Jonin senseis of the Konoha teams that made it to the tower. He was both happy with some performances and very unhappy with others. As per usual when a genin from a rookie class was involved now, Iruka was present, sitting by the Hokage’s side, files in hand. Since the man was a bit zealous he had spent the whole time after the preliminaries reviewing the other Konoha genins that made it to that particular point of the exam.

“Hinae, Satoshi, let me congratulate you for the performance of your students. Hinae both young Yuuna and Gou’s performance has been nothing but exemplary. Unless their performance during their match is abysmal, which I doubt, their promotion is in the bag for them. You trained them well.”

“Thank you, Hokage-sama.”

“Satoshi, it seems your team has progressed a bit this year. Misumi had been quite clever and also lucky with his opponent. Make sure he’ll be ready to make a good display in a month.”

“I will, Hokage-sama.”

“How is Yoroi? Is his condition severe?”

“One punctured lung and also his stomach. The med-nin were quick to act so he will recover nicely.”

“That’s good to hear. It really was a bad match-up for him, a shame.”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

“Do you need a private training ground for the duration of the month for your students?”

“If possible, yes. One for each of my students.”

“Misumi has his own secret place to train, so it won’t be necessary.”

“Very, well. Hinae, you can use both training ground Seven and Ten until the end of the exam.”

That particular piece of news made both Kurenai and Asuma frown, those were the training grounds that had been allocated to them when their team was officially formed. In Hiruzen’s mind though, since none of their students would fight in the last round they could train elsewhere for a month. A genin that was almost sure to advance in rank during the exam and bring revenues was more important than a rookie genin team far from the spotlight. It was also a bit of a punishment for the two Jonin for having a dick measuring contest by using their students in the exams.

Hinae and Satoshi were dismissed and Hiruzen turned to Gai.

“I’d like to congratulate you, Gai, for your students’ performance. I truly do, unfortunately...”

"Tenten had a bad match up, Lee didn't have the opportunity to shine and Neji..." the green beast of Konoha said in an exasperated and a bit ashamed tone. To the side, Kurenai had murder in her eyes.

"Yes. Neji. While he didn't break any rules, trying to murder another Konoha ninja, his own cousin at that... No one will want him on their team. The amount of distrust he earned with his actions may very well stop his career altogether."

"He's still young, Hokage-sama. He will learn, hopefully for the better and before he ends up stuck as a genin forever."

"You do know that I can't promote him, right?"

"I do, he may be strong but he doesn't have quite the mind to be a chunin yet." agreed the Jonin. "I admit I'm a bit stumped on how to approach such a change. I believed I had curbed his hatred for his family but clearly I was wrong."

"You don't have to worry about that, Gai-san." Iruka interrupted.

"How so?"

"Neji is strong, yes, and from a prestigious clan, unfortunately he grew arrogant because of it. A good ass kicking from someone he considers inferior will give you the opportunity to work better on this particular point. Riku will do the job perfectly."

"Mah~ You're talking as if Riku already won against Sasuke."

Both Hiruzen and Iruka turned to Kakashi as if he had sprouted a second head but neither of them gave a rebuke. In their mind it was a waste of time. Gai however, spoke up. It was less in defense of his student but more in hope and curiosity.

"Is that genin really that good? I saw his match against young Naruto but... I mean, I hope he is, because it would be better for Neji but I'm not knowledgeable about him and Neji is a prodigy..."

"No, Neji is a very talented individual but he is no prodigy. At least beyond his taijutsu style. Riku on the other hand -"

"Reminds me of Minato." Hiruzen cut in on the conversation between Gai and Iruka by dropping a verbal explosive tag the size of the Hokage Mountain.

"L-Lord fourth?!"

Shock came across the face of every Jonin present. Even Iruka was surprised but a bit less. He knew that Riku was a real prodigy but to compare him to the one that is considered the strongest Hokage in history... **That**, the chunin did not see it coming.

“Yes. Minato, Itachi, Orochimaru, you, Kakashi. Riku is on par with all of you. Fortunately for the village, he’s more like Minato.” *‘And thank Kami for that!’*

“Are... are you sure, Hokage-sama?” the leader of team 7 asked in disbelief.

“During the six months he spent outside the academy and in the genin corps, he spent most of his time doing C-rank with chunins or coming up with ideas that benefited the village more than any genin ever did. As we speak, Anbu teams average success rate increased by 12.3% and survival rate by 17.1% and it keeps increasing. All thanks to him.”

“A-Anbu?”

“Yes, Kakashi. Anbu. Team Ro and Alpha were so pleased by the seals and ninja tools Riku came up with that they requested that I pull him out of the genin corps to put him in the Anbu’s R&D division.”

Asuma and Kurenai were a bit lost at what was being discussed. They knew nothing of Anbu (beyond what the public knew) and didn’t understand the gasp of surprise that Gai let out, nor Kakashi’s lack of his usual disinterested cool attitude which was replaced by utter shock. They didn’t know either that Team Ro was the most successful Anbu team in Konoha’s history and had been led for nearly a decade by Kakashi himself. Iruka stayed quiet but understood by Gai’s and the silver haired pervert’s reaction that what he heard was a big deal. A very big deal.

“Anbu has a R&D division now?” inquired Gai, still surprised. He had never joined the ranks of the black op despite trying (More to help Kakashi sinking into depression than anything else) but he did design a training regimen for them. For that to happen he had to be privy to some and enough secrets about this special shinobi section of the village.

“They do not.” replied Hiruzen in a no nonsense manner.

“Y-you mean.”

“Yes. They petitioned to have one. They want Riku to work for them first and foremost but it’s neither here nor there. Neji will have the ass kicking he needs and that’s all that matters. And yes, Kakashi, Sasuke may be very talented but the odds of him winning against Riku are very low. At least currently. Now let’s continue with this meeting.”

Understanding what he meant, the jonin senseis of the rookie teams stood a bit straighter.

“I am... deeply disappointed with your teams’ performance.” Hiruzen announced and to keep in control of the conversation, raised his hand to stop any retort the three shinobi had to make. “When you nominated them to enter the chunin exams I believed in the

assessment and the trust you presented about your students' skills. It seems to me now, that you put them forward for simple bragging rights among your peers."

To the side, Iruka nodded slightly in agreement. He had voiced his thoughts about the matter, that none of them were ready and had been rebuffed. Only Gai had given him support.

"I was hoping to see strong genins that could reach the final stage and would show the might of Konoha to our clients. Instead all I saw was average genins, sometimes even lower than that. Only one of the nine made it to the next round and it was only because his opponent didn't even try." Having said that, Hiruzen looked at his son. Akimichi Choji's display in the preliminaries had been an embarrassment if nothing else. Thankfully only Suna and a representative from Kusa had been present. "Had Sasuke been paired with any of the other match winners, he would have lost. Yes, the cursed seal severely limited him but that's not an excuse and you know it Kakashi."

"I wasn't going to say anything Hokage-sama." the called out Jonin defended.

Hiruzen took a moment to look at the man. He knew that Kakashi knew perfectly well that in the shinobi world there were no excuses for defeat and loss, yet ever since he was pulled out from Anbu for his own good he had become complacent. His fight against Momochi Zabuza in the Land of Waves had proven that.

"Good, maybe you didn't completely soften after all. Now, Iruka has made a report for each of the teams and I'm curious to hear what they say. It will also reflect your own capabilities as a sensei."

With that said, Hiruzen gave a nod to the chunin that the field was his.

"Let me start by saying... No offense, Hokage-sama but I think you're a bit too harsh on them because of your unreasonably high expectations."

Everyone in the room was shocked once again by what they just heard. They thought that they would be heavily criticized by the chunin, like he had done at the time of the genin team selection (something that Gai had heard about and had agreed wholeheartedly). They didn't expect Iruka to have a go first at the Hokage or even have a go at the Hokage at all. Even Hiruzen, who had put his pipe in his mouth and lit it, had his mouth open in shock.

"The three of them entered their students in the exam, yes, but I don't believe for a moment they thought that any of their students would make it to chunin with the exception of maybe Shino. I think they entered them more for the experience than anything, after all they never stated that their students would reach the last stage, just that they were ready to experience the exam."

Hiruzen took a moment to ponder what he heard in silence and begrudgingly had to agree with a nod.

“It seems that is the case. With almost all of them being heirs of a clan I may have had high expectations, yes.”

“As such, Yuhi-san’s performance as a sensei has been nothing but exemplary for the amount of time she had with her students. They passed the first stage flawlessly and I even commend her for teaching Kiba to finally use his head, allowing him to understand the true purpose of the test. Six months ago he wouldn’t have used his head like that if at all. He would have just panicked and cheated. There was no panic there.

Her teachings in tracking and survival allowed them to make it on their own in the second stage. The only other Konoha team that could boast of such a feat and actually did better was Hyuga Hinae’s team. I commend Team 8 even more, especially when they nearly encountered **that** Suna team that made it to the finals and got away unharmed and undetected.”

Iruka stopped there to let what he said sink in then took another big breath and continued.

“The preliminaries however, had proven that none of them were quite ready for the rank of chunin yet, despite the obvious progress each member of the team made. Hinata showed a better Juken than in the academy, and a confidence and bravery that she didn’t have before. She still needs to work on that a lot more. It’s the only thing that is holding her back for a promotion. Her strength is acceptable and her mind is more than keen enough.

Now Kiba. As I stated earlier, he made great progress in using his head but he still needs to grow up more in that regard. His match had proven that he had not quite yet the reflex to hold himself back to observe and analyze his opponent to come up with a strategy or a tactic to win.

Shino certainly has the mind for a chunin, unfortunately he’s lacking the strength. He relies too much on his bugs and it was costly for him during his own match. If I had to pick one of the nine rookies for a promotion it would be him.

Overall as individuals or a team, Team 8 has proven to be a well balanced team and above the average for a rookie team of six months. You can be proud of your students and yourself, Yuhi-san.”

Hiruzen nodded at the assessment and was amused to see Kurenai tried her very best to not grin in giddiness. The corners of her mouth kept twitching.

“Now, Kakashi-san. Let’s start with the first stage. Only one of them understood the purpose of the test. Sasuke took some time but masterfully realized that he needed to cheat and smartly used his Sharingan to do so.

Sakura and Naruto on the other hand... I don’t know who is the worst. That a smart no, brilliant, kunoichi as Sakura was smart enough to answer the questions by herself but completely missed the point of the test or Naruto who didn’t understand the test at all and didn’t even try to cheat, banking it all on the last question. Yes, he did pass with his guts but guts alone is not enough. Their lack of ability to gather intel not only disqualifies them for the rank of chunin but will get them killed one day. I’m surprised that with you as their sensei they have not yet mastered ‘underneath the underneath’ especially Sakura who clearly has the brain for it. Naruto... well, that was to be expected.

Moving on to the second stage. Sasuke had displayed the ability to work with others which is great. What is less great is him attacking a fellow Konoha shinobi that came to help. Yes, some factors are to be taken into consideration. His relationship with Riku and the cursed seal he had just barely survived, no one will deny that, however resorting to violence on the spot when he didn’t get his way is worrying.

Sakura displayed bravery and competence as a kunoichi she didn’t have before. While not a frontliner, she supported her teammates well, especially when both were unconscious after their run in with Orochimaru. She made a stand against Team Oto and that saved Sasuke’s and Naruto’s lives. Luck too with the intervention of Team 10 and Team Gai but luck is part of the life of ninjas.

Lastly, Naruto. He has shown an outstanding ability for teamwork that he certainly didn’t have at the academy. He’s ready to put aside his personal feelings to work together with others to the point of being the linchpin of the team. His survival skills helped the team greatly however his lack of awareness got him then his teammates in serious trouble. The only reason he did not die an hour after the start of the test is because the Ame-nin that captured him chose to let him live. And that’s the least of the problems. A dead Naruto is a Kyubi free.”

Those words sent a chill to anyone present, Hiruzen included. Such an event would be a total disaster.

“I’ll prioritize his training on that.” Kakashi simply said, acknowledging implicitly that he may have fucked up a tiny bit in that regard.

“Now the preliminaries. Let’s start with Naruto since we’re talking about him. His display during his match was...” Iruka stopped and winced there, not quite finding the words to describe how bad the performance of his favorite student had been. He got help, however.

“Bad. I know.”

“Abysmal.”

“A joke.”

“Most un-youthful.”

“Kakashi, Naruto needs to learn that sometimes giving up is not a bad thing and even a better option than to keep on going on.” said Hiruzen.

“I’m trying but he’s the most stubborn individual I have ever seen. Once he has something in mind he is inflexible.”

“Hmm... Did you try a lose-lose situation with him?” inquired Iruka.

“I... didn’t think of that. What do you have in mind?”

“A simple game of Tic-Tac-Toe? The winner gets a prize, the caveat is when someone is close to win, add a new rule, like... an explosive tag, activating hurting both him and you when one of you wins.”

“Ah! The solution in that case would be to not play the game at all anymore and retreat, or rather give up on winning and the reward. Drastic but it might work.” Kakashi nodded in agreement.

“Back to his performance. The only jutsu he showed was the Kage Bunshin and his taijutsu barely got any better since the academy. Riku with the academy style completely ripped into him.”

“You’re being generous, Iruka.” interjected the Hokage. “The last time I saw such a senseless beating was when Tsunade caught Jiraiya trying to peep on her in the hot springs. Let me remind all of you that he spent four months in the hospital and nearly died as a result. In fact he confessed to me once that this experience was the closest to death he has ever been. Thank Kami, Riku has not yet discovered how to replicate Tsunade’s super strength.”

“Not yet, Hokage-sama?” inquired Gai.

“Riku’s chakra control is not perfect but close. From what he told me he’s been practicing it intensively since he unlocked his chakra at six. He’s certainly smart enough to reverse engineer Tsunade’s strength or come up with it himself given the time to do so.”

“Anyway, Naruto didn’t improve much on his fighting skills. Sakura didn’t either and was unable to show much of anything against her opponent. Neither did Sasuke with his match against Choji.

The final assessment as a team is that Team 7 is not as dysfunctional as it started which is a great relief. However, Naruto is the one holding everything together and he's not yet mature enough to lead the team properly and the responsibilities for such a role. A single mistake from his part and the team will fall apart. The team is good but because of its dynamic it's average. A lot more work is needed to bring it up to the expectations on it.

Individually they all grew up mentally and matured to a varying degree. It's good but not enough, especially regarding Naruto. Riku's words had been harsh but nonetheless true. Hopefully his... sound defeat will push Naruto to introspection, something he critically needs among many other things. Their skills as shinobi however barely progressed **but**." Iruka put a big emphasis on the 'but' "Looking at the long term, I believed it was a smart decision from you to focus on teamwork, Kakashi-san. A bit more training in the shinobi arts would have been good though. Is that why you entered them in the exam? To make them realize firsthand teamwork was the most important without you as a safety net?"

"Yes. Now that they really understand that and are actively working together I can start with the second phase of my training: focusing on the ninja arts."

"May I ask for details?" cut in Hiruzen.

Kakashi took a deep breath and began detailing what he had in mind.

"For Sakura, break her out of her stupid dieting idea and develop her physical abilities while starting her on medical ninjutsu. I thought about training her in genjutsu but it's out because she doesn't have the creativity for it.

Sasuke will receive a very light version of Anbu regimen. So training with a tanto and element affinity. Naruto..." he stopped there and sighed. "Start from scratch. His basics are so bad that I suspect the instructors at the academy willfully sabotaged him. Mizuki first and foremost. With his mindset it will be tedious but with the promise of ramen and jutsu I believe it will set a faster pace than without. I may request some help to deal with his immaturity as it's not my forte. Since he needs a bit of a shocking experience I was thinking of Anko. Some kind of shock therapy."

Iruka nearly voiced a protest on the spot, knowing how bat shit insane the kunoichi was but the idea had merit.

"Hmm... Not a bad idea. That will pull her mind away from Orochimaru. I'll order her to help."

"Thank you, Lord Third."

It was finally Asuma's turn and Iruka didn't start immediately. Instead he looked at the man right in the eyes for a moment then sighed.

“Team 10 did exceptionally well in the first stage. Better than team 8 in fact. Where Team 8 passed with flying colors but individually, Team 10 did it as a team. Ino and Shikamaru’s skills in information gathering helped Choji a lot. Ino got the intel by possessing the disguised chunin, then Shikamaru to give him the answers. Shikamaru then used his shadow technique to take control of Choji’s body and fill his test. I only have one word: brilliant.” the chunin said with a bright smile. “It was expected of them however.

The second stage was... A bit lackluster in their display. Shikamaru proved he has a keen strategic mind by avoiding enemy teams and ambushes. Their teamwork and team spirit allowed them to help other Konoha teams, which is really good, however their time in the forest has been ill spent.

As the Ino-Shika-Cho they clearly have the skill to ambush most teams during the test, yet they focused on survival first. It’s like they had no motivation to actually pass the exam. A bit surprising, considering how competitive Ino is. Had Ino not asked for a scroll from Riku and Riku’s agreement, Team10 may not have passed the test. Speaking of Ino, her knowledge in plants and poisons helped the team greatly in sustaining itself. It’s too bad she didn’t use that knowledge to deal with other teams.

Choji didn’t display anything to mention with the exception of a lack of survival skill.

The preliminaries... Well... Shikamaru was smart to forfeit the match. He had put to good use the retelling of what this Gaara could do from Team8. I’m pretty sure it saved his life.

Choji, for his part, didn’t even try. He still has his dislike of hurting others, he needs to fix this yesterday. Ino did barely better than Sakura but completely relied on her clan technique. I don’t think I need to point out how bad that is.

Overall Team10 presents the best teamwork of the rookie teams, unfortunately the skills as a shinobi of its members are low, making it a bit below the average. Individually... There is a lot to be done because they can’t do anything on their own. None of them are eligible for a promotion to chunin which is a shame. My advice would be to train them separately. Since Kakashi-san put forward the idea of asking Anko for help, I suggest giving her Ino too for a short time and Shikamaru to Gai to both motivate him and train him physically. He needs to learn that sometimes he doesn’t have time to make a plan and needs to act fast.”

“I don’t mind but after the exam, I have my own student to train.”

“As for Choji, you’re perfect for bringing him out of his mindset, Asuma-san. I believe that one-on-one training with you, without Shikamaru for Choji to lean on, would produce excellent results.”

With his report over, Iruka gave the Jonin sensei their respective team's files. They thanked him and Hiruzen dismissed them along with Gai. Taking time to process what had been said, he finally turned to the chunin.

"I don't think you're paid enough for your work, Iruka." the old man shared his thoughts. "That was an excellent analysis. Huh, we should have done this for each rookie team years ago. Quite the clever idea you had. Hmm, maybe I should promote you to Tokubetsu jonin."

"Thank you, Hokage-sama. I would decline a promotion though. I don't think I'm fit for the responsibilities of the rank. However I won't mind the raise that comes with it." the chunin joked, making Hiruzen chuckle.

"Did you-"

"Make a file for Riku? No but I did study his performance."

"And?"

"He's far beyond any expectations I had of him. No matter how far fetched they were. Despite being two years younger than his teammates he was the one leading the team and there was no conflict, resentment or jealousy involved from them. None. It's like it was a natural thing. They acknowledge him as their leader without any problem despite being a recent addition to the team. His decision making had been top-notch and I didn't spot any mistake at all. The first stage, he passed it on his own. He understood the true purpose of the test but solved the questions by himself. His control of the **Gale Palm** blew me away, along with the note he sent to Gou with the answers.

His strategy at the beginning of the second phase showed he was thinking beyond just passing the test. He deduced the two most probable options everyone would take and chose a third one that took advantage of them and would benefit the village."

"I admit, his idea of always being on the move and hunting down competition to help Konoha as a whole was not something I expected."

"Yes. No freshly graduated genin, heck no genin at all would have come up with the idea to do more than just secure their missing scroll and pass the test. Leaving a shadow clone behind to keep helping while passing the test... I have no words"

"I was watching. 'Better to face a leaf-nin, than someone from an enemy village in the final stage'. Yes, very few would think of that."

"Then there is the way he dealt with Uzumaki Karin. He befriended her, recruited her and adapted his original plan in accordance with this unforeseen development. Furthermore, while I'm sure his intentions were genuine, befriending her had also an ulterior motive. More than maintaining good relation with Kusa, I believe he-

“Tried to make her defect for Konoha. I’m aware, in fact he came to me before the preliminaries and outright said it. Not with those words of course but he was very explicit.”

“Finally, his match with Naruto was... It was hard to watch because of both sides but...” Iruka closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “I believe Riku’s actions were right. Despite completely beating down Naruto, I think he did it with the objective to help him.”

“I think so too.”

“Lastly, he showed very little of his skill set, which is a huge plus. Honestly at this point, he doesn’t even need to participate in the finals to secure his promotion in my opinion. Out of all the participants, he’s the one who showed to be the most suited for the rank of chunin.”

“I couldn’t agree more.”

“To think he’s mostly self-taught. Geniuses.” he lamented a bit out of jealousy. “Hokage-sama I... don’t know much about what being Hokage entails but when I look at him...”

“You see a potential successor.” Hiruzen stated.

“Yes.”

“I see it too. The more I get to know him, the more he reminds me of Minato in his youth and the more I’m upset at those three for wasting the opportunity to guide him properly. Unfortunately, what’s done is done. I do commend you for your thought of helping him with Izumo and Kotetsu. Well done.”

“Thank you. I just... I couldn’t leave things at that.”

With the conversation seemingly over, Iruka stood up, bowed and left the room, leaving Hiruzen alone with his thoughts. The tired Hokage stood up too and looked at the village outside the window, his hands behind his back and pipe in mouth.

‘The way Riku dealt with the Oto team was perfect. He may have not known the link with Orichimaru but the knowledge that Oto was hostile to Konoha was enough to make him act mercilessly. Hopefully, whatever mission they had ended in failure with their death. This is good. He’s not as much of a flight risk as I thought him to be. He’s creating bonds with others, no matter how strong or weak those bonds are. The addition of young Karin is just a bonus at this point, in fact it’s more to tie her to the village than him. Still, that leaves the problem of how Riku is going to train this month. Hinae is an excellent kunoichi but ill suited to teach him and she knows that. Besides, she’s already busy with her own students. Jiraiya? No, while Riku may remind him of Minato too, it’s time for my perverted student to meet his godson. Since Kakashi will focus on Sasuke who is still in the exam, it’s perfect for Naruto. And since Jiraiya is out, so is his

knowledge in fuinjutsu for Riku. Asuma is busy with his own team and hopefully Choji so wind manipulation is also out. If Tsunade was here, I would throw her at Riku in a heartbeat alas she is not. Kurenai? With young Hinata in the hospital... No, no. She still has to take care of the rest of her students and from what Iruka told me, Riku doesn't like genjutsu much. Damn it. Were I not Hokage, I would...'

Quite suddenly, and to the surprise of his Anbu guards, Hiruzen began to chuckle. The chuckles turned into a laugh then into a cackle. They will never admit it but that scared the shit out of them. Fortunately for them, the dreadful scene came to an end when Hiruzen's secretary, Hisho, knocked on the door and entered to tell him that his guest was there. Nodding at her and giving her a signal to let his guest in. Hiruzen turned around to face them.

"Good morning Uzumaki Karin. I'm Sarutobi Hiruzen, Sandaime Hokage of Konoha. Nice to meet you."

Chapter 14: Finals

Riku got up at his usual time to start his training. With only a month before the finals he had a lot of work to do if he wanted to beat Neji (not beating Sasuke was not a thought that entered his mind). From what he knew of the boy, Riku was quite a bit at the disadvantage in close quarters. Should Neji reach him, he knew that he was done for. The basic taijutsu style of the academy couldn't hold a candle to the gentle fist, Riku was very well aware of that. At the same time, the dirty blonde didn't have any jutsu allowing him to win at a distance. Sure, he has his shurifuits but those were lethal and while he found acceptable maiming the *'bastard'* killing him was a line he didn't want to and will not cross. That left him a bit in a bind. Hinae had agreed to give him half an hour of sparring a day so he could familiarize himself with fighting an opponent using the Juken but not more. He understood why such a limit. She had to train two students for the finals after all. That she agreed and didn't outright say no, made Riku feel good. It wasn't often that someone actually helped him in such capacity. Not even Izumo and Kotetsu were that involved.

After washing his face and brushing his teeth, he dressed up in his training clothes and exited his home. Just as he opened the door, he was confronted with a familiar Anbu with a neko mask and long purple hair. While he wasn't 100% sure, he was almost certain that behind the mask was Hayate's fiancée, Uzuki Yugao. Purple hair was just uncommon in the village but not rare.

"Ah! Good morning Neko-san. How can I help you?"

"Warudo-san, Lord third summoned you." she stated and Riku nodded in acknowledgement.

"I'm on my-"

“No. Hokage-sama is not waiting for you at the tower. I will bring you to his location.”

“I... see.”

A bit confused, Riku closed the door of his home and let himself be a tag along to Neko's shushin. After a few stops to shushin again, the pair arrived at what looked like a training ground. A secluded one. Riku had no idea where they were but from the short stops he gathered it was near the Hokage Mountain. Every thought about location went out the window when he saw a dozen feet away from him, the Hokage himself in his battle gear.

'What the fuck?!'

Apparently he said out loud his thoughts because Hiruzen laughed, and Neko hit his shoulder with her hand as if saying *'Mind your language in presence of Lord Third.'*

‘I... have so many questions right now and the only one I have an answer to is... Am I about to have my butt handed to me? And I'm pretty sure the answer is **‘yes’**.’

Hiruzen laughed some more and even Neko let out a very unprofessional but deadly cute snort.

“You're correct. It's time for you to have a proper teacher to guide you and I found myself the most apt to the task.”

“No offense, Hokage-sama but... Really? I'm sure there are plenty of jonin out there qualified for the job. And wouldn't that be kind of cheating that you...” Riku began but stopped himself and shook his head as if he was removing some cobwebs. “Nevermind, you're the Hokage, you do whatever you want and cheating is a shinobi skill.”

“Exactly! Besides, it's been a while since I had a student, even if temporary.”

“Why me, though?”

“You... don't know?”

Hiruzen lost his cheeky smile and replaced it with bewilderment. He had thought that Riku would have understood why.

“Can't say I do, Hokage-sama.”

“Because you're a prodigy.” the old man replied bluntly in a ‘Duh’ tone.

“ME?! I mean sure I'm smart but there is smarter. I just work hard.”

"You are, I assure you. In my almost 65 years of career as a shinobi I only met four individuals who had as much talent as you do. You're the fifth."

Riku, who had wide eyes ever since Hiruzen's statement about being a prodigy, slightly leaned toward Neko who was still at his side. His eyes still fixed on his leader he whispered something outrageous.

"Neko-san, did someone switch Lord Third's tobacco with drugs?"

Her answer was swift. A fist punching the top of his head.

"No, nobody switched my tobacco with drugs. I'm utterly serious. Such potential, **your** potential, can't be wasted anymore."

"I..." Taking a big breath, Riku spoke his mind. "Honestly I doubt it but as I said, you're the Hokage so you do whatever you want. If that's training me, then so be it. I won't spit on a helping hand anyway. I just hope you won't regret your decision, Hokage-sama."

"I don't think I will."

Signaling to Neko that she could go, Hiruzen approached Riku.

"What is your plan for the coming month?"

"I was thinking of a way to counter the Juken. As I am now, I have no way to soundly beat Neji. Learning a new taijutsu style would be foolish as a month would not be enough. I did schedule half an hour with Hinae-san to get used to it. Ninjutsu on the other hand seemed like a good idea. By using some jutsu in combination with my non-lethal shurifui and seal I was hoping to... well, perhaps seal Neji inside a barrier and remove the air inside of it to make him fall unconscious. At least that's the plan as of a few minutes ago."

"Hmm... You're right about the taijutsu part. Neji had been practicing the gentle fist for years and is a prodigy at it, you would stand no chance. Well thought about sparring with Hinae." replied a pondering Hiruzen, not bothering to ask why Riku was fixated on Neji and not Sasuke who was his first opponent. The odds of Kakashi training Sasuke to be a match for the young man in front of him were low in his opinion.

"I also was thinking of increasing my speed by increasing the strength of my resistance seal."

"What resistance seal?" inquired a confused Hiruzen.

Riku opened his green vest and lifted his grey shirt to show him a seal placed on his stomach.

"This one. So far... well in terms of weight I'm at 2.5 mine and I weigh 40Kg. It's not really weight though but-

"I know, I'm familiar with the seal, no need to explain further. Did you have it on you during the exam?"

"Yes. If the situation became dire I would have deactivated it."

"I see. Anything else?"

"I have two jutsus I want to learn specifically..."

Izumo and Kotetsu were making their way towards Konoha's stadium. Today was the day of the finals of the Chunin exam and they wouldn't miss it for anything in the world. After all, their little kohai was competing. They congratulated him for passing the first two stages and had pressed him to know about his training and how he was going to deal with the 'Last Uchiha'. Riku's answer has been a simple 'kick his ass like I always do' and didn't elaborate further about it. Neither on his training. That frustrated both chunins to no end, especially the little smug smirk that Riku was giving them each time. Hayate and Yugao didn't have better luck either, though they suspected the latter to know something, simply from the barely contained amusement in her eyes. They had tried to rope in Anko's help, who was all in about teasing a young pre-teen with a lot of lewd flirting but she was rebuffed by a ballsy '*Begone, thot!*'. **That** started the most epic chase across all over Konoha to the group's hilarity. Sadly those happy days came to a tragic end when a few days later Hayate was found dead on one rooftop. From what they heard the sight had not been pretty. The body presented multiple deep cuts and lethal one from his left shoulder to his right hip. They had yet to find the murderer. To add salt to the wound Yugao and her team had been the one to find him. No one had seen her since but everyone knew that she was broken. Hayate had been everything to her. Riku had not taken the news well either. He had few friends and he considered Hayate one of them after all the time spent together on missions and outside of it. The funeral had been a somber affair and their kohai too disappeared. Knowing him, they knew it was because he went to train even harder. It's been three weeks since then and they hoped Riku had recovered.

"Izumo, Kotetsu."

Turning to the side, the duo saw Iruka making his way towards them.

"Iruka, man! It's good to see you!" Kotetsu greeted him.

"We thought you'd be stuck teaching your little kids." added Izumo.

"I... gave them the day off. There was no way I would miss this."

“**You** gave them the day off? Damn! The world is going to end Izumo.”

“It’s not **that** bad. The classes today were History, taijutsu and shurikenjutsu. Not something that would be detrimental if they miss it once.”

“Fair point.”

“We were going to the gambling booth before finding a seat if possible. Interested?”

“You bet I am! As if I would miss out on easy money! Naruto is a financial black hole when I’m buying him ramen!”

Iruka said it as a joke but Naruto’s stomach really was a bottomless pit when ramen was involved. That made his friends have a good laugh while they walked to the gambling booth.

“Holy shit! Look at the odds!?”

“100 to 1 in the Uchiha’s favor. Clearly the bookers have no intel on Riku.”

“It’s even more easy ryo than I thought.” Iruka commented.

“Senpais! Iruka-sensei!”

Being called out, the three chunins turned around to see the contestant on who they were planning to bet and make a shit load of money.

“Kid! Finally showing your face, huh?”

“It’s good to see you again, Riku.”

“You too Izumo-senpai. And Iruka-sensei... I wanted to do it once I had some results to show but thank you for sending those two my way.” Riku said bowing deeply to Iruka whose lips turned upward.

“Think nothing of it. You deserved better.”

““Hey!””

“That’s true, sensei.”

““HEY!””

“Shinobis, sirs, if you’re not making any bets, I would ask of you to please stand to the side.”

Having their conversation interrupted, the four turned toward the booker behind his booth.

“Holy shit! Those are the odds for my match?! Can I bet on myself?”

“Your match? Don’t look like an Uchiha so I presume you’re Warudo, hum? Regardless, yes, you can bet on yourself there are no rules against it as long as it is on your victory and not your loss.”

“100 000 ryo on myself, please.” Riku announced as he picked his book of seal and pulled out from storage the said amount.

“W-wha.. A hundred thousand ryo? Are you sure kid?” the booker asked for confirmation. “It’s the Uchiha you’re fighting.”

“I am! The question is, can you pay up if I win?”

“Oh, confident are you? Yes I can pay, you don’t have to worry about that.”

“It’s ten millions.”

“It is.” the booker replied nonchalantly.

“Maybe I should stop being a shinobi and become a booker.” Riku joked.

“Good luck with that. Some bookers are sponsored by nobles.”

“I see.... Still, I’m going through with my bet.”

“Very well.”

The booker took the many rolls of ryo, used a machine to count the money and once he was sure that the 100 000 were all there, gave a voucher to Riku.

The dirty blonde put the voucher inside his vest inside pocket, saluted his comrades and left but not before answering Kotetsu’s question.

“Will you hold back?”

“Absolutely not. I’m going all out right from the start. Intimidation tactic, you know?”

With a nasty grin on his face, Riku left.

“Booker-san. 50 000 on him.”

“Me too.”

“Me three.”

For an instant the booker wondered if he wasn't making a mistake taking those bets. But then again, it was not his money they would get if they won so it wasn't his problem.

Receiving their vouchers the trio went up nearby stairs to find a good place to watch the matches. As they walked Iruka found Gai, Asuma, Kurenai and Anko behind a rail on the top floor. Taking the seats right below them were their students.

“Hello, everyone.”

““““Iruka-sensei!””””

That all of his former pupils greeted him made him happy.

“I'm glad to see that everyone is doing well.”

“I should be among the ones fighting!” shouted Kiba, who was followed by Naruto.

“Me too!”

“Better luck next time.” he said with a smile and joined Izumo and Kotetsu who were talking with Anko.

“...50 000?! Really?!” the purple haired Kunoichi exclaimed.

“If I tell you.”

“Damn! You're all crazy! It's one thing to get away from me, it's another to win a fight. You sure the kid is up to snuff?”

“Anko, that match is easy money.” Iruka cut in.

“Yeah, you should place a bet before the match starts.” confirmed Izumo, more because Anko would finally be able to pay for her dango addiction than to help her.

“You always win when you bet on Sasuke-kun!” Ino exclaimed after having heard the conversation.

“Besides, Sasuke-kun had awakened his sharingan. Riku is strong but he can't do anything against it.” Sakura added.

“If the sharingan was omnipotent, Sakura, Konoha would have had an Uchiha as a Hokage long ago.” Iruka commented and Gai gave a few more words.

“A kekkei genkai is just a tool. Useful, advantageous, true but a tool nonetheless. It doesn’t make you invincible. Look at the Hokages, out of the four, only the Shodai had one. The Niidaime, Sandaime and Yondaime didn’t and were stronger than any Uchiha with a sharingan.”

That deflated Sakura a bit. She knew that the sharingan wasn’t invincible. She had witnessed it plenty of times between Kakashi and Sasuke but Riku, while good, wasn’t a prodigy so she still hoped.

“Back to topic! Are you sure betting on the kid is a sure bet?” Said Anko.

“““YES!”””

“The kid is going to kick the Uchiha’s ass!”

“In less than five minutes.”

“I’d say one.”

“Really Iruka? One minute? I say you’re pulling my leg.”

“Riku said he was going all out and I believe him. Tell you what, if he doesn’t win, I’m paying you back twice your loss on the bet.”

“DEAL!”

With that said, Anko sushined away.

“You bet on Riku, sensei? Not Sasuke?” inquired Ino in disbelief.

“I don’t like it but I think Iruka-sensei is right, Ino-chan. Sasuke stands no chance.”

“Shut up, Naruto! Just because you got your ass handed to you means that Sasuke will lose!”

“Don’t bother, Naruto. She’s in fangirl mode, you can’t reason with her.”

“You said something, Shika!?”

“Yeah, troublesome.”

Riku met Karin in a room on the first floor of the arena. Contestants were to wait here until the beginning of the event and then would sit into a section reserved for them. When he saw her, a bright smile appeared on his lips.

“Karin! It’s been a while, how do you do?”

“Hello, Riku! I’ve been fine.” she replied with a smile of her own. “What about you?”

“I trained like hell! But it was worth it. I believe my odds of winning this thing are the best. Are you ready?”

“As much as I can be. I don’t think I’m going to win my match, you know I’m not much of a fighter but I’m sure to make a good show.”

“Don’t sell yourself short, you never know what may happen.”

“That’s... kind of you to say.”

“Do you have time after the finals or do you leave immediately?”

“Oh, I have all the time in the world because I’m staying in Konoha!” she revealed with a happy grin.

“Really?! How?! I mean, that’s great!”

“The Hokage summoned me for a talk and offered me to stay in the village if I wanted to. I’d be on probation for a few years to make sure I’m no spy but afterwards I’d be a proper Konoha citizen. In the meantime I will have to be confined in the village but that’s fine with me since I want to join the medic-nin program but anyway I’d be a Konoha kunoichi.”

“I’m happy to hear that. I wonder how he got Kusa to agree to it though.”

“Threat, mostly. Ever since the fall of Uzushio, Uzumaki belonged more or less in Konoha. The fact that Kusa treated me like shit and that Senju Hashirama’s wife was an Uzumaki gave him leverage. In the end the agreement was that I participate in the finals as a Kusa kunoichi and afterwards any ties to that blasted village are severed.

“That’s really great. Do you already have a place to stay? I own my own house, inheritance from my parents, and I have a free room for you if you want. You won’t have to pay rent.”

“That’d be... That’d be great thanks. I won’t have to spend the money the village lends me on rent; it would be easier to reimburse it. Since I can’t go out on missions that would have been difficult.”

“Anytime. If it’s money you need though-”

“I can’t ask your help for that! You already provided a place to stay, I can’t...” she quickly dismissed, waving her hands in front of her.

“Oh, no! I wasn’t...” Riku began to chuckle. “I was going to say that you should bet on me against the Uchiha. My odds are 100 to 1 that I win.” he explained.

“WHAT?!”

She didn’t say anything else and ran outside the room to go and make a bet. She hadn’t been impressed by Sasuke one bit during the second stage and she knew Riku was very powerful. It was a no brainer for her.

“Well, well, well. Did you see that, Gou? Little Riku is **moving** fast with his girlfriend. Or rather, **moving in**.”

Turning around, Riku saw Yuuna and Gou standing side by side with a Cheshire smile on their faces.

“How could I find a girlfriend when you own my heart, Yuuna-chan? Does my love mean so little to you?” Riku replied in a brokenhearted tone making Gou snort.

“Bleh! You’re too young for me. Maybe in a decade when you’d look like a real man and not a girly one?”

The trio laughed at the nonsense and discussed lightly about their training. Of course nothing was shared. Not when Gou and Yuuna were opponents right off the bat, so they simply talked about their lives outside training. When Karin came back, it was just in time. A chunin led them to the arena where they would stand in front of everyone. At the sight of another proctor than Hayate, Riku felt a pang of sadness but didn’t dwell on it.

“My name is Shiranui Genma and I will be the proctor today for the finals of the chunin exam. The rules are simple. When I say stop, you stop. When I say the match is over, it’s over. I will act if you disobey and you will be disqualified. Otherwise you’re free to maim or kill your opponent. Capiche?”

The round of yes and nods he got prompted him to continue.

“With the exception of Warudo Riku and Uchiha Sasuke, everyone leave the field.”

Karin and his teammate wished him good luck and left for their waiting area. Riku found himself alone with no Sasuke in sight.

“Damn, I hope Kakashi didn’t rub his bad habit on-”

Genma’s rant was interrupted when a swirl of leaves appeared in the middle of the arena. It revealed Kakashi and Sasuke back to back.

“We’re not late, are we?”

“Get out of here, Kakashi.”

With a nod, the open pervert looked around and found Gai (something not hard to do with how the man was dressed). Immediately he shushined away and landed right next to his eternal rival.

“Only ten seconds late, Kakashi. That’s a huge progress.” commented Asuma.

“Mah~ I couldn’t let my cute little student be disqualified because of me.”

“Not like that would have changed a thing. Those three bet that your duck butt haired kid will eat the dust in less than a minute.” Anko said pointing at Iruka, Izumo and Kotetsu behind her with her thumb. Naruto and Kiba snorted at the “duck butt” comment and both were punched by Sakura and Ino respectively.

“Is that so? Sasuke progressed a lot this last month. He may not win but I’m sure he will last more than that. Besides, you never know what may happen in a fight. It’s not always the strongest that wins.”

“Well, we’re about to see.” Kurenai stated.

Everyone looked down at the arena. Genma raised his extended arm to signal the start of the match and both opponents ran forward. To everyone’s shock however, Riku did more than just ‘move’ he moved so fast that he was almost a blur. Fast enough to punch heavily Sasuke’s stomach. Even with the sharingan active he had not been able to react to Riku’s explosive speed.

“Hot damn!” Anko exclaimed.

Riku’s assault didn’t end with this first strike, no. With his other hand he hit Sasuke’s jaw then began a flurry of heavy hits. The ‘Last uchiha’ quickly tried to counter attack with a feint which allowed him to jump backward and gain some distance. As he did so, he made the hand seals from a great fireball. With the distance not that big he was hoping to catch Riku with it. Unfortunately, for him Riku was quick on his feet and quick of wits. Hidden by the fireball, he used the opportunity to make a shadow clone and kawarimi away, before doing it again to position himself right behind Sasuke who was too busy believing his attack had hit. Crouching down, Riku pulled a tag from his pouch and held it between his fingers, which were making a tiger seal.

“OH MY GOD!”

Kakashi paled, thinking exactly like Anko shouted. He knew what Riku was about to do and prayed to Kami for his student. Up the kage’s booth, Hiruzen did his very best to not snort or facepalm.

‘I used it on him once! ONCE! I should never have done it!’

“ONE THOUSAND YEARS OF DEATH!”

With a manic gleam in his eyes, Riku stuck his finger into Sasuke’s anus with so much strength that he simply flew. Sasuke’s body went up half a dozen feet and was propelled forward. He wasn’t able to scream, the paralyzing tag Riku left in his colon made him unable to do so. That was also why he wasn’t able to land properly but instead crashed badly against the ground and skipping a few more feet, rolling. Sasuke ended up head down ass up and couldn’t move. Because the paralyzing tag was easy to counter with a big burst of chakra, Riku didn’t stay still after his successful attack. He rushed forward and brought out his chakra scalpels, cutting Sasuke’s knees’ ligaments just like he did to Naruto in the preliminaries. He went further by doing the same to his shoulders.

“WINNER: WARUDO RIKU!”

Anko was rolling on the ground laughing hysterically at what she had just witnessed. Kurenai was doing her best to not laugh by biting her lips and trying to stop her friend’s antics.

“H-help!... I can’t... I can’t... “

Kotetsu took mercy on her (but not before taking a pic for potential blackmail) and just gave her a bitch slap.

“Owie!” she said and sent him a glare. He simply looked at her with an eyebrow raised and offered her a hand. She grabbed it and the glare went away. Once pulled up on her feet she couldn’t help herself and took a dig at Kakashi.

“Soooo. What was the time?”

“16 seconds.” Izumo replied, which almost sent her into a second laughing fit.

“Damn! I really like that kid! He’s crazy as hell!”

“If you’d excuse me. I have 5 Million ryo waiting for me.” Iruka said and took his leave.

““Ditto.””

“Wait for me guys! I have Ten Million to pick too!”

“T-Ten?! You bet a 100 000?!” Asuma exclaimed, totally flabbergasted.

“Well, yeah. Had I lost, Iruka would have paid me 200 000.”

“BITCH!” yelled the chunin, going down the stairs.

To the side, Gai was trying to verbally engage Kakashi.

“Kakashi? Are you going to be alright?”

“My student got the humiliation of his life in front of everyone... Meh, I'll live.” he answered with a shrug.

“I expected a lot more from the famed ‘Last Uchiha’.” The Kazekage said behind his veil. If one was paying attention, they would have heard the frustration along with the disappointment.

“Sasuke is strong for a genin but the gap in strength was just too big.”

“You wouldn't have used a ringer, Hokage-dono?”

“I assure you, young Riku is not one. In fact he was part of Sasuke's class and graduated rookie of the year.”

“I see... Warudo. I don't recognize the name. An unknown or small clan?”

“Not at all. Warudo is the name of his civilian father. His mother was a kunoichi though not from any clan or known shinobi family.”

“A relatively mixed background then. Impressive.”

“Nuh-huh. If you think I'm going to high-five you after your fingers had an intimate relationship with some dude's asshole, think again.” Yuuna said, shaking her head, leaving Riku hanging with his hand in the air. The dirty blond turned to his other teammate who shook his head too.

“Nice showing though.” congratulated Gou.

“Thanks!” he said and took a seat next to Karin.

“That was... sick. Both good and bad.” the redhead commented. She did find Riku dashing and very cool even though the execution was distasteful. At least she had a good laugh.

“Oh, damn! I forgot!”

“What?” Yuuna inquired. “Picking the tag from between the Uchiha's buttcheeks?” she joked and got a round of laughter.

“No! I need to pick up my money, I’m 10 Million richer!”

““WHAT?!””

“Oh! Yeah! I won a 100 000 too!”

“Then let’s go! It’s not like the next match is interesting. Neji will win.”

Both genin stood up and went back to the gambling booth where they met the few people who bet on him. Anko was upon him on the spot and tried to hug him to death against her breasts. Riku was faster and switched places with Karin.

“What the? Really? You’re really a shit, you know that?” the T&I kunoichi said with a deadpanned tone but never let go of the redhead who was trying to escape and breathe.

“And you’re a thot. Now please let Karin go.”

“Fine!”

Anko released Karin from her deathly embrace. The young girl had her face as red as her hair but the expression on her face clearly indicated that she loved the experience.

“See, that’s how good you would have felt!” the Tokubetsu jonin pointed at his friend.

“Probably but if I have to motorboat some awesome boobs, it will be because I take them in hand, not because they’re given to me.”

To the side, Izumo, Kotetsu and Iruka, couldn’t believe what they were hearing. Any further conversation was stopped by the booker giving them their money.

“Do you have ours?” Riku asked, pulling out his voucher, followed quickly by Karin.

“Yeah, give me a moment.”

The booker went back inside his booth and after a minute came back with a mountain of bills that was way too big for a regular bag.

“What If I bet everything back onto my victory in the next match?”

“Then you bet back everything. The news came in. The Hyuga won. The odds are 25 to 1 in his favor.”

“That’s 250 Millions.”

“Indeed.” the booker answered without a care in the world.

“... No one ever tried to rob you?”

“The stupid ones do. They don’t live long.”

“I see. Then Ten Million on me.”

“I’m betting back all of my winnings on him too!” Karin said quickly.

“Me three.”

“Me four.”

“Me...”

“Yeah, yeah I get it. You are all betting the total amount of your winnings on the kid.”

Afterwards, the group separated again. Riku and Karin got back just in time for Karin match to start. In fact she was a bit late because Kankuro had forfeited against his little brother Gaara. It was in a hurry that the Uzumaki got into the Arena.

“Good luck, Karin! Do your best!” he shouted and waved his hand at her. She smiled and waved back just before disappearing inside the building to reach the arena.

“You think she’s going to win?” asked Yuuna.

“... The odds are against her but not by much. Temari seems to be a long distance specialist with her big fan and looked more than competent in manipulating wind. I’d say 3 out of 10 are her chances of winning. Maybe four. But I’m making an estimate from what I know about them from a month ago so I can’t really say.”

“That’s not too bad.” Gou commented.

The match started and Karin tried to close in on Temari to restrict her in the use of her fan. Unfortunately, the blonde was faster and created a huge gust of wind. Karin barely had the time to dodge a wind blade that would have bisected horizontally. It did leave her with a deep wound on her waist, screaming loudly out of pain. She didn’t let the pain get to her however and popped a smoke bomb at her feet. Temari created a second gust of wind to dissipate the smoke but it was thick and was only pushed back some feet. It did the job however and relieved Karin’s position. Or rather previous position as she had moved and was nowhere to be seen. On guard, Temari searched her surroundings to find her opponent but found nothing. She was so focused at looking around that she didn’t notice the golden chains sprouting from the ground behind her until too late. The chains, with spikes on each link, warped around Temari’s body tightly.

“Forfeit!”

Karin's voice came from the smoke that had been pushed away against the wall. As it dissipated it revealed Karin hiding behind a tree on the edge of the arena with her chains connected to her back and going into the ground. When Temari didn't do as ordered, the chains around her neck tighten even more, drawing blood but more importantly choking her. Judging her captured and being at her opponent's mercy. Genma acted.

"WINNER: UZUMAKI KARIN!"

Declared the victor, the redhead retracted her chains, got out of her hiding place and exited the arena. When she came back to take her seat, Riku congratulated her.

"Kekkei genkai are bullshit."

That made her snort as it wasn't what she expected him to say but she agreed. Ever since the Hokage had given her some information about her chains, she had been practicing with them. She didn't care one bit that the chains were a rare kekkei genkai of her clans, what mattered to her was that it was another tie to it. Better than her special sensor ability or her other one. This one she kept quiet about it. She didn't want Konoha to learn about it and use her like Kusagakure used her and her mother.

The next match was intense. Gou and Yuuna did their very best and actually went all out or at least Riku thought so. Yuuna tried to overwhelm Gou with fire but it didn't work. To hers and Riku's surprise, Gou, a taijutsu specialist, used water jutsus to counter her fire. One may have thought that the black haired girl was now at a disadvantage but it couldn't be further from the truth. This time it was her turn to shock her teammates by going into melee. Gou may have been more skilled in Taijutsu but Yuuna was faster and dodged well. She fell for a feint and barely had enough time to block with her arms a heavy kick. She was sent flying away but quickly recuperated thanks to a flashbang she had bought from Riku and that she put on Gou's leg when he hit her with it. With her opponent disoriented, she quickly made some hand seals for a genjutsu making Gou see things that were not there, mostly. With a burst of speed Yuuna moved behind Gou, and hit him in the back of the knees making him fall down. The match ended with a kunai against his throat.

"WINNER: TANAKA YUUNA!"

The girl pulled back her kunai and offered her hand to her friend. He took it and was pulled up to his feet. He didn't seem unhappy to have lost. He had done his best and was happy with his performance. From the cheers and applauses of the public he knew it was more than enough for a promotion. When both came back from the arena, they came across Riku who congratulated them. He tried to high-five them but once again he was left hanging.

"You didn't think we forgot where your fingers had been?" Gou simply commented.

"I take back everything good I said about you. You guys suck!"

That made them laugh and Riku continued on his way. A minute later he entered the arena.

"That was a good fight. Definitely chunin material."

"In comparison to the previous matches, yes, it was entertaining." the Kazekage replied to Hiruzen. "I look forward to the next match. The Hyuga prodigy against the surprising dark horse of the finals. Any idea of the outcome?"

"Now, Kazekage-dono, that would be telling." the old Hokage replied with a knowing smile.

"Your student is going to get hurt really, really bad, Gai." said Kotetsu.

Gai said nothing but hoped so. Neji needed a resounding defeat from someone who he believed to be his lesser. A good dose of humility would be a big step in his student's progress. He had talked with Neji about the repercussions of his actions against Hinata and the young boy seemed to have understood his mistake.

'Or pretended too.' he thought.

"How bad are we talking about here?" Asuma inquired, not dismissing immediately the idea of Riku winning as something ridiculous.

"Considering what Gai's kid did to his own cousin..." Anko began.

"Kurenai-sensei, he wouldn't..." Hinata, who was just below her teacher, asked, looking up at her.

"Don't worry kid. Riku may hate traitors and consider your cousin one but..." Kotetsu cut in.

"Neji is still a shinobi of the leaf so he won't take his life. That's a guarantee." added Izumo to reassure Hinata.

"Maiming on the other hand..."

"ANKO!"

“Sorry, nai-chan, but I met the shit a few times and...” she stopped herself when she noticed the look she was getting from her friend.

In silence they all looked at the contestants. Neji was the first to engage verbally.

“You should give up. It is your fate to lose to me today, why bother trying?”

“There is no fate but what we make ourselves.”

“Damn it! That was so cool!” Naruto shouted from his seat after hearing Riku’s response to Neji.

“Yeah! I’m totally stealing that line!” agreed Kiba.

“That kid is really too much!”

Ignoring the interruption from Anko and the genins, the chunins and the Jonins were hyper focused on what was happening down the arena.

“The expected answer of a clanless loser. Did your easy victory against the Uchiha boost your confidence too much? No matter, I will teach you your place. It’s at the bottom of my feet!”

Riku gave no answer but took a basic stance waiting for Genma to start the match. After a moment to let the tension build up the jonin did so. Immediately, Neji sprung forward, hands and fingers ready to strike. He crossed the half dozen feet separating Riku in a flash alas he wasn’t fast enough. The dirty blonde had enough time to make a series of five hand seals and clapped his hands. A huge wind impacted Neji full force and sent him twice as far as the distance the two genins started with.

“**Gale Palm**. Good choice.” commented Iruka.

“Yeah. It’s not as powerful as a **Great Breakthrough** but faster in its execution.”

“Why? What’s the difference between the two?” Naruto asked Asuma. As a wind user himself, he was curious.

“**Gale palm** only needs a clap of the hands that you are already using with the hand seals. **GreatBreakthrough** on the other hand, pun intended, needs you to take a deep breath to fill your lungs with as much air as possible and then release it which takes more time. The difference is only a few seconds but that would have been enough for Neji to hit Riku.”

Naruto nodded in understanding and turned back to look at the match. Riku had thrown a volley of shurikens at Neji. Some had a straight trajectory, some a curved one. The point of it was to trap Neji. If he dodged to the left or right the ones with a curve would hit him. If instead he chose to dodge backward, the straight ones would hit him. Neji was more or less forced to take a hit. Until he didn't. The Hyuga spun on himself at such a fast speed, he created some kind of dome and repelled all the shurikens. When there was no more he stopped spinning.

"This is Kaiten, the ultimate defense of the gentle fist. No attack can break it." Neji explained smugly.

"Ultimate my ass. It's the first time I've seen it and I counted at least six ways to counter it."

"Bullshit! There is no way that's true!"

"Every jutsu has a weakness, Tenten." Iruka reminded her.

"Sensei, is it true?" Sakura asked Kakashi.

"Yes, every jutsu-."

"I meant about what Riku said."

"Hmm... Who knows?" he replied mysteriously, not wanting to confess that he only knew of two at the top of his head. He was curious if what Riku had said was actually true or not.

"Nobody believes in your obvious bluff. Kaiten is unbeatable."

"Let's find out shall we?"

'Okay, that shit is annoying but easy to deal with. The byakugan is still the more dangerous threat. It's really such a bullshit bloodline. Seeing through everything? What a hack! Nothing really changed though. I can't let him hit me or bye bye my access to my chakra. I won't even be able to activate any seals with my tenketsu closed. That's not even the worst! Since he can see chakra he can... Wait a minute... That's it! Option C it is!'

With a sudden plan in mind, Riku pulled out his book of seals from his back pouch. With one hand he quickly opened it to page 44, while with the other he made the hand seals for a **Great Breakthrough**. He had worked tirelessly to be able to use that simple jutsu

without two hands under Hiruzen's advice and now it may very well be what would give him victory. With Neji at a greater distance than the start of the match, Riku had no problem using the jutsu. This time however Neji used Kaiten to counter the pushing force and stay in his position instead of being pushed back further.

'Even better than what I hoped.'

As he maintained the blowing wind, Riku used his free hand to unseal the shurifui in page 44, but also 45 and 46. A second before he stopped blowing to breathe, he threw all the shurifui at Neji. Carried by the wind, their speed was even greater than normal. It didn't matter to Riku, however. What mattered was their effect. Some of them were explosive, some were flashbangs. The last type however was the smoke type. Those ones, Riku threw them at his feet.

"Okay what the hell?!" Ino exclaimed. "First he picked up a book. A book! In the middle of the fight then he used a jutsu by only using one hand to make seals which should be impossible, then he threw some explosive shurikens. Shurikens! Shurikens are not supposed to explode! Nor let out a blinding light and a big boom sound! And certainly not release a cloud of smoke!" So I'm asking. HOW?!"

"The special shurikens are his invention." Izumo answered and everyone, including the jonins, turned to him for a further explanation. "Don't look at me for more intel. Hokage-sama made it an S-rank secret."

"You're kidding, Pops did?" Asuma inquired in surprise.

"Yep."

"Make sense, that shit looks really nasty." Anko commented.

"Oh, they don't just look." Kotetsu assured her.

"Hum... I'm sorry but how do you know that?" Hinata asked.

"We were there when Sandaime-sama decreeted it and we saw Riku use them enough on missions."

"How come?" This time Shikamaru was the one to ask the question.

"Reporting for a mission."

Before more questions could fly their way, something unexpected happened in the arena.

“WINNER: WARUDO RIKU.”

Chapter 15: Invasion

“What the fuck just happened?” Anko asked in confusion looking down in the arena.

She wasn’t the only one. All the genins were looking at Izumo and Kotetsu to try to know more about what Riku had just done, so were most jonins, and as result completely missed the end of the match. The only exceptions were Gai and Kakashi. The former because it was his student fighting, the latter because he was really curious about the kid the Hokage had said was like his sensei.

“From the cloud of smoke, Riku kept throwing his special shurikens relentlessly which forced Neji to maintain his Kaiten. Then suddenly...” the cyclops began.

Two hands bursted from the ground, kunais in each of them. The faint blue-ish glow of each of them was a clear indication that they were coated in wind chakra. Unfortunately, since they came from right under Neji’s own feet, who were located inside the very opaque dome of spinning chakra, nobody saw it. Not even the Hyuga himself. Two simultaneous swings later and the dome disappeared, revealing to the public a footless and ankleless Neji spiraling in the air, leaving two trails of blood. The rookie of the previous year barely hit the ground with his face that Riku was already on his back and pinned the two kunais in his hands into his opponent’s shoulder blades. Seeing that Neji couldn’t move, Genma called out the match in Riku’s favor.

“B-bu... But how did he do that?!” Kiba asked in a shout of disbelief.

“Look.” Kurenai pointed down at the cloud of smoke that was now dissipating and revealing a second Riku. This one didn’t exist for long as it simply popped.

“Riku made a shadow clone inside the cloud and went underground to reach Neji, bypassing the Kaiten. He then used a variation of the **Double Suicide Decapitation Technique** to maim Neji’s legs.” forwarded Gai.

“That’s impossible! Neji has the byakugan, he would have seen him go underground.” Tenten commented.

“He couldn’t.”

“But why sensei?”

“The shurikens. Be it the explosions, or the flash ones... Even the smoke was filled with chakra. Riku’s chakra that was all around. With Neji’s spinning speed, the blinding lights that may have greatly impaired his vision further and the shurikens kept coming from the smoke... Neji didn’t and more importantly couldn’t notice Riku moving underground.”

Kakashi explained further instead of Gai, pulling down his head protector to cover his sharingan.

Everyone looked back down at Riku who retrieved his kunais from Neji and left him with some parting words.

"I guess that's what people mean when they say 'Sweeping someone off their feet, huh?'. Anyway, fate is a coward's excuse to justify they're losers. Those kinds of people... They will always be limited by their own mind and insecurities and never reach the stars. If that's what you want in your life? Then more power to you, just don't force your belief onto others, that's... un-youthful."

With that said, Riku made his way out of the arena, coming across the medics that came for Neji.

"OH Kami! The shit is cracking me up! 'Sweeping someone off their feet'? Hilarious!" cackled Anko.

"Personally, the dig about being un-youthful was better." Kotetsu commented.

"It's like you berated your own student, Gai." Asuma added.

"Must have stung a lot more." the green beast agreed verbally. On the inside he was grateful because that little jab may have pushed Neji to reach for him even more because of his defeat.

"But... isn't Neji's career over?" Sakura asked.

"Not at all. Riku used wind chakra to maim Neji." Kakashi said.

"Yeah, from what I can see from here, he really has a good handle on his wind, the cuts are thin and clean. The medic-nins won't have any problem reattaching his feet and fixing him back to 100%. Had he used another element however..." added Asuma.

Up in the stands, in the Hyuga area, Hinae couldn't believe what she had just witnessed. Not that Riku won; after two months of knowing him, she knew he would. What she couldn't believe was that he won by completely destroying one of the main branch secret techniques. She, a side branch member, was allowed to learn it because she was a jonin on the field. There weren't many in the clans and so the elders and Hiashi agreed that she needed Kaiten to protect herself better. A simple preservation of precious resources. Yet she never showed it to Riku and he overcame it after seeing it only once during the fight.

'And Neji barely stopped using it when Riku already had six ways to counter it on the spot. That kid is really a prodigy.'

"Hinae, did you show him the Kaiten during your sparring sessions?"

"No, Hiashi-sama. Our sessions were more about how it felt to be hit by the Juken. To get used to it and find ways to doge the strikes. I was never in a defensive position and even had I been, I wouldn't have used the Kaiten."

"I see... Then perhaps, that young man is every bit the prodigy you believe he is."

"I'll stake my life on it, Hiashi-sama."

"What a clever way to deal with an 'ultimate' defense." the Kazekage said, quite impressed.

"Indeed. And to come up with it on the spur of the moment..."

"It seems, you already got your next chunin."

"It seems so, yes."

Back at the gambling booth, Riku with Karin by his side, was sealing his hard money inside his book of seals. All 250 Million of it.

"You're not betting anymore?" the redhead asked.

"Not confident in your victory against the sand boy?" Anko teased. Though after looking at the tapes of the second stage of the exam, she knew that Gaara was the real deal.

"No. This time the odds are really not in my favor."

"I'm glad I forfeited, there was no way I would have won."

"Yes. I'm glad you did, because I would have lost my new roomie and I wouldn't have like that." Riku replied, putting back his book inside his pouch.

"Aww, but I wanted to earn more."

"Don't be a petulant child, Anko. You're already 250 Million richer than when you started the day." Iruka chastised her while putting away his own 125 Million.

“True.”

For the second time in the day the group separated. Riku and Karin came back to the contestant area only for them to see the end of the penultimate match. Yuuna looked like she had gone to war, facing a bit burnt but still good to go Lee. With how hard his teammate was breathing and the state of her body that had more blue than its natural slightly tanned color, Riku believed that it would be the end in mini-Gai's favor. Unexpectedly, Yuuna pulled up a nasty genjutsu on her opponent, who screamed very loudly and fell unconscious, before fainting herself.

“END OF THE MATCH! IT'S A DRAW!”

“Wow. She really gave it her all. Was he that good?” Riku asked Gou.

“That and more. He's like me, a taijutsu specialist but the difference is... it's the only thing he can do.”

“What do you mean?” inquired Karin.

“Because of a medical condition he's unable to use chakra properly so no Ninjutsu or Genjutsu for him. As a result he focused all his training on Taijutsu to the extreme.”

“With Gai as a sensei, he must be quite the little monster in strength and speed.” Riku stated.

“You don't know the half of it. Yuuna held like a pro, despite taijutsu being her weakness but her odds weren't very good. She took quite the beating, though she'd be pleased to know she technically didn't lose.”

Riku nodded and Gou left to the infirmary wing to see their teammate. The former wished to go too but his match was about to begin. Just as he began to walk to the stairs to go down, Karin grabbed his arm.

“Don't die.”

“Don't worry. I'll forfeit if it's too dangerous.” he gave her a smile but that didn't seem to ease her worry a bit.

On his way toward the arena he began to review what he knew about Gaara and how to defeat him.

“Okay so that guy is a psycho so he probably will try to kill me. Using sand. Sand that he controls at will. No close quarter then or I'll be caught. Explosive tags won't damage the sand which protects him, but flashbangs and smoke may still be useful. Except I don't have many of them anymore because of Neji. I may box him in a barrier. Sleeping gas may not work but removing the air may. Unless he hides behind his sand to make a

*close space. In that case, victory will be determined by air or my chakra going out first. I may also deal directly with the sand but that would be even more chakra extensive. Dealing with Neji took a good third of my reserves. I shouldn't have used that much chakra to overpower **Gale Palm** and **Great Breakthrough** but then again I may not have been able to keep him away. At least Gaara is stationary, uber confident in his defense, so I have some leeway.'*

His thoughts stopped there when he ended up face to face with his opponent in the middle of the field.

"Mother wants your blood. She will get it."

Riku raised an eyebrow as if to say 'say what now?' but said nothing and just took a stance. Once again Genma let the tension build but this time more than he usually did. When he moved his arm to signal the start of the match he jumped backward to get out of the way. Riku did the same and got way out of reach from the sand attack that came towards him. He threw kunais and shurikens coated with wind chakra at his target and while they went through the sand, its thickness slowed their speed considerably. Enough to make them useless.

'Kunais and shurikens are out then. Option B.'

He created a smoke cloud at his feet and out of view of anyone made two shadow clones who used their speed to run separately around Gaara creating a diversion by throwing shurikens and kunais. The sand tried to keep up and barely succeeded. With nobody knowing he was still in the cloud, Riku took advantage of Gaara's stationary position. Unsealing the last ten of his explosive shurifui which were special ones as they were hyper charged, he threw them towards his target and used a jutsu he had developed in secret behind the Hokage's back.

'Shurifuin Shadow Clone Technique!'

He pumped half of the chakra he had left after creating two kage bunshins to multiply the shurifui to a good hundred. Knowing that his timing was perfect, he knew without being able to see that Gaara's sand would not be in position to block this attack.

Up in the Kage's booth Hiruzen's eyes grew four times in size when he saw the shuriken multiply.

'HOW?! Did he recreate my jutsu from sensei's notes on the kage bunshin?! In A MONTH?!'

The hundred of shurifui exploded on their target, the cumulative shockwave they created making enough wind to blow away the cloud of smoke Riku was hiding in. With now an unobstructed view he was able to see that his attack had been mostly useless.

'A dome of sand?! REALLY?! Fuck me! I can't deal with that one like I dealt with Neji's. Option C then. Chakra exhaustion here I come.'

Riku dispelled the shadow clones, gaining back their chakra, and quickly pulled out four Kunasi from his back pouch. After a small run half around Gaara he had thrown them all in a square pattern and made the hand seals to activate the barrier. Pulling out his books of seals he unsealed some tags in page 69 and put one of them onto each side of the barrier. Once done He made another sequence of hand seals and fire and wind burst from the new seals in the direction of the sand dome. He would have preferred lightning for the occasion but he had yet to finish working on Earth manipulation.

After five minutes of spending chakra maintaining the fire and the wind, Riku stopped. With the raging inferno inside the barrier gone, everyone was able to see that the sand had turned to glass. Quickly, he put down the barrier and with a kunai laced with wind pierced the now fragile defense of the Suna-nin. The scream of pain resulting from his attack told him he had struck true. Just as he was about to launch a few more, ignoring the psychotic rant of his opponent, feathers began to fall on the stadium. On the spot, Riku did a rat seal and spiked his chakra to quickly dispel the genjutsu that someone was using. He tried to look around but a sudden attack from the side took him unprepared. Fortunately for him the blow was blocked by Kakashi (if he remembered his name correctly).

Despite how tired he was with so little chakra left, Riku was able to understand that Suna was attacking Konoha. Or at least that's what his exhausted mind got from the sight of plenty of Suna-nins attacking Konoha-nins. Looking back to Kakashi, he saw his opponent was the Suna siblings' Sensei. Speaking of the siblings, they picked a deranged Gaara away from the stadium.

"Join the other genins, reach a shelter, help if you can on the way there but don't go start a fight."

"Understood."

He may have said that, but he did otherwise right off the bat by activating his barrier again and trapping the Suna sensei inside of it. The man had landed Right where Gaara used to be.

"It will last a couple hours I think." Riku said to Kakashi who turned his head around and gave him a look. "Though if I do this..." This time he put a vacuum tag on the barrier and when all the air was gone put a sleeping tag. In two minutes the suna jonin-sensei was down for the count. Meanwhile Kakashi was dealing with the small fries around letting Riku do his thing. Removing the barrier, the genin put a paralysis tag on his down opponent, put him in a crate he had unsealed from his book and dealt with the man like he dealt with the Oto prisoner in his A-rank mission.

"Kakashi-san. I captured him for later interrogation! I'm joining the others! Good luck!"

Not waiting for an answer from the cyclops, Riku went to the contestant area for Karin. He found her asleep and immediately broke her out of the Genjutsu.

“Riku? What are you doing here? Is the match over?”

“Oh, yeah it’s over! Replaced by Suna invading Konoha! This is war, Karin. We have orders to avoid fighting and reach the nearest shelter. I will lead you there.”

“Oh..O-okay!”

He grabbed her hand when he heard a big explosion coming from the other side of the stadium. Giving it a look he saw a huge purple barrier erected.

‘Four Violet Flames Formation. Shit, that’s not good! Is that the Hokage in there? Wait! Trees sprouting out of nowhere on a roof? Mokuton? What the hell is going on?!’

“Karin, change of plans!”

“W-what?!” she exclaimed, scared out of her mind.

“The Hokage is in a bind. Trapped in a barrier. I’m probably the only one present with any knowledge on fuinjutsu that could help. I have to, meaning I can’t lead you to the shelter. So find...”

“Don’t leave me here!”

“Okay. Okay... Just... Come with me and stay vigilant, there are Anbus up there so we should be quite protected but still.”

The redhead nodded, unsure of herself but trusting in Riku. Both genins got up in the room and ran all the way toward the barrier location.

“YOU! GET OUT OF HERE!” shouted one Anbu with a bird mask.

“We’re here to help!” replied Riku.

“As if two genins could help with the situation. Now Go!”

“You know what?! Fuck you!”

Riku made a shadow clone and gave him five particular tags from his journal. He then left with Karin, going down to the floor right below. They got inside the building and Riku hastily began to pull out all the medical supplies he had in storage.

“What are you doing?” inquired a frantic Uzumaki.

“That barrier above is the **Four Violet Flames Formation**. It’s powerful but has a major flaw. You can get out by going underground.”

“You want to go inside by going through the roof? Are you insane?! Didn’t you see?! It’s Orochimaru in there! The boogie man of the Elemental Nations!”

“There are also the Shodaime and Nidaime Hokage with him. I don’t know what Orochimaru did but whatever they truly are, they are under his control. That’s not my plan though. I’m not going in, I’m getting the Sandaime out!”

Back on the roof, Riku’s clone had not been inactive. He put a tag at the corners of the barrier and put the fifth one in the middle of two of them.

“Kid, I told you to scram!”

“And I told you to go fuck yourself! Now shut the fuck up and let me work in getting the Sandaime out of there.”

The bird Anbu tried to grab him by his collar to throw him away but his arm was grabbed by a newly arrived Neko.

“Let him.”

“But Taicho he-”

“Is a fuinjutsu expert and knows what he’s doing. Genin Warudo, what is your plan?”

“Create a barrier above the enemies’ to lock them inside on our terms.”

“Why?” the bird Anbu asked.

“Sooner or later they will release their barrier and try to flee. That way they will be contained. Good idea Genin, but that doesn’t help Hokage-sa-”

Neko stopped there when out of nowhere a cloud of smoke suddenly appeared from the ground and hid Hiruzen. Riku reacted fast and slammed his hands on the tag on the ground in front of him. A blue-ish white-ish barrier appeared around the purple one.

“Shit! The area is so big, the chakra consumption is insane. Anyone have chakra pills? I won’t last long.”

Neko picked a small pouch of them and put one in his mouth.

“Thanks, Neko-chan. You better keep them coming because boy one won’t be enough.”

“Your body won’t be able to withstand the side effects if you take too many.”

“Yeah, well thankfully I’m just a kage...” he stopped there as a thought crossed his mind.

“Riku?” Hiruzen said as he coughed away the smoke he inhaled.

“Yeah.”

“What did you.. Where are we?”

“The floor right under the roof. Karin used her sensory abilities to locate you then I busted you out and locked them in. They can’t follow.” the dirty blonde said quickly as he used a diagnostic jutsu on the old man. “Shit, you’re pretty banged up.”

“Well... fighting my student and my predecessors on my own was not easy.”

“Here, drink this.”

Riku handed Hiruzen a vial who drank it without thinking about it twice. He then warped a tight bandage above his patient’s left elbow to make a tourniquet. Everything below was beginning to turn purple and black.

“It’s an all antidote for the most common poisons. Doubt that will have any effect on the one in your system but you never know. I made a tourniquet just in case. Amputating may be the only solution.”

“It’s a rare and unique one from the famous blade Kusanagi.”

“Yeah? Well... Let’s wait a bit before removing a good 3kg from you.”

Riku began to look at the other wounds all over Hiruzen’s body. Some were just scraps and shallow cuts but some were serious.

“Okay. Good news, I can fix you. Bad news I have to use the **Mystical Palm** and I never used it on a human.”

“Either by poison or blood loss I’m going to die anyway at this rate so go ahead.”

“Wait!”

Both male turned toward Karin who had a conflicted expression on her face.

“I have a better way.”

““You do ?””

“It’s... an Uzumaki secret I suppose. I didn’t say anything because... I didn’t want Konoha to treat me like Kusa did.”

“What do you mean?” asked Hiruzen.

“As you know my chakra is special but more than you thought. It has... extraordinary healing properties. If you bite me, your wounds will heal in a matter of seconds.”

“That’s... Kusa sucked dry your mother, didn’t it? And were doing the same to you.”

“Yes.”

“You don’t have to worry young, Karin. This is an Uzumaki clan secret and I won’t share it. I’d be in big trouble otherwise. I may be the Hokage but I’m not all powerful regarding politics. I have to respect the laws about the clans. I’m sure Riku will keep quiet too. You don’t have to worry, Konoha won’t treat you like Kusa did.”

Karin nodded and opened her jacket, revealing multiple dozen bite marks on her shoulders and arms. That made Hiruzen and Riku frown but they said nothing. Just as she was about to give her arm to Hiruzen, Riku interrupted.

“Wait! Does the healing deal with poison?”

“I... don’t think so?”

“Then amputation first. That thing is potent, without the tourniquet it would have already reached the heart.”

“Then do it quickly.”

“Alright. Here goes my last drops of chakra.”

Riku channelled his wind chakra into some ninja-wire and tied it in a loop just above the tourniquet.

“On Three.” Riku said and Hirzuen nodded, preparing himself for the incoming pain by putting a kunai in his mouth. “Three!”

Riku pulled with all his remaining strength the wire whose loop shrank on itself. It cut through Hiruzen flesh as if his arm had been made of paper. The old Hokage’s scream had been quite loud despite being muted a lot. Riku quickly sealed the amputated arm away for a later study of the poison while Karin ditched the kunai in Hiruzen’s mouth and replaced it with her forearm. The effect was immediate. A green glow surrounded the old man’s body and his wound began to heal at a rate only Tsunade could outpace.

In less than half a minute not only all his wounds were closed and he wasn't bleeding anymore but his chakra reserves had been replenished to their fullest.

"Thank you. The both of you." Hiruzen said after removing Karin's arm from his mouth.

"Your thanks are unnecessary. Genin or Hokage, it doesn't matter. We're simply ninjas of the leaf and we help each other. Especially when some fuckers attack our home." Riku said and handed him his book of seals. "Page 17 is a butt load of paralysing seals. Page 71 are crates. Page 42 are barrier tags. Page 88 and above are empty storage seals."

"For the Shodai and Nidai?" inquired Hiruzen, taking the book with his only hand.

"Yeah. Now go feed that snake his own tail, Hokage-sama!"

"I will." the Hokage replied with a confident smirk on his face.

Making his way outside he smiled even more when he heard two thuds behind him. He knew he had drained Karin of almost all her chakra and Riku had been running on fumes after three matches. Yet they gave their all.

'They remind me so much of them. Perhaps... No, that's a thought for later.'

Jumping up to the roof, Sarutobi Hiruzen was ready to kick some ass. Fortunately for him, he didn't need his arms for that.