

KEEPER 186

Chapter 186: BURNING

The endless pool had never seemed so far. Sagiri's body was burning so badly that his skin was coming off, and neither nvaru or lotaga could hold onto him. Something was really wrong. It was as if the archives were not moving freely in his veins or circulating through his body with ease. His skin peeled off, and he could not take the pain anymore. He fell forward and groaned in pain. The cold stone walls and floors under the central pentagon offered less relief. Even the air he breathed felt wrong. The markings on his body glowed and frickered.

"We need to help him," Lotaga said. They had tried twice, and he had burnt them. "Let's use our hands, not arms, to lift him, then we can beg Sayaku for those quick healing pills," Lotaga said, and it did not take long before a pair of hands held onto sagiri. They hissed in uniform.

"He is burning alive," Lotaga said, as they lifted him and dragged him to the pool that was now a level down. "What happened?" Lotaga asked.

"I don't know, he was fine, and then it happened. It had never happened before," Nvaru said in a low voice as if he was fighting tears. It was truly painful to watch someone burn alive, and their skin peel away, while not being able to help them. The two ran down the remainder of the curved stairway pathway before they broke into the cave deep under with the massive pool. Sagiri had never been so happy to see the hellpool. Lotaga and Nvaru dragged him all the way as fast as they could. They might have been moving fast because he was burning them or because they wanted to help him quickly, or both, but either way it worked.

Lotaga barely had time to open the gate before Sagiri threw himself into the pool. The water hissed as it came into contact with hot metal. The water at first felt like acid being poured on his peeled skin, and sagiri wailed under water, which made him swallow a mouthful of water. He did not fight to float this time, however, and allowed himself to sink as far as he could. He writhed in pain for a few moments before the icy water started to numb his body. He had not realised, but he had gone a few feet under. The fire in his skin started fading, but it was very much even, though it had slowed down a little.

Sagiri kicked his feet and swam to the top of the pool. N'varu and Lotaga were standing at the edge, staring at the water with longing. When he resurfaced, they both signed with relief. He must have been under for a while, even without noticing. He was not planning to stay above the water for long, however. He took a fat breath before he allowed himself to sink again. When he was twenty feet under, he finally let his eyes open to the place. Somehow, he could see. The right eye had activated, and he was sure this time it had eaten through the veil. It was only a matter of time, but he had not expected it to be so soon.

Just then, he could see something new as he took the cross-regarded position deep beneath the water. He could see the archive with his right eye. It had shot out of his body like a hexagon figure, with runes at the edges, and the same markings on the body crawled all around the hexagon, and he sat at the centre of it. beneath the water, it took shape.

At first, it was only faint lines, thin, glowing edges forming in the dark, each one sharp and precise. Then the lines connected, locking into place, expanding outward until the full structure revealed itself. A vast hexagonal frame suspended around Sagiri. Each side was immense, stretching beyond what his eyes could fully hold, yet perfectly aligned, six equal faces formed a closed, geometric presence that felt absolute.

The edges burned brighter than the rest. Runes carved themselves along those edges, appearing and disappearing in constant motion. They did not stay fixed. They slid across the lines, overlapping, replacing one another, forming sequences that shifted too quickly to follow. Inside the hexagon, layers unfolded. More hexagons. Smaller ones. They nested within each other, rotating slowly, each turning at a different angle, creating depth that seemed endless. Their surfaces were etched with the same moving runes. Between the layers, thin strands of light stretched and snapped into place, connecting edge to edge, face to face, forming a living network that pulsed faintly.

At the very center inside him, connecting everything, there was a core. He had never felt it before, but somehow it was there now. A compact hexagonal void. It did not glow, unlike the rest of the archive. It somehow absorbed the darkness in the pool, or it appeared so, considering how endless it was. The runes closest to it slowed as they approached, then broke apart, drawn inward, dissolving into that core before vanishing completely.

The structure pulsed. Each pulse sent a ripple through every layer, every rune shifting in response, reorganizing, rewriting itself. Deep under water, Sagiri could see that the archive was moving on its own spine, unrestricted. He could see the yellow moving around and around, yet just now it had not been able to move properly inside of him. Something had caused the sudden change, and the archive had almost burned him alive. The air around him had slowly gone from cold to warm as the fire in his body dulled.

Moments later, he could feel the skin of his body healing. He sat still in the middle of the water as he felt his skin heal and return to its original colour.

Something was telling him that whatever had happened had something to do with the blade that had stabbed him in the shadow colonnade. Perhaps the same thing had eaten all the water in the pool he had fallen into. The archive had known to sink them into the pool then. How lethal is the thing in the blade? It ate an entire pool of water, or perhaps the burning had been swallowed by the water then. He could have surely died then if he had not fallen into that pool, and perhaps he could have died now if he had not gone to the hell pool. What was it that was in the blade?

Sagiri sat under water even long after he had healed, and the archive snapped back inside his body like a small hexagon. Only then did he kick up his feet and float to the top.

"Thirty minutes under water?!" Lotaga exclaimed.

Had it been that long? Sagiri had not noticed it, but somehow, with the archive surrounding him underwater, he had not needed to struggle to hold his breath. Sagiri crawled out of the pool, and he did not realise how the burning had exhausted him, and the healing had weakened his body.

"The blade I was stabbed with must have had something in it," he said after a moment of catching his breath.

"I think so too. You must have been poisoned. The blade must have had two tasks." N'varu said.

"Either kill you on the spot or kill you later. Like now." Lotaga added.

"Damn her!" Sagiri said. She really did come prepared with a plan on top of another.

He finally jumped to his feet, and the moment he turned around, N'varu and Lotaga gasped.

"What?!" he asked, narrowing his eyes. Had something happened to his face? sagiri ran his hand on top of his face, but it was totally fine.

"Your right eye keeper." Nvaru said, "The keeper's eyes." Nvaru said in awe.

"You have a red eye?" Lotaga said in shock. Of course, the veil was now gone.

"I know," sagiri answered. He hooked his hands behind his back before retrieving the red sash. He pulled the material over his eyes and tied it to the back of his head. It was a temporary solution, but it's not like he had another better choice.