

KEEPER 196

Chapter 196: THE FIRST TEST

The Lokuza students were the first to go through the gate under the arena, the only one that led into the arena from the inner pentagon. The drums went crazy. They were to open the ceremony alongside the dancers from the Tiwesani tribe. The most decorated dances and lovers of festivities. The only regret was that the others could not get to watch the opening dance. The crowd went crazy, and the drums were enough to shake the whole place. With every beat that rose, the excitement and tension rose to new levels. The four schools had finished their exams, but they were still cadets, and they could wait for their turn before taking their allocated seats to watch. The Cils, Tisaro, Arc, Molakwa, and Lokuza had finished their exams in the third week, and they would only be watching.

The stomping of the dances grew more violent. When the drums could not go any louder, they finally slowed, marking the end of the dance. The Lokuza were led to their seats before a voice joined in, which could only belong to one person, Wokira Ogiri Tiwesani, the ceremonial division commander. It's not like his job was demanding, and so on other days, when there were no ceremonies within the walls of the academy, the man could travel all over Tagayia to enjoy any ceremony. His name should have been changed from the ceremonial division commander to the tagayia ceremonies chief.

"Ladies and gentlemen!! I am wokira ogiri Tiwesani!! I welcome you to the final exams of the war academies!" his voice went wild again. There must have already been thousands of people sitting, and it was barely daybreak.

"Now, before we start, welcome our future healers, diplomats, and innovators who will push Tagayia to a new era!!" The drums went crazy again as the gate rose for the second time to allow the three schools to walk through. They had to salute the crowd and the grand marshals before they could sit, and the process did not take that long. Wokira went on and on, telling them to salute around ten times, not missing one spot of the arena, before they were finally allowed to sit. The crowd was massive, and even a seasoned warrior could get intimidated by the mere weight of the thousands of stares. Sagiri could feel their uniform relief when they were finally allowed to sit down.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, kids and toddlers, the moment we have been waiting for!!" The drums went crazy. But booed soon after. "But before that, I want you to sing praise to our war general and great chief of North Chief Zaka Asakana Bami, who is in our midst. The north is under him, and we have to thank him for allowing us here!" The crowd went loud with chants again. Wokira really knew how to work a crowd.

"Long live the chief! Long live the chief! Long live the chief!!" the crowd chanted, but their fear was blatant. They feared Chief Zaka, and even though squad 25 could not see his face from the underground,

they still remembered it, and they shifted uncomfortably. To add insult to injury, they shared a squad with his son. Kaka straightened his back at the announcement, but as always, he kept his cool and pride.

"That is not loud enough!!" Wokira announced, and the chants rose even higher for a few more minutes before he let it go.

"Now that we have the blessings of the chief, let us invite all the generals' warriors of Tagayia who have come to watch the young pebbles in the dirt be turned to precious stones to join in their ranks!!" The crowd chanted a welcome, and again Wokira let it go for a while. With the level of impatience of the asakana, it was a wonder Chief Zaka was letting the man drag the opening ceremony for a long time. The chants for all the warriors of Tagayia and generals were even louder to show just how much Tagayia adored their warriors.

"Are you tired of me already!! Should I turn away and end the ceremony!!" He had the guts to say that, and somehow the crowd went crazy with a few chants of praise for him.

"Wokira!! Wokira!!" he laughed with glee before he finally continued.

"Now for the moment we have all been waiting for, but..." Wokira went on to call the ten marshals to greet the crowd, and Zazami Senraki had to give a speech of welcome since he was the host inside the walls after all. He did not miss the chance to be insufferable and make it about himself, and sagiri could picture Salka's face at that moment. He would be rolling his eyes and dying inwardly for a chance to beat Senraki to a pulp.

"I am very happy that you have all come here to honour my hard work. I have worked harder than anyone to make the best warriors that all Tagayia has ever seen. Having such brilliance as two suffocation chamber proteges under my guidance requires me to push myself harder so I can bring out the best in them. Galka War Academy, as the number one academy, will continue being the number one for many more years under my guidance. I, as the grand marshal of the number one academy, make me feel like a grand marshal of all ten schools and all the cadets here look up to me..." He really was pushing it. The other war schools snickered. Was he trying to make them enemies of every school and make their lives more difficult during the test?

"You Galka Academy are so prideful, and your grand marshal is insufferable," the teshini girl gritted.

"The strong can have the honour of being prideful," Kaka added insult to injury. He and Senraki were doing an impeccable job of making them enemies. The other academies did not take this well, and there were sharp breaths of dissatisfaction, but it is not as if they could go one-on-one with Kaka, and so most remained silent.

"Number one position belongs to Kafika this time," the teshini girl said, looking straight at Kaka, who did not spare her a glance.

"Talk is talk and action is action," Kaka said after a moment, and the tensions rose even higher.

"...I expect the Galka War Academy to emerge number one yet again because we are simply the best!! Welcome and feel at home within this wall," he finally finished, and not only Salka but Sagiri was sure the other marshals, especially those from war-oriented schools, wanted to beat him to a pulp.

"Finally, the moment we have all been waiting for!!" his voice was even louder this time. The crowd was still sceptical of a 'but' from his but still cheered enough to wake the dead. "Let's welcome the future warriors of Tagayia!!" he said with the most excitement, and the gate was pulled up for the third time, and the cadets poured out. They walked in six tight lines divided by schools before they further broke into five more lines for each school, assuming thirty lines from the number one Galka, Kafika, Konate, Zoli, Yalami, and Daziko, far behind because of the controversy of their battling formulas.

There were deafening cheers as the cadets fell into neat lines, and then silence followed. The cadets were not carrying any weapons for this, and they had been stripped of even the blades before they started their wait in the tunnel. They looked naked without weapons but still neat.

"Please make sure to put in your best and entertain me. Let me see how much you enjoy ceremonies. Remember to smile. This is a happy ceremony, and we will remember it for the rest of our lives." Wokira said as if it were a festival and not an exam, but for those watching, it could be entertainment as well. "Now my work is done, let us welcome the examiners and instructors and ink keepers!!" Wokira finally left the podium reluctantly. Sagiri was sure the man could talk all day if allowed.

An examiner stepped forward and the environment. Even the cheers die down. More instructors joined behind him, almost half the number of cadets. They walked down to the podium with the ink keepers who had scrolls.

The crowd was silent until the group was standing in front of the cadets.

"Cadets! honour position!" the leading instructor announced, and the movements were silent as the knees met the ground. After the Tagayia warrior creed. He spoke again.

"Cadets! Respectable stance!" He announced, and cadets finally rose into a respectable stance. The man stepped aside and allowed an ink keeper to step forward. Sagiri remembered him. He was the one with a mean look who had come for Kiana that day.

He opened the scroll slowly and linked his lips before he finally spoke.

"The first test will be a team test," he announced in a shaky, shrill voice.