

KEEPER 171

Chapter 171: NEAR DEATH AND PAIN

Sagiri staggered back, one hand clutching his chest. The wound pulsed painfully as he watched with horror. Instead of healing, it was rotting. Sagiri pulled out the knife, but the wound still refused to heal. His breathing grew uneven as the pain persisted and blood flowed out of him like water.

Sagiri let out a guttural howl from deep in his throat before he fell to all fours. The archive that always stayed inside his mind was now looming around him like a sphere. It contracted to his body's size, swallowed him whole before plunging through the earth of the shadow and pillar arena, and sank with him deep into the ground. Sagiri did not know how that happened, but he was soon falling into a dark pool under the arena. He had not known it was there, but after falling through the concrete and space for a while, he was plunged into a pool.

The water swallowed him whole. It was even colder than the hellpool. How was there a pool under the shadow colonnade? The ice water, however, was nothing compared to his dying body. He could feel himself hanging at the edge of death. The archive was the only thing keeping him alive. It was merging with his blood to push it and repair his skin, but the wound was festering as fast as the archive was putting it together.

Sagiri sank beneath the surface of the hidden pool beneath the arena, the world above vanishing into darkness. There was only silence. Then, just as fast as the silence and darkness engulfed him, the archive opened as if it were an entity of its own. It did not do it gently this time, but it tore through him. It was as if he had only ever touched a tenth of the archive, and now it was like the seal that had been keeping the rest of it at bay had snapped to save its vessel. It tore through him, not just his temples that now felt like they were being torn apart. Sagiri's body convulsed beneath the water as something ancient surged into his mind, something vast, overwhelming, and impossible to contain.

Images exploded behind his eyes. Just like in the past when he could randomly know the history of something just by touching it, now memories were flashing into his mind so fast that his mind could not rewrite, and they were tearing him open. The echo images were not organised. The memories were not of a place or thing. It was as if everything was tearing into his mind all at once.

Everything.

Deserts burning beneath black skies. Cities collapsing under forces that were not from this time. Voices, thousands, millions, layered over each other, speaking, screaming, whispering in languages he had never learned yet somehow understood. He tried to scream, but only water rushed to fill his lungs. His wounds

were festering as fast as they healed with the strength level of the archive. He didn't drown either. The Archive did not allow it. It held him there. Well, he could not escape it because they were one, and whatever the seal had let loose, he had to experience it fully. There was no point trying to escape it.

The water did not feel like water anymore. The pain he was feeling was too much to bear, and it was a wonder he had not passed out or died. The water suddenly thickened and darkened and became heavy around him, until it wasn't water at all. It was smoke or dust or both, but he was no longer in the water.

Sagiri staggered forward, and the world snapped. It was an upgrade from what he had just endured, but it was not in the least pleasing. There was fire everywhere. Flaming arrows were being launched everywhere. There was so much fire. It was not an echo image anymore or a memory; he was in the place. Fire, so hot, was everywhere. The sky burned red, choked with ash. Structures collapsed in the distance, their silhouettes breaking apart under the weight of flames. The air was filled with screams, raw, human.

familiar.

Sagiri froze.

"No..."

His voice came out small. This was wrong. He knew this place. He knew it like the back of his hand. This was the same desert he had danced with Nokai and the woman. The woman? He was now beginning to understand why Nvaru told him there was nothing he could tell him because he already knew. All this had been in the locked-away part of the echo archive all along

His hands trembled at the pain he felt. The pain of the clan, the people now running up and down past him. The people are arranging themselves in formation. Thirteen formations. And he knew not just by the echo image but from something deeper. From something buried. From deep within him. He was one with the place. One with the Men, Women, and children, all wearing the same markings as him. Their markings were only around the upper arms. But they were the same as his that were all over his body. This was...

His clan.

Blood soaked their clothes. Some carried children. Some dragged the wounded. There was nowhere to go, and they returned only to sit behind the thirteen formations. Something or someone had cornered them. Sagiri reached out to a mother holding tight to his child. His hand passed through one of them. He wasn't there. He was only watching. He was watching something that had happened long ago, and for the first time, he wished he could look away. He was not only watching, but he was feeling everything. Every emotion is flying in the air. Their fear, their despair, and hopelessness.

Pain hit him. Not his own, but the pain of each death that followed. Warriors suddenly flooded the place. He knew the combat suits. They had not changed. He knew the warrior combat suits very well. The black combat suit with splashes of copper.

The Tagayia warrior uniform. How could this be?

A blade tearing through flesh snapped him back to the pain in his clan. A body collapsed, as the child the mother had been clutching took their last breath. Sagiri gasped as the sensations slammed into him one after another. A man in the formation who was holding onto the formation using his life force fell with his throat slit open. A woman screamed as flames consumed her home. A flaming arrow had been shot into her house. Not one but a couple of dozen. A child cried until the sound cut off suddenly...

Sagiri dropped to his knees.

"Stop!"

But it didn't.

"I don't want to see anymore!" Sagiri cried, and this time a tear fell from his eyes. He had never shed a tear once ever since he was born, but now he was sure a tear had escaped his eyes. The Archive forced him deeper. The ground shook with the impact of an approaching battalion. He looked up and watched as Figures moved through the burning village, killing. Everyone and everything. Even the beasts.

Blades rose and Fell.

Again.

Again and again and again without mercy and without hesitation. Even when they tore the breastfeeding child off their mother's breast, they did not hesitate to crush the infant. This wasn't a battle.

It was a slaughter.

Sagiri's chest tightened, and he hauled in pain so much so that he felt his throat bleed. His heart pounded violently. He tried to stand, but another wave hit him. This one was even stronger and more familiar.

It was Personal.