

KEEPER 198

Chapter 198: THE TEST

"That is a good question, but I was getting there," the ink keeper said before he lifted his hands, and the ground trembled. Pillars higher than the arena rose in a distance as far as the eye could see, and on each an instructor was perched.

These instructors here will be exchanging shifts with the ones already in the field. After an incident inside the walls of Galka War Academy during an exercise, we are very vigilant. There are watchers on the wall, too. It would take an army to break past the watchers on both the inner walls and the outer walls and the ones in the field.

"What happens when a rabbit is hunted down by another beast already in the outer district? Won't that be unfair?" Kiuga asked again.

"Another good question. That is why this is not only a race against each other but a race against time, and why getting fifty tags means one passes. Approximately five hundred rabbits have already been eaten by snakes and the big cats," the ink keeper answered. "The rabbits also have sigils on them, in case you are wondering. Also, the more you keep asking questions, the more the delay," the ink keeper said with a bored tone. There was silence after. These exams just kept getting better and better.

"If I take a tag from an already dead rabbit, will it count?" someone asked.

"As long as you don't break the rules, a tag is a tag," the ink keeper said, and some little hope was restored. Even so, depending on tags from already dead rabbits in the entire district could not end well. It was just a matter of luck. Even worse, the beast that killed the rabbit could be lurking, and since they were not carrying any weapons, that was probably a bad choice. Depending on the instructors to save them was also not the best choice.

No one asked any more questions, and they walked in lines and squads to have the sigils planted at the centre of the chest, with their name engraved at the top. Each group was afforded a red flare. One red flare, which they had been instructed to fire, meant failure. What was the purpose of a flare that they were not going to fire? After the sigils were planted, the students were given hooked ropes.

Soon, the commotion died down, and they were back in line. The ink keeper looked even more bored now than ever, as if he was not the one reading one of the most treacherous exam instructions.

Lastly, if cadets can get the thousand tags or the fifty required to pass on average, and they are satisfied with that, they can fire the flare showing they are done and moving out. If the flare even goes off accidentally and you only have one tag, then the one tag will be split among the team. The red flare can only be used to signal that a squad has achieved its goal.

"The test ends at midnight, and any team that hasn't fired their flare at 12:00 fails. A warrior, after all, must keep time.

"Those who fail this part of the exam should not lose hope because the second and final test starts tomorrow morning, all the way to the end of the week, depending on how fast you beat each other. Perhaps you will completely dominate your opponent and get a good score."

Did the ink keeper want them to fail?

How could one know they were going to dominate their opponent or opponents? What if one's opponent was Kaka Asakana or worse, most of the Bami? Perhaps catching the runner hare species was easier compared to depending on the combat matches. The ink keeper finally stepped back, and the instructor stepped forward.

"The exam commences in five minutes. Remember, the faster you finish, the better. A warrior needs to stay alert even without food and water, but the runner hares aren't getting any slower..."

"The supreme mandra arrives!!!" Suddenly, a voice tore through the silent arena, and in the highest, most decorated place of the arena, a small commotion began and spread all over the arena.

The supreme mandra?

All warriors and cadets immediately fell into an honor position with the right knee to the earth and another and a fist to the heart.

"Long live the supreme mandra!!! We greet the supreme mandra!!!" they chanted, and the crowd joined with deep bows, their palms to the heart to show their adoration for the supreme mandra.

It said that in the past two years, he had not come to witness the exams, yet here he was dressed in a purple combat suit to honour the ceremony with a long white coat and a sapphire green sash to show the harmony of all sashes in Tagayia. His face was covered in a veil, and his pepper grey braid ran all the way to almost the back of his knees. The veil was the highest form of respect granted to the ruler. One should not see the face of their ruler after all. Even the shadows and the birds did not deserve such honor. He raised a hand to show acceptance of the greeting before he sat on his high seat.

After a moment, he waved his hand to signal the continuation of the ceremony. The warriors saluted him before they broke into their lines again.

"You have three minutes now, you can leave now or wait for the three minutes to elapse," the instructor finished, and before the sentence was out of his mouth, through the other five gates in the arena that opened to different sections of the arena, teams started pulling out. It was a good strategy indeed since they were dealing with a small and treacherous opponent.

Kiuga did not move as expected, and neither did Sagiri. He was still looking at the supreme mandra. Could he be the man he was looking for? He was, after all, the most powerful man in Tagayia. But then, why would a supreme mandra care that much? And after what Salka had said about the shadow corps, wouldn't it have been easier to just eliminate him?

"Sagiri, what do you think?" Kiuga's voice suddenly snapped him out of his thoughts, and the team had now gathered around him somehow. Sagiri peeled his eyes off the direction of the supreme ruler of Tagayia and turned to face his team. Before sagiri could answer, the girl from Tsanka Aclan and her team stopped by them.

"If my team wins, I win this challenge, and if yours wins, I will admit defeat," Gavina said. She somehow looked serious, but Sagiri could hear her dysfunctional heart beating out of her chest. She looked at Sagiri for a long moment before she turned away.

"Kafika will win this round. We are hunters after all," the Teshini girl said, her back slightly turned, before the three joined their team and ran out of the arena. Sagiri watched the departing team, not understanding what winning or defeat meant for him. If he won, did that mean he won't have to take her as a wife, or if she won, did it mean she won't have to take him as a wife? He was not planning to, but somehow understanding women was harder. He shook his head and turned to the group.

"The runner hare rabbits are the fastest thing. The faster you chase them, the less the chances of you catching them," Sagiri explained. "They are also the most restless species. They ran at even the slightest breaking of a branch," Sagiri said. He had encountered a few back in the village when he used to go hunt for fun, and he had to admit he never caught any. They were fast, restless, and good at hiding. He mostly let them be because they were restless. He did not want to cause them grief.