

KEEPER 174

Chapter 174: THIRD WEEK EXAM

Tum! Tum!

The beats came slowly, then quickly. Sagiri had been in and out of darkness for what felt like ages. The pain in his body had disappeared at some point, and he was floating endlessly in darkness. The sound of his beating heart finally reaching his ears was the first thing he had heard. Or perhaps it was the sound of drums signaling the start of the third week. The exam that was loved by most, but still second to the fourth week exams. The third and fourth exams would be held in the arenas in the outer pentagon. So the guests, dignitaries, and masters of most weapons came to watch. The judging of these dances included ten judges in each weapon from across the kingdom who are said to be the best of the best. That's said, Senraki is to sit in the sword panel and shoot the bow and arrow. That is only because one master in a weapon can only sit on one weapon examiner panel, or then Salka could have qualified for all panels.

Something had changed with sagiri. Even though he was still submerged under the pool and the darkness with the archive healing him and feeding his body with oxygen, it was as if he felt lighter than he had ever felt before. The largest part of the seal of his mind had broken through, and it was as if whatever it was capable of was a joke. Now lying in a pool swallowed by darkness, he tried to push out his senses, and they exploded. The archive expanded with them, and just from where he played, he could feel the entire inner pentagon. A little further, and he could perceive the entirety of the Galka War Academy. The people moving around a set of beating hearts, intentions, and feelings. They were more intense now, but somehow he could handle them all without having to filter any.

All the students were gathered in the assembly ground at the central pentagon. He did not have to hear what was being said to know that they were being prepped to go to the outer pentagon for the beginning of the third-year exam. So it had only been a night, yet it felt like he had been stuck in the darkness for weeks. The number of students was missing by twelve. The number of students was supposed to be two thousand six hundred and fifty. Yet only two thousand six hundred and thirty-eight fathered. Sagiri knew that excuse; he could persevere in the presence of everyone within the walls of Galka with his newfound archive power that had enlarged a hundredfold. He concentrated further and sure to his feelings. The nine were his teammates, the girl who was lying unmoving in the healing wing, he knew this because he could perceive any of her feelings. The eleventh person missing from the assembly was Marana.

These were the twelve people he knew well, and he could easily find them in each crowd just by filtering their feelings and the presence they carried. Now, in his new state, he could see it more clearly. The aura surrounding each person. He did not have to concentrate much either. The twelve were gathered in Senraki's office.

"I am sure no one has left the gate. Lotaga and Yavaga are at the main gate," Salka said with conviction.

"Could he be held prisoner inside the school?" Kiuga asked.

"There was blood in the shadow colonnade. He always goes there to meditate." Nvaru said, and sagiri could perceive the worry rolling off of him in waves.

"We can't assume it is his blood yet. There seemed to be a rough battle there, and then we found that girl," Matasi said. "The shadow colonnade looked like a fierce battle, too."

"She has woken up, but she is not saying. The person who attacked her might be the one who attacked him," Kolu said.

"The exams are about to begin. You ten, need to leave now. The girl at the Healing Wing says she can compete too. We will keep looking for him," Senraki said.

"What if he is..." N'varu said. "I don't care about the exams," he said, his voice sounding pained.

"If you forfeit the exam, we might draw more attention. You of all people know that," Salka said, and N'varu shook with nerves and the tension building inside of him. "As long as he is within the walls of the Galka War Academy, I will find him. His exam number is the last, and he probably won't be able to do his blade dance exam till the end of the day. I will find him," Salka added.

The group reluctantly peeled out of the room.

"Do you think the Kafika trio did it?" Ulekai asked, and everyone sighed. He was the little moron.

"They live in a different pentagon. The person who did it has to be from Galka, Konate, Yalami, or someone who was in the fourth year pentagon." Kiuga explained, and Ulekai nodded, finally getting it.

"He also disappeared that day back at the war headquarters. He has not said where he went. Perhaps he went to some place, and he will be back." Bukata said.

"If he misses the first weapon dance exam, I'm going to kill him," Kaka said.

"But that does not explain the blood," Zazarie said. That was too much blood.

"It could be the blood of his enemy," Zolinka said. The group kept chatting away even as they joined the last group already walking out of the inner pentagon. It was just after sunrise, and the groups could separate into three groups. The Lokuza school could not participate in the weaponry dance together with Cilsu, Molakwa, and Tisaro. So they had their own arena. Cadets from this school who wished to venture into a war academy could participate, and cadets from the six war schools could participate in the former school's exam. After all, there could always be an odd one in a school they did not have interest in, or who realized their love for something else years after joining a school.

Banga, for example, excused himself to go to the innovation arena where they would be sourcing their innovations. He was the second-best student in war innovations in Galka, and he could no doubt be a war equipment innovator in the future. Zazarie would do both, too, the weapon dance and the healing practical exams. His desire to become a war healer had increased ever since Sagiri's near-death experience. The other eight were start-to-finish warrior-oriented, and they joined the others in the biggest arena outside the inner pentagon. Students of Daziko could do both healing practical exams and war dances, so it was going to be a long day. It was not so far from the inner pentagon, but the cadets had to do a thirty-minute run to get there.

The Lokuza men could open the exams with a war spirit dance, and the ladies in the other arena for the four schools, much to the disappointment of many.