

KEEPER 114

Chapter 114: 114. ZONUVAKI TERRITORY

When sagiri had gone north with Squad Salka, they had used a war carriage, and it had taken them three days to reach Galka City. Now, since they were required to go on foot, it could take them five to seven days, just like Lotaga had said. It meant they had to run day and night and rest for only a few hours each time.

Sagiri's body had grown, and at least looked his age now. His stamina had doubled, too, and he was no longer slow. That said, he was still not the fastest, and he had to push himself not to slow others down. The first day of the journey was peaceful. Apart from the fact that everyone was energetic, they were also full, and everyone had carried some dried meat. Even Kaka, who had been beaten by his dad in sparing, looked to be doing fine. The second day was also just fine, and the passerby just looked at the Galka logo on their combat coats and looked away. Harming a student of any school was punishable by death. The Supreme Mandra himself had signed on to this rule that the ten schools' organizations council had passed.

The second day was peaceful too. They had stopped only for four hours and slept in two-hour shifts. Six slept in the first and five in the second. They needed to get down to Ko'alsi quickly. The north was still a warring place, and sagiri had gathered that the weaker clans and tribes did not love the Bami tribe. Squad 25 carried two from Bami, and worst of all, one was of the Asakana clan and a child to Chief Zaka.

Chief Zaka had not given a squad with his son on it any special treatment or escort. The man was truly ruthless.

On the third day, things got a bit interesting. Almost everyone had run out of water, and the terrain the lotaga had taken them through was rocky. They could not find water or cover, and it was too hot. almost everyone, and put away the heavy combat coat that helped with the cold at night, and tied the overalls at the waist. They had to sleep on rocks, and it was quite uncomfortable.

Lotaga led them through odd roads to avoid civilization after they had rested a bit. But on the fourth day, just after dawn broke, they had to break through the hidden roads and woods they had been running through. Lotaga had wanted them to reach the Zonuvaki tribe lands and pass through them before night but somehow they had been behind time, and they could only reach there at night.

That was not the only problem, however. Sagiri had noticed that Kaka had slowed down since the end of the third day, and he could smell blood. He was sure someone like Kiuga noticed it too, and he was

lagging with him and continued teasing him. Sagiri could tell that he was doing it not to alert the others, because Kaka hated pity. Sagiri was sure that if he sensed pity coming from any of his team, someone was bound to die.

Everyone was too tired, hot, and dehydrated to notice a slowing comrade. whose slow pace was now their average fast pace. Sagiri had been raised with a healer woman, and he knew that the body could only take so much torture before it gave out. If his body gave out and he really collapsed because it was bound to happen at some point if he did not admit that he was in pain, then Team 25 would be in a twist. Sagiri knew for sure that showing weakness was a death sentence for Kaka. The boy had jumped to save him when he was kidnapped, and he had not found the time to return the favour yet. He still owed Kaka and Maita for risking their life for him.

Sagiri was sure Kiuga knew this, too, but he also knew it would be harder to find help for Kaka. It was a hard strategy. To help, while not making it obvious.

The group finally stepped into the edge of the Zonuvaki territory an hour before nightfall. The Zonuvaki territory was set in such a way that there was only one way through. Going through meant going heading westwards and then going around the Zihili mountains, which could take two more days. The only way south was through zonuvaki and they were very protective of their territory. Walking at night through Zonuvaki unless you were the chief zaka, Salka squad, or other elite squads meant death sometimes. depending on how their chief was feeling. The Zonuvaki tribe was in no way weak.

This was also a bad time because it was when they initiated their boys to welcome them to manhood. Killing a beast could earn them a small tattoo, but killing an intruder could earn them the tattoo of a count that they wore on their backs to show their kill count. All in all, youths could get hungry for tattoos and kill by 'accident' to get a tattoo.

"We will be in the heart of Zonuvaki soon. By then it will be night," Ulekai said, fearing to become a tattoo count on a Zonuvaki's back. Everyone was scared, of course. They were just eleven against a whole tribe. Zonuvaki was among the few tribes whose clans worked together as one. It was as if there was no separation of clans between them.

"It seems so. We set camp here and wait for dawn," Lotaga said, and there were sighs. There were no hunting grounds around, and to hunt, they had to go into Zonuvaki territory. The group was hungry and thirsty, and it was about to be a long night. If they went to hunt in the Zonuvaki lands, it could mean absolute death. Lotaga was right for the first time.

"I'm so thirsty and hungry," Maita said in an irritated tone as if it was everyone's fault.

"We keep going," Sagiri said, staring into the lands beyond, where the Zonuvaki tribe lay.

"Are you planning to get us killed?" Lotaga asked, throwing his body on the hard ground.

"I'm thirsty, hungry, and now a boy from the east or whenever wants to kill us all," Maita said, his voice more irritable than the last time he spoke.

"None of us can even speak zonuvaki, and you want us to walk into the heart of their territory when they are having their initiation festivities," Zazarie said.

"You will not die," Sagiri said, and after the many things Team 25 had witnessed, he and his weird abilities, they almost got swayed, but walking into the zonuvaki territory at night guaranteed all bad outcomes.

"I say no. I'd rather be hungry and thirsty here than dead in Zonuvaki lands," Bukata said, sitting beside Zazarie on a flat rock on the ground.

"Why do you suggest we go in?" N'varu asked.

"Because I can speak Zonuvaki," Sagiri said, and everyone turned to look at him.

"You can?" Lotaga snapped his eye open. "Where did you learn to speak it?" Lotaga said, his ears twitching with curiosity as he sat up.

"In the library, all language books are there, even the lost tribes," Sagiri said. It was half true, some half false. Some languages he spoke before he even heard of them. The archive inside him knew all languages, and those it did not, he had made a point to study them, and now perhaps he could not speak maybe four or five, and it was because they belonged to some lost tribes. Even those, he would study with the archive at a later time.

"Even so, knowing their language can not guarantee them from going berserk on us," Zoliath chimed in. He was also sitting on the ground. Kaka, too, was sitting quietly, and the smell of blood had gotten even more distinct. Now looking back, Kaka had not pushed the upper part of the overall off even when it got hot, as if he was hiding something.

Sagiri turned to look at Kiuga, and their eyes held in a silent conversation. sagiri looked between Kiuga and Kaka, who had his heads hung low and eyes tightly shut, then back to Kiuga. Sagiri knew kiuga would understand what he was getting at. Kaka had not even snapped or called him stupid for the stupid idea, which was enough to show how much agony the guy was in. He was also silently asking Kiuga to agree with him because he was the glue and brains of the team, and if he agreed to his idea, then no one could debate.

"I also know their traditions," Sagiri answered to zoliath not taking his eyes off off kiuga.

"Thai is not enough..." Maita started, but kiuga cut him off.

"I agree with Sagiri," Kiuga said, and there was a uniform head turn. He was the brains of the team, and if he was in support, then they naturally could trust him, but this time, everyone was a little skeptical.

"I agree too," N'varu said, and it was expected of him to agree with Sagiri, so his vote did not count.

"Well then, it is settled. Let's get going before the festival food runs out." Lotaga jumped to his feet and yawned. There were uniform sighs, but no one could debate with him because, after all, he was the one in charge of the team, and disobeying a superior in a field exercise guaranteed failure.

"Yes, sir!!" The group answered in chorus as they gathered their things and put on their combat coats.

"Whatever you do, don't carry your bows and arrows or blades in a threatening manner," Kiuga said. No one had been stupid enough to carry a spear because they were heavy, and apart from sagiri who carried Nokai and the two dozen small blades, everyone else carried either a sword or a bow and arrow.

After everyone was set, Lotaga led the group into the Zonuvaki territory.