

KEEPER 197

Chapter 197: TEAM TEST

"The first test will be a team test," he announced in a shaky, shrill voice. "You have all already been grouped into squads, so I believe you understand the first requirement of this exercise?"

"Cadets understand!!" the cadets answered in chorus. Sagiri did not care much for the instructions. Kiuga was the strategist, and as long as it was a team test, then they would fill him in. His eyes scanned the crowd in front of him. They were standing facing the dignitaries' section, and through the sash over his eyes, he used his right eye to look. Even when it was not glowing with the archive's power, it was still redder, and so it was safe to keep it covered with a sash. He scanned the whole place, looking from face to face, letting the archive keep every face. It is not like he could know who the enemy was just by looking. Even seeing the aura surrounding them could not help either. There were chances that the hate someone felt was not directed at him. The noise of chewing had nearly torn him apart, but he could not afford to wear his seals. He had started to practice how to filter out noises. Unlike filtering out feelings, this was much harder, and with the noise and crowd in the arena, he was suffocating.

He did not have time to freeze, however, and he pushed himself. Sikuwa had asked him not to get his blood running. Sagiri also knew that using the archive might cause retaliation, but he still had to use it. The dignitaries and generals looked normal. But then, of course, it's not like they would have the name enemy tattooed on their faces. He pushed his senses out, but the mixture of auras from everyone was a maze to pinpoint anything of importance. He pulled back his senses and looked back at the examiners.

"Innovators rank one pull up the view!!" The ink keeper said out loud, and above the arena, a concave, visible doom floated. It seemed that innovators had come up with a way to showcase the area of exercise. They must have planted view innovations all over the outer nonagon.

"The watchers circle!!" Banga exclaimed. "The Fuzaka are finally able to make it!!" It was the loudest sagiri had ever heard Banga raise his voice. The Fuzaka are the leading tribe of innovation geniuses in the central plains, with the Banga's tribe, the Wataida, coming second. Anything you can think of, Fuzaka can make. During the final exam of the previous years, the crowd only had to wait for the flares in the outer nonagon and wait for the watchers on the ground to give an account. The supreme mandra had voiced his desire to watch what was happening as it happened. That was two years before, and this exam would be the first displayed for everyone in real time as it happened.

"What is the watcher's circle?" someone asked.

"It is an eye the Fuzaka have been trying to make, same as an eagle's eye, to give an aerial view of what is happening over an area where they set their Field Anchors. In this case, they must have set them all over the Outer nonagon. The field anchors have Witness Nodes or Anchor Spires buried in the ground beforehand. They can track movement, capture sound, energy, and motion." Banga said with so much excitement that his eyes twinkled. That was the longest sentence Sagiri had ever heard him say.

"I see one of you knows what we are looking at. What he says is right, but that is just part of it. The watchers circle was also made to watch war camps in times of war to watch against enemy intruders," the ink keeper said in a shaky voice, enough for everyone to hear. "The Watcher's Circle has not been perfected yet, and that is why we need all cadets to walk up to the innovators to your right so they can plant a sigil at the back of your uniform. In order of squads and schools," the ink keeper said.

"A sigil?"

"Yes, the watcher's eye is not magical, and it will be easy to find you if you have a mark known by its eyes so it can find you. This will also help in situations where a cadet or cadets need to be pulled out," the ink keeper said.

"What about the flares? What if its eyes fail?"

"It will not fail," the instructor from earlier said. "But in case it fails, then the one red flare given to each group can be fired. In which case, it will mean you have failed," he said without emotion. How was one even supposed to know the eye had failed?

"If the eye fails, the sigil planted to your backs will go off," a rank-one innovator suddenly joined the group. "The watchers circle and its eyes will not fail, however. It has been tested several times, well, unless a force big enough bursts the very ground where the field anchors are. Which again won't happen because senior warriors are protecting them at all nine corners of the nonagon.

"Now, before that, I will go over the test," the innkeeper said, pulling back another scroll. It seemed sagiri had missed whatever he said that was on the first scroll.

"The rabbits were released yesterday into the whole outer district. They are the runner hare species.

You don't kill them. You capture them, rid them of the tags, and set them free."

"The runner hares!" someone exclaimed under their breath. The vermin was the fastest thing, and at that size, it was a blur.

"How are we supposed to catch them without killing them?" another groaned. The ink keeper did not look like he cared as he continued to read the instructions.

"Every group is required to have at least a thousand tags. A thousand tags means a hundred marks for every team. So the lower the number of tags collected, the lower the number of marks. Less than five hundred tags means the team fails.

"The number of hares released is one and a half million, which is to make sure each cadet gets a hundred. The test ends at midnight.

"Remember. It is a squad test, so going off on your own means failure, too, even with a hundred tags.

"For every hare killed, a cadet loses a mark. If you kill a hundred, you earn a zero, and you fail.

Sagiri was beginning to understand the reason they had been stripped of all weapons. Even if they carried weapons, it was of no use if they were not going to kill. Not killing was even harder now since the cadets had been taught to kill, only to be tested on not killing. The hares were so fast they could have been lucky to pin them down with blades if they were allowed to kill, but now they were not even allowed to kill.

"What if we are attacked by the beasts in the terrain?" kiuga asked.

"That is a good question, but I was getting there," the ink keeper said before he lifted his hands, and the ground trembled.