

KEEPER 221

Chapter 221: THE SHADOW AND THE WARNING

Sagiri stood at the center of the forest clearing, his blades clenched tightly in his hand as the darkness around him began to move not as individuals, but as a single, living mass. The Shadow Unit no longer struck in isolated bursts. They converged, their movements blending until they became

indistinguishable, a storm of fleeting silhouettes that pressed inward from every direction. It was the whirlpool shadow formation. Not many can escape the formation. It was meant to trap, and by the time it broke, the one at the centre of it could be nothing but small pieces of what they once were. The more violent the formation became, the more cuts were torn into his body.

Blades flashed within the shifting gloom. Each step Sagiri took was met with another strike, each defense forcing him deeper into a tightening circle. The air itself seemed to constrict, leaving no path of escape. He could no longer track individual attackers; they were everywhere at once, a vortex of silent death.

They had him cornered.

Sagiri's breathing grew heavier as shallow cuts accumulated across his body. Even with his high endurance for cuts and stabs with his now weakened body, he could not heal, and the last of the black rot residue was yet to disappear to leave his body. The shadows advanced with merciless certainty, their synchronized assault allowing no room for escape. The mass surged even higher and even darker. How were they even able to do that?

For a fleeting instant, Sagiri understood the truth. This was not a battle. It was an execution. They could have killed him already, but after what he had done, they must have considered him a high threat, and even with the formation, they remained cautious. They were deadly and cautious. Even at his full strength, they remained a deadly threat. The current formation was one of their deadliest, but Sagiri was sure they had hundreds of formations more, each one more deadly than the last. Sagiri fell to his knees in agony. He could feel himself fade from the deep cuts and blood loss. He could not make it much longer.

Then just as he was clinging to his last shred of consciousness, Something changed.

A violent distortion ripped through the encroaching darkness, like a blade slicing through fabric. The shadows suddenly faltered and slowed as a new presence entered the battlefield, one so fast that even Sagiri, with all his heightened senses, could barely perceive it. Well, they were crippled a little since he

gave in to the darkness inside of him. The whirlpool of shadows pulled back a little at the sudden interruption, but Sagiri's condition was still bad.

The whirlpool of shadows held their formation for a while, but suddenly, a single streak of motion tore through the Shadow Unit and the formation with so much force that the ground shook. One operative was thrown aside before their strike could land. Another was sent crashing into a tree, their formation fracturing for the first time. The mass of shadows recoiled and faded. Sagiri felt a powerful arm seize him around the waist and hoisted him off the ground.

The world blurred.

The forest vanished into streaks of shadow and moonlight as he was carried forward at unimaginable speed. The wind roared in his ears, and before he could even attempt to comprehend what was happening, the motion stopped as abruptly as it had begun. The shadow placed him on the ground gently before he retrieved something. Sagiri, even with his now crippled senses, could not perceive any killing intent from him. Just like the shadow unit, he could not even perceive his presence.

Sagiri did not have even the strength to resist, and he choked down the round substance that was shoved into his mouth. Sagiri could not handle the pain and the agony anymore, and he passed out right after. When he came to again, he was still being hoisted up by the shadow man, and he was still tearing through the terrain like a falcon. This was the fastest Sagiri had ever seen a person move. He was a blur. Sagiri was still drowsy, but he was not in too much pain now. His vision was still blurred, however, and with the current speed they were moving at, he would not see anything properly. The shadow man finally set him down firmly on solid ground. His senses were regaining their sharpness, and he could perceive the hundred people around them.

He staggered slightly, regaining his balance, and realized he now stood at the center of a warrior's barricade. A defensive formation of heavily armed fighters, their shields raised and weapons ready, formed an impenetrable perimeter around him. Torches flickered along the barricade, pushing back the darkness. Had the shadow saved him only to dump him straight in the enemy camp? Even Sagiri could not have seen that coming. The figure who had brought him here was already turning away.

Sagiri caught only a glimpse. A silhouette cloaked in motion, edges blurred as though the world struggled to keep pace with him. Even standing still, the man seemed poised to vanish at any moment. Then he spoke, and sagiri froze.

"This is the only way to save you for now. Don't do anything stupid." The voice was calm, familiar, and unmistakable.

Sagiri's eyes widened in realization.

"...Salka."

The name left his lips in a breath of disbelief. The figure paused for the briefest moment, just long enough for Sagiri to see the faint outline of his profile illuminated by the torchlight. There was no time for further explanation, sagiri could already hear the warrior in the place start to whisper in recognition. He was still wearing the Galka Academy combat suit.

He should have known that only one man could move that fast. A man strong enough to break the deadly whirlpool formation in one move. And right now, he was grateful the man was not on the other side. Just what other secrets did Salka have under his sleeve? If he was such a deadly shadow unit member? Why did he quit to become an academy captain?

In the next heartbeat, Salka was gone. He vanished like a shadow and dissolved back into the night with the same impossible speed with which he had arrived. Beyond the barricade, the forest remained shrouded in darkness. The Shadow Unit lingered at its edges, their presence still undetectable, but sagiri could feel their presence looming, like predators assessing a sudden and unexpected obstacle. It seemed the shadow unit was on a different order from the unit he had currently been dumped in the middle of. Their orders were to kill him, but the squad that Salka had dumped him with must have had orders to capture him. The only reason they were not attacking now must have been because this was now another's territory.

Sagiri tightened his grip on Nokai's handle, his mind racing. Salka's intervention had saved him from certain death, but it had also raised countless questions. Why had he appeared now? And what danger awaited that required Sagiri to remain within this fortified sanctuary?

"Raise your hands in the air and take a knee!!" A command rang suddenly, and Sagiri could feel the thousands of weapons pointed at him. He had not expected this turn of events, but in his current state, this was the best. For now, he would heed Salka's words and not do anything stupid.

Chapter 222: THE WARRIORS' GUILD

Only after Sagiri had been confined and thrown in a dark prison stripped even of Nokai did he know where he had been dumped. The forsaken warriors' guild's northern base. Their fortress was not big, but it was nevertheless powerful. The warriors' guild could almost be considered a neutral party, but it was also a cunning one. The old union was set in the name of protecting warriors, and at its head sat powerful members of Tagayia. It is the oldest council. founded even before Tagayia itself. Their power and influence ran deep.

Sagiri was finally beginning to understand Salka's logic. If he made it seem like the warriors' guild caught him, then even the supreme mandra or the shadow general who sent the shadow unit to eliminate him would have to think twice before attacking the warriors' guild base. This would indeed buy time for him. He was to be transferred to the warriors' guild headquarters in Ko'alsi, but since the night before and ever since he was caught, he had been left in the dark place. There were at least six most powerful councils in Tagayia.

The ten schools council, the warriors guild council, the war headquarters council, and the mandra and his great chief and inner council. The kaya and the four colleges would be said to have the same footing, but they were not directly affected in this matter, so their involvement could be said to be null. Right now, if sagiri was right and Lira had been rescued, then at least he would have one less enemy. Even so, he was still not clear about the ten schools.

He was sure that the council wanted him dead. But as long as the four councils did not agree, even the mandra could not just force his will. The councils were prone to tear each other apart for a long time, and unless they all spoke with the same voice, he was not sure how long he would be a prisoner. Sagiri was not sure that the mandra wanted to kill him either. Even so, he had wiped out an entire squad, and if the mandra did not take action, then it could still be detrimental to the citizens of Tagayia, who could accuse him of being unfit to rule.

The situation was indeed sensitive, and until all the council was satisfied with just executing him, then he would be a prisoner for months until they came to a unified decision that satisfied all six council members, even the ones not directly involved. The solution could also have to satisfy the citizens of Tagayia, and if they deemed it unsatisfactory, then tensions were prone to rise. Sagiri was not planning to wait until then, but he was still weak at the moment, and Nokai had been taken away.

Whatever Salka had fed Sagiri must have been the antidote because he could no longer feel the black rot residue in his system. It was only the fourth day after he went berserk in the Galka War Academy arena and killed a warrior and kidnapped a cadet, yet it felt like a decade had passed. A lot had happened in a short period of time.

Sagiri flexed his hands in the dark dungeon, and even the residual cuts had healed with the help of the antidote. Well, the black rot slowed his healing, but now, without it, the cuts had healed. Even so, another problem had arisen. Every time he healed that quickly, his body could take a heavy blow, and he needed to eat enough to feed a village for the following few days to recover. That was not possible in this situation, and he was beginning to feel the heat.

His stomach rumbled again, and he curled up. No one had brought him food yet, and he did not know how much longer he could take. The archive had not stirred yet, and the markings on his body remained dormant. He was sure something was seriously wrong this time, and he needed to find answers soon. The answers could no doubt be in the south with his mother's sand shade, who was now in a prison he did not know, rotting away. His journey south was facing a thousand obstacles now, and he could help but wonder what N'varu was doing. The exams were prone to start up again soon after Lira was rescued. They had to continue even after he ruined it for everyone.

The day dragged by slowly, and with every hour that ticked by, the hunger Sagiri was feeling became unbearable. Someone was kind enough to throw in a scrap of bread when night came, but it was barely enough to even begin to quench his hunger. He could feel himself falling weak and weaker by the second, and on the third day, ever since his capture, something finally changed. The seventh wing was allowed into the warrior's guild base. They had come with special restraints to keep him bound. The seventh wing and the warriors' guild could then escort him south to the warriors' guild headquarters. They were the ones who had 'captured' him, and so they were the ones to keep him until the verdict was rendered.

The seventh wing did not look happy. They were even more unhappy when Sagiri was brought forth for them to bind. Their comrades had been slaughtered, and other than fear, they reeked of hate and anger.

"If you bring me food, I will allow you to tie me with your strings," Sagiri said, and he meant it. He was still bluffing since they did not know he was weak now, but whatever worked.

He was not going to allow the scared bunch near him until he ate. Being starved could cause one another sort of madness, and he was not specifically putting up an act. If he did not eat, he was going to go berserk again. The warriors' guild did not look happy but even though he was bluffing at the moment, they finally brought him food, and he had never felt so happy to see a badly prepared meal. After he had eaten his fill, he stretched his hands out, and the same thread the weavers used was used to bind him. His hands and feet were bound before the group finally stepped back with relief written on their faces.

And so his journey to Ko'alsi began.

Chapter 223: THE NINE CONCILS

It had been three weeks since sagiri was brought into Ko'alsi City and one week since he was transported to Alikah City. Only then was he transferred from the warriors' guild headquarters and into the toughest holding prison of the High Council. It was rarely used, but sagiri could understand why. It was rare for a crime to be so serious that it required all nine members of the council of Tagayia to decide the verdict for one person. The prison was worse than the suffocation chamber. It is airtight, and he was still bound by the seventh wing binding threads. More had been added, and even if it was still unnecessary, Sagiri did not correct them. He had regained all his senses and body strength, but somehow the archive was still silent for some reason he did not know. Today was the beginning of his hearing, and from the prison, he could not hear anything outside or even extend his senses. It was another suffocation chamber.

Deep in the heart of the inner wall of the inner city of Alika, nine councilors sat in the convergence hall. The High Council, the War Council, the Ten Schools Council, the Warrior's Guild Council, the Northern Council, chaired by Grand Zorath Zaka Asakana of the Bami tribe, the Eastern Council, chaired by Grand Zorath Linga Maaka, the Western Council, chaired by the Western Kun and Grand Zorath Nakia of the Tsanka tribe, the Central Plains Council, chaired by Tendai Mbeki of the Fuzaka tribe. And lastly, the diplomatic council of Tagayia.

The Convergence Hall stood at the heart of Alikah City, a monumental testament to the unity and power of Tagayia. Rising from a slightly elevated plateau, the circular structure dominated the city's skyline, its walls fashioned from ancient stones and warm sandstone that shimmered under the sun and glowed softly beneath torchlight at night. The council could run from night to morning. Before dawn came, they would have to come up with a verdict.

The floor of the convergence hall bore eight interlocking emblems surrounding a ninth at the center, representing the collective strength of the councils under the authority of the High Council, chaired by the supreme mandra of Tagayia. Elevated platforms formed a perfect ring around the chamber, each aligned with the respective directions and reserved for a specific council, ensuring that every voice carried equal weight within the hall. At the center stood the obsidian throne of the Supreme Mandra, flanked by the seat of the Shadow General and the inner council. Their position signified neutrality and ultimate authority in the governance of Tagayia.

Each council was instantly recognizable by its distinctive attire and symbol, reflecting its philosophy and role within the nation. Members of the High Council wore flowing robes of deep ivory and gold, symbolizing unity and balance, while the Shadow General's midnight-black cloak bore subtle silver designs of shifting shadows. The War Council appeared in ceremonial armor of bronze and crimson, heavy capes draped across their shoulders and etched with the honors of past battles; their symbol,

crossed spears behind a shield, signified unwavering readiness to defend the realm. In contrast, representatives of the Warrior's Guild donned fitted garments of indigo and charcoal, allowing ease of movement, adorned with beadwork and trophies from conquered foes. Their emblem, a coiled serpent around a blade, reflected their cunning nature, perhaps.

The Ten Schools Council projected an air of wisdom and discipline through layered robes of sapphire blue and white. The ten grand marshals sat at the far back of the council. The Eastern Regional Council, carrying the burden of Sagiri's upbringing, wore elegant garments of emerald green and gold. Their emblem is a rising sun over gentle waves. From the harsh lands of the north, Great Chief Zaka Asakana and his council stood clad in heavy cloaks of deep blue and silver, trimmed with fur and reinforced with leather armor. Zaka himself wore a heavy coat fashioned from the hide of a feral beast he had killed, emphasizing the northern belief that only the strongest may rule. Their symbol, a mountain crowned with a sword, represented unyielding strength and dominance.

The Western Regional Council, led by the formidable Kun, presented a striking image in structured robes of burnt orange and black. Their emblem, a setting sun framed by twin blades, symbolized vigilance and decisive action in the face of threats. Representatives of the Central Plains Council wore lighter robes in shades of amber and teal, blending practicality with elegance. Subtle metallic ornaments, which hinted at their devotion to innovation and economic progress. Their symbol, an interlocking gear and sheaf of grain, captured the harmony between technological advancement and sustenance.

Finally, the Diplomatic Council embodied serenity and restraint through graceful robes of white and soft lavender, their attire minimally adorned to emphasize neutrality. Their symbol, an olive branch encircling a globe, signified peace, unity, and their commitment to preventing conflict both within and beyond Tagayia.

Seated within the Convergence Hall, these councils formed a vivid picture of power, tradition, and ambition. The arrangement of their platforms ensured balance. Regional leaders were positioned according to their geographical origins, while institutional councils occupied spaces reflecting their societal roles. The council had long sat, and only the arrival of the high council remained. The Supreme Mandra's arrival would signify the beginning of the meeting. Even as all dozens of high-ranking members of Tagayia sat, there was tension in the room. No one dared speak until the supreme ruler of Tagayia arrived, but a lot was being said in the silence.

It was going to be a long night.

Finally, the twin doors opened, and the supreme mandra stepped through. Walking behind him was his most trusted man, Tsaka, the general of the shadow units, and the other members of the inner council.

Even with his face covered with a veil, the supreme mandra was poised, and each of his steps spoke of elegance and power. He was not hurried, even with the discussion at hand. A ruler is never to show weakness or haste, and a man who easily bends under pressure does not deserve the position. He walked to his throne and stood. Every member of the council stood and bowed deeply in greeting.

They only dared to sit after the man sank into his chair and the high council was seated before they sat.

"The council begins!" he said in a powerful voice, and as if the councils had been waiting for this moment, the hall quickly descended into chaos.

Chapter 224: TENSIONS

General Felunka rose, his imposing figure clad in ceremonial armor scarred by countless battles. His voice boomed across the chamber.

"An entire Seventh Wing squad lies dead. One hundred and twenty of our finest warriors were slaughtered without mercy. This is not merely a crime. It is an act of war against Tagayia itself. The War Council demands immediate execution. He also killed my two warriors and killed two rogue students of the Galka War Academy. For the life of my dead soldiers, I demand justice." his voice was full of rage, and his lips trembled with rage. "If the ten schools council had not refused me last time, I could have killed him, and this could not have happened. Murmurs of agreement echoed from several platforms. Felunka's gaze swept the chamber.

"If we allow such a force to live, we invite rebellion, embolden our enemies, and signal weakness. Sagiri must die." He added, slamming his hand to the table.

Before the echoes faded, Kun Nakia, the Great Chief of the West, rose gracefully. Her eyes were sharp, her voice calm yet laced with steel. "The West stands with the War Council," she declared. "We have long guarded the borders against threats from beyond. Sagiri's origins in the South make him a potential catalyst for insurrection. He needs to be eliminated.

High Envoy Yamina stood, her composure unshaken despite the hostility directed at her. She sat at the head of the diplomats' council.

"Decisive action without foresight leads to ruin," she replied. "Sagiri's connection to the South cannot be ignored. Executing him may be interpreted as persecution, igniting tensions that could spiral into open conflict. The Diplomatic Council proposes deportation to the South or, at the very least, a more lenient sentence. If a southerner dies in the North, do you presume to think the South could take it lying down?

No one knows why they shut their borders, or perhaps someone knows. But if this is the strength of one of them. We should be cautious."

Nakia had not yet sat, and she turned toward the Diplomatic Council with a faint, disdainful smile.

"Peace is not preserved through hesitation but through decisive action. We have to show our hand..."

"You would hand a weapon of mass destruction to a region already steeped in resentment?" Felunka's fist slammed against the railing and cut Nakia off.

"It would prevent a war," Yamina countered firmly. "Sometimes restraint is the greatest strength a nation can display," she was, after all, the highest chaperone of peace, and her decisions were never based on emotion.

"Perhaps a woman should not lead the diplomats' council. Women are too emotional!!" Felunka said, and both Nakia and Yamina did not appreciate the tone.

"I dare you to repeat those words, and I will kill you, half-blood!" Nakia of the Tsanka tribe said her eyes narrowed to slits like a snake ready to strike. Her snake peeked from inside her coat to respond to her hostility. Her snake the red-headed viper. One of the deadliest snakes, and it was clear she was ready to give it a command. She was a deadly woman from the deadliest clan of the west, and it would be wise for Felunka not to offend her because she could kill him for uttering those words.

"You are the emotional one here. Your accusations are baseless, and it has been proven that the blades and arrows used to kill your warrior were not his doing. You should thank him for avenging your warrior's death, and perhaps you should explain why assassins were in the headquarters to kill the boy." Yamina said her tone unhurried, but it could seem she had not come unprepared.

"I have nothing to explain to you. My conscience is clean." Felunka snapped as if that meant anything.

"Order in the hall!!" Tsaka announced after the mandra raised a finger so he could announce his wish. The hall fell silent for only a moment before falling into chaos again.

Great Chief Linga Maaka of the East rose slowly, the weight of responsibility evident in his expression. "Sagiri was raised by citizens of the East. Whether by fate or failure, we bear a measure of responsibility

for the man he has become. To execute him without attempting redemption would be both unjust and dishonorable. The East advocates for capture and rehabilitation." He said. He was currently in the hottest seat. He was required to take responsibility and show both a soft but decisive hand, yet he still had to show his best strength.

"Honor does not shield us from danger, Chief Linga. You might feel a sense of responsibility and kinship, but that does not mean we share the same sentiment." Kun Nakia's eyes narrowed. Her voice was cold as stone when she spoke.

"Nor does fear grant us wisdom," Linga replied calmly.

A deep, resonant chuckle echoed through the chamber as Zaka Asakana, the Great Chief of the North, rose to his full, towering height. His presence alone commanded silence.

"You speak of the boy as though he were a plague," Zaka rumbled. "I see something else entirely. The boy destroyed an elite squad alone. That is not a weakness. It is power. In the North, only the strongest rule. We do not discard strength just because we are scared. Or perhaps you mean to tell me you are scared of the boy. His power should not be discarded. I demand we forge it."

General Felunka glared at him. "And if this 'weapon' turns against us?"

Zaka met his gaze without hesitation. "Then it is we who are unworthy of wielding it. The North proposes that Sagiri be captured and trained. I can train him myself. In the right hands, he could become Tagayia's greatest champion. He might be from the south, but he was bred in the north," Chief Zaka said. He was a beast of a man with pride enough to rival that of the mandra. He was not scared of anyone.

From the Guild's platform, Guildmaster Bekizize rose with measured elegance. His expression was thoughtful, his tone carefully neutral.

"Just like Chief Zaka has said, we should consider the value of a warrior. The Guild acknowledges the severity of Sagiri's actions," he began. "Yet, to execute a warrior of such extraordinary capability would be... wasteful. We support his capture and containment under strict supervision. But since he was captured by the guild, it is only natural that we should wield this weapon." His words were carefully chosen, revealing nothing of the Guild's true intentions, and what better way to achieve his intention than hiding behind Chief Zaka?

His eyes flickered briefly, almost imperceptibly, towards Zaka before returning to the assembly. Only an old, prideful geezer like him could dare challenge Chef Zaka. "Should he prove uncontrollable," Bekizize added smoothly, "execution may still be considered."

Though his words seemed reasonable, a subtle unease spread among the representatives. The Guild was known for its cunning, and many suspected deeper motives behind their proposal.

Chapter 225: FIRST VOTE

It had been hours now since the back and forth began, yet the council was still going at each other's necks. Those who wanted him to be sent south, those who wanted him to die, those who did not yet know which side to take, and those who wanted him to be used as a weapon. The ten schools had been silent for a long while, but Felunka was not satisfied with their silence.

"The ten schools council seems silent today, Sissara, don't tell me you are embarrassed by your incompetence," Felunka said bitterly, still holding a grudge from the last time with Sissara of the Kano tribe, the head of the ten schools.

"A student was taken under Sagiri's watch. While we do not seek vengeance, we demand justice. The Ten Schools advocate for his lawful capture and trial. Tagayia must remain a nation governed by principles, not fear." The head of the ten Sissara of the Kano Tribe of the central plains spoke, and schools spoke. His tone always held the uncanny calmness. He almost seemed unbothered, always with controlled intentions in his eyes. It was always hard to get a read on the man. He turned toward the Warrior's Guild. "He is not a prize to be claimed, nor merely a weapon to be wielded. He is a citizen who must answer for his actions. To add to that, he has not graduated yet, he is still a child and a cadet." his last statement angered Felunka, but he did not say a word. He already knew going in circles with Sissara was a bad idea.

Finally, Chief Tendai Mbeki of the Central Plains adjusted his robes and addressed the assembly with calm pragmatism.

"While the rest of you debate honor and vengeance, the Plains must consider the future of Tagayia. Sagiri represents a phenomenon unprecedented in our history. Understanding his abilities could yield advancements beneficial to the entire nation. We support containment and study. provided stability is maintained."

Kun Nakia scoffed. "You would turn a massacre into an academic opportunity?"

Tendai's expression remained unchanged. "Progress often emerges from crisis, Kun of Tsanka. The Plains have never been into war, but progress simply ensures that Tagayia does not squander such an opportunity. If he is executed, it still does not matter to us. Even though I hear his adoptive father is from the central plains. The boy grew up in the East. The plains will make a decision that does not affect our progress."

The hall descended into chaos as voices overlapped. Felunka accused the diplomats of cowardice and insisted that Sagiri be executed. Perhaps his stance was the most clear, and many in his council seemed to share the sentiment. Yamina warned of the catastrophic consequences of rash decisions. Zaka Asakana challenged the War Council's fear-driven stance. Kun Nakia Zawadi condemned any proposal that allowed Sagiri to live. Bekizize subtly maneuvered the conversation toward Guild custody. Linga Maaka appealed to honor and responsibility. The head of the ten schools insisted on justice and lawful proceedings, while Tendai Mbeki emphasized national benefit over emotional reactions.

The mention of the South reignited old grievances, pushing the chamber to the brink of open hostility. At last, Supreme Mandra rose. The hall fell into immediate silence.

"You have each spoken from the convictions of your councils," he said, his voice calm yet commanding. "Security, honor, justice, strength, progress, and peace, all are pillars upon which Tagayia stands. Yet tonight, these pillars threaten to fracture the very foundation they support." His gaze swept across the assembly before continuing. "We will not fight among ourselves." Those gathered could understand his meaning.

'You are all arguing like children, yet Tagayia waits for a decision. My patience runs short. You'd better come up with a solution soon.'

Tsaka arose at the words of the mandra. The man could be said to read even the mind of the mandra and knew just how to please him.

"If it pleases the mandra, I suggest that the boy be brought before the council. Some of us have never met the boy personally. According to the testimony by his grand marshal and his captains, the boy has been peaceful. Perhaps seeing him and hearing would help some of us make a decision." Tsaka said, and the hall fell into chaos again.

"You dare bring a criminal in front of the mandra? If I did not know you, I could say you are trying to have the boy kill the mandra." Felunka shot an accusation. "he killed a whole squad. nothing can redeem that but by his death!!"

"You are saying the boy is to be executed, yet you dare not be in the same room with him?" Chief Zaka scoffed. "How do you presume to kill him if you don't want him to be in the same room with you. The supreme ruler of Tagayia is the strongest fighter of Tagayia and all the lands surrounding it. Do you dare insult all of us by claiming the boy is stronger than him and us?" Chief Zaka was clearly enraged by this. He stood to his feet, and even though Felunka was part asakana, part chimera, he was still a foot or two shorter than the beast of a man that was chief zaka, and right at the moment, the beast was not happy.

"I dare say I also want to see the boy who had my niece change her outlook on marriage. At least before I vote to kill him," Nakia said. Only she could dare such an obnoxious thing. Of course, it was known that her niece had challenged the boy, and to the tsanka, that was like a proposal.

"Nakia, why could you possibly want your niece's prospective death?" Yamina asked with a knowing smile.

"A southerner would only taint our superior tribe. I will save her the heartache by making sure he dies." Nakia rolled her eyes. It was said the woman had killed her own husband after she gave birth to their first daughter. She claimed he had done his job. She was a ruthless viper.

"It is settled, then we shall vote for him to come to the hall," the supreme mandra said.

"I vote yes." Chief Zaka was the first to speak.

"I vote yes," Kun Nakia said in a slow singsong tone. The ten schools voted a yes, and the east voted a yes. The central plains council was eager to vote a yes on this. Felunka remained silent, and so did the guild. The guild was keeping its cards close to its chest. The diplomats, of course, remained neutral for this round, but the votes had already surpassed half.

"It is decided then. Shadow general, bring in the prisoner," the supreme mandra said, and the tensions rose even higher. Everyone waited with bated breath.

Chapter 226: FINALLY

An hour or less later, Sagiri was finally brought in from the dungeon. He was escorted by the shadow unit. Only this time it seemed their orders were different. The power-taming threads of the seventh wing still crawled all around his body. They bound him so his hands were bound to the back, and his feet were bound in such a way that he could just take small steps. The threads of shimmering energy coiled tightly around his wrists, torso, and neck. They pulsed with faint runic light, tightening subtly with every surge of movement, suppressing the darkness that lay dormant within him. Despite the bindings and the dried blood staining his garments, Sagiri walked upright, his expression calm.

At least he could finally know his verdict.

The council, on the other hand, had not been silent for much longer. After a few minutes of silence, Felunka had found a new target to rain down his frustration on.

"Perhaps the grand marshal of our top war academy is not suited for the role, and he should be stripped of his ranks, and a more fitting grand marshal should be given the position!" he said, looking at the marshal table behind the ten schools council platform. The grand marshals were not necessarily required to speak in this chamber, but still, since he had addressed one of them and the hall was already in disarray, it would be harmful to reply.

"And who should be the best candidate to replace him? You?" Sissara asked.

"Perhaps you want to get rid of anyone who stands in your way, Felunka. What is your intention?" Senraki said after standing and bowing deeply to the supreme mandra.

"How dare you, a mere grand marshal, accuse me?!" Felunka's eyes twitched.

"You don't like to be accused, yet you accuse others. You want me to be stripped of my position, yet you are the one who allowed an assassin into the war headquarters of Tagayia, lost two warriors you can't account for, and now you have lost 120 to a boy. Perhaps it's you who has failed," Senraki said his sentences calmly, but each word carried weight.

"I think the grand marshal makes sense. Why was the boy and his team personally asked to do their field exercise in the headquarters, and why was he assassinated twice while he was there? The way I see it, Felunka, you are standing more and more in the middle of this mess," Yamina spoke for the first time in an accusatory tone. Perhaps she was tired of Felunka coming for everyone's throat.

"I only demand justice for my dead men. unless you believe murderers should walk free. Perhaps it is those who want to use him as a weapon who have an ulterior motive." Felunka scoffed.

"I am just the grand marshal of the Galka War Academy. I don't control admissions to my academy. The exam council does. The boy has been under my care for half a year, and in that time, someone has sent assassins to kidnap him twice. I kept him safe both times, and even inside the walls of the headquarters, it was my marshal and captain who saved him. I dare say someone knew who the boy was a long time ago, and all the ideas leading to this day were arranged by him. Only he did not expect the boy to be a rogue. Felunka, you wanted the boy dead, even long before this, even when you knew he was innocent. Care to tell the council why you were convinced that the boy should have died back then, even when he was the victim?" Senraki continued, and with each word, Felunka looked more and more uncomposed. He looked like he wanted to say something, but instead shook his head and sat down.

"I'd hate to know that I am dancing to someone's tune," Nakia said, tapping her long, black painted claw on the surface of the platform she sat behind.

"The question is, why did someone insist on forcing the boy to join an academy and try to kidnap him twice and assassinate him three times. Forgive me for speaking out of turn, supreme ruler of our vast lands, but it seems someone in here already knew the boy was from the south and didn't report it long ago. Why would the person hide it from everyone?" Senraki was choosing his words carefully. It had come to this point, and all he could do was try to make everyone more wary.

"Grand marshal. You should pick your words carefully. Are you saying that someone in Tagayia is colluding with the South to overthrow Tagayia or creating a feud between Tagayia and the land of four winds to his own advantage?" the warriors' guild master Bekizize warned.

"I dare not make such an assumption," Senraki said before taking his seat. His duty was to plant a seed of more doubt between them, and that was done. As long as the councils were suspicious of each other, perhaps he could buy the boy a way out, even if it was to be deported south.

"The South has never been warring, and they keep to themselves. Why could they suddenly attack?" Tendai Mbeki spoke.

"That is a good question," Linga Maaka said, and there was some silence. The conversation had finally managed to take a new turn.

Suddenly, the doors burst open, and the shadow unit walked in with Sagiri at the centre. They were shrouded in all black like shadows. Sagiri walked in the centre, his head lowered. He was still wearing the Galka Academy combat suit. Only now, his usually covered head was uncovered, and his hair was on display. The red stripes merging with the dark ones were now more visible. There were sharp intakes of breath as he was led to the centre and forced to his knees.

Sagiri did not dare to look up just yet. He could feel the strong auras of everyone in the room, and they were deafening. Some of them made the aura surrounding Senraki seem not so dangerous. The aura of the man sitting on the throne was something he had never felt before. The ruling clan of Tagayia was a mystery, but it was not without its mysteries. Sagiri snapped his eyes forward and only had a second to look at the man sitting on the highest seat before he looked down. His face was covered in a veil so he could not see his face, but it was no doubt his eyes were peering into him.

What raw power and deadly aura!!

Sagiri was familiar with Chief Zaka's aggressive and prideful presence and felt Felunka's hostile one. Many powerful auras merged, and it made the room. There was killing intent, scheming, pride, curiosity, and, of course, fear. They were the strongest men of Tagayia, all in the same place.

The shadow unit disappeared in an instant, leaving him alone, but it was clear they were lurking in the walls and shadows of the hall. There had to be at least a hundred. Whispers rippled through the chamber.

"I was hoping he could be taller like a Bami. I am a little disappointed." Nakia was the first to speak.

"Now then," Tsaka said. "The prisoner is here. We can wrap this up."

Chapter 227: POSSIBILITY OF GOING BAD

State your name." Tsaka naturally took the role of starting the final run of the hall. It was now past midnight, and other than throwing accusations and calling each other incompetent, it could be true to say the councils were in a stalemate.

"Sagiri," sagiri said begrudgingly. He very much hated hearings.

"Sinner Sagiri, you have been accused of killing an entire Seventh Wing squad. Do you deny it?" Tsaka asked, standing to the left side of the mandra's throne. Silence followed. Most in the hall had never seen him. They had all not witnessed the massacre in person, and it was well to say they were waiting to hear it from his very own mouth.

"No," Sagiri replied. "I killed them," Sagiri said after prolonged silence, his head slowly rising to look at Tsaka. A ripple of murmurs spread through the chamber.

"Then you admit to mass murder. See, he has admitted to killing them." Felunka's eyes hardened. It was as if he was finally being proven right, and he was ecstatic.

"They came to capture me," Sagiri said. "I defended myself."

"Ridiculous!" Bekizize said under his breath.

"You kidnapped a student and killed a warrior who tried to stop you. Yet you seem to think your acts are justified." Nakia said, tapping claws softly. The woman looked like a snake in her mannerisms. Her pet snake had its eyes on Sagiri, and it looked about ready to pounce. "One hundred and twenty warriors do not fall to self-defense by a normal boy. A red haired red eyed boy. A southerner. What is a southerner doing in the north?" Nakia asked again.

"Isn't it a question you northerners should answer?" Sagiri said after a while, tilting his head to look at the kun of the west.

Sagiri remained silent, his gaze drifting across the chamber until it settled on Zaka Asakana, the Great Chief of the North. His expression had also changed at his answer, the calm giving way to something darker. Zaka rose, studying him with interest.

"You fought a whole squad alone. That is a strength. The North respects such power. Why not choose to use that power to do good?" Chief Zaka said. Sagiri let out a short, humorless laugh. He loathed the man after what he had witnessed and what he had heard from Kiuga. A man who trains his own son to death and drives another close to his death could dare to speak about using his power for good. He had wanted to eliminate the man ever since he saw his brutal display on Kaka. Only a man like Salka was worthy of ruling the north. He was strong but with a big heart. This Zaka was just brute force and pride.

"Use it for good? Chief Zaka, does killing your own son and almost killing another in a sparring match equal you using your strength for good?" Sagiri said, and there was pin-drop silence. The hall grew still. Everyone knew what had happened to the first son of the great chief of the north, yet no one had dared speak of it.

"The weak have no place in this world. I am willing to let that remark slide, but don't forget I can kill you in the same breath. You are either a weapon or a threat," Zaka Asakana seethed, his killing intent pressing on Sagiri.

"A weapon?" Sagiri said. "Is that what you call it? You want to use me as your weapon. Who says I want to be a weapon for the north?" asked. He was getting irritated the more he stayed in the hall. All the auras and intents pressing onto him were stirring something deep inside of him.

"The way I see it. You don't have a choice. You have to pay for your sins in some way or die. At least being useful could prolong your life," Chief Zaka Asakana held his stance.

"My clan was wiped out by you northerners," Said after a while, his voice tightening. He knew for sure the person who had a hand in it was in the room in one of the councils, and it made him burn with rage to be told that he did not have a choice but to serve a people who wiped out his clan. "Burned to the ground. Slaughtered. Men, women, children. And it was done under the banners of the Northern tribes!!"

A wave of shock rippled through the chamber. Zaka's expression hardened, but he did not interrupt. Sagiri's eyes blazed with restrained fury.

"So tell me, Chief Asakana... who pays for that? Who answers for their deaths? If blood should be paid with more blood, the way I see it, it is the North that owes me a debt of blood! Somehow, Sagiri could now feel two feelings merging: those of shock and those of guilt. The strongest one was coming from the direction of the mandra. His face was covered in a veil. Someone sitting in the council of the mandra. Another was coming from one of the generals sitting at Felunka's table. The special units general.

In that moment, the archive that had been silent stirred. And it had been a while since the voice screamed in his ears.

Enemy

Before Zaka could respond, General Felunka slammed his fist against the railing.

"Enough! This council will not be derailed by unverified accusations." I have been the head of the war council for twenty-five years, and I have never given such an order!" he was telling the truth, and sagiri could tell. The man might have been a pain in the neck, but that was the extent of it. Sagiri turned sharply toward him.

"Unverified?" he said. "I watched it happen," Sagiri said, his eyes narrowing. He could feel the markings under his skin crawling violently. The archive had finally found who it was looking for, and sagiri could feel the raw pain and rage of his clan in that moment. He demanded that the debt be paid.

Felunka's patience snapped. "You dare stand here and accuse the North while admitting to the slaughter of our soldiers? You are a menace, and I should end you where you stand." Felunka was too heated to hear whatever Sagiri had to say,

The shadow corp shifted uneasily in the shadows as the tension escalated, but they remained in the shadows. Sagiri met Felunka's glare, completely unfazed.

"Should?" he asked quietly. "Or could?" Sagiri asked, his voice now cold. The question hung in the air like a drawn blade. Felunka's face flushed with rage.

"Do not test me, boy," Felunka said, pulling out his blade.

Sagiri shot to his feet suddenly, and the tension in the room spiked. He could feel the shadows move, but with a raised finger from the supreme mandra, they remained in the shadows, lurking. He took a single step forward. The restraining threads flared, tightening around him, yet he did not flinch. His gaze swept across the entire assembly.

"Felunka, do you think you are capable of killing me?" Sagiri's voice was chilling even to his own ears, and Felunka paused in his position. Salka had asked him not to do anything stupid, but who could understand the hypocrisy and audacity of the north more than him? He would rather die than submit and be used like a weapon by them.

"You sit here," Sagiri said, voice low but carrying through the hall, "deciding whether I should live or die. You call me a monster. A weapon. A threat." He paused, letting the silence build. "Tell me something," he continued. "If I had truly wanted to kill every person in this hall... who would have stopped me? Shouldn't I sink this hall and bury all of us in this building?"

The chamber fell into stunned silence.

Several council members instinctively tensed. The shadow unit multiplied, making the hall seem even darker. The faint hum of the restraining threads was suddenly the only sound in the vast hall.

Chapter 228: THE VOTE I

Things had escalated to toxic levels after Sagiri's threat to eliminate everyone and bury everyone with him. The men and women gathered must have heard or seen the scene he had left behind in the north. The torn earth and the flattened houses.

"Such insolence, the East can not be responsible for what the boy does anymore," Chief of the East Linga Maaka said with chest. Whatever Sagiri said was treason. He had threatened to kill everyone in the hall, and that involved the very sovereign ruler of Tagayia. That sin in itself was unforgivable, and things were in danger of taking a different turn. In the past few minutes, more bindings had been thrown around Sagiri, forcing him to his knees once again. He was now on his knees again, with more thread weavers adding so many threats that there was no part of his skin untouched.

"You can only take a donkey to the water. But you can't force it, type drink." Chief Zaka Asakana said, leaning his broad hands on the platform, he sat behind.

"I thought the boy could be smart, but it seems we do not need to vote after all. The boy is determined to die. Threatening to kill our supreme ruler and bury all of us with him. How bold!" Kun Nakia said, still drumming her claws on the surface of the platform, she sat behind with her council. Even the diplomats' council had gone silent, finally. "There is no saving someone who wants to kill you," she said, her voice filled with ice.

Chief Zaka was shaking his head in disappointment. The warriors' guild was silent this time. Bekizize looked to be deep in thought, and the ten schools councils looked to be at a loss for words, too. The war council, on the other hand, was swelling with victory. Felunka was happy to see the grave Sagiri had dug for himself.

"Well then, it seems you have seen and heard what the boy says. This should help you cast the vote.
"The vote will be, to kill him, to deport him south and rehabilitate him," Tsaka said, still unfazed by the commotion that had ensued.

There was silence, and then murmurs burst as the councils began to talk among themselves to decide what they should do with sagiri. The murmurs went on and on for a while while sagiri was pinned down by the power-sucking bindings and power-taming threads. He did not know where Nokai was, but when the archive had stirred violently, he had felt him in the same building, not so far away. Nokai was also bound by the seventh wing threads, and sagiri could feel the wall between them.

All he could do for now was listen to them vote on his fate as if the vermin who had changed his destiny were not in the councils. Sagiri had thought the man was high up in the power chain, but sitting in the mandra's inner councils was quite a surprise.

"We will start on the vote!" Tsaka announced after a few minutes of each council member discussing among themselves. "Chief tendai mbeki, your councils seem to have concluded. Open the vote for us. Chief Mbeki stooped and headed to the platform behind sagiri to cast his vote.

"The central plains does not wish to be the enemy of the south or destroy our years of progress if a southerner dies in the north. We also do not wish to let the boy keep killing in the north. After much deliberation. The plan has decided that it will be in the best interest of the citizens of the central plains and the citizens of Tagayia if the boy is deported to the south. The plains are willing to make a treaty with the south and distance ourselves from this," Chief Mbeki said, his voice steady. The plains have never been ones to fight. They were innovators to drive Tagayia forward, and a war is never good for progress. Chief Mbeki returned to his seat.

"One vote to return the boy south!" Tsaka announced.

The kun of the west was the next person to take to the stage. Her thin, tall form was cold even in the manner of walking. Did the woman even have any warmth in the bottomless pit sitting on her chest called a heart?

"The West naturally doesn't fear death, nor do we fear enmity. The boy is barbaric and unsalvageable. He will be in trouble for the south, whether he is left to go south or remain alive. He claims that his clan was killed by the north. He does not seem like he is the forgiving type. So as the kun of the west. The West had decided that it was in the best interest of the boy to die. The dead can't avenge. Perhaps it's best if he joins his clan," Kun Nakia said at the mention of his clan. Sagiri burned with rage, and he

fought to get out of the restaurant, but this must have been modified because even the slightest movement caused him pain. The thin strings were beginning to cut into his flesh deeply.

"One vote to the boy to die!" Tsaka announced as the kun of the west walked to her seat.

The third council to take to the stage was the diplomats' council.

"I stand by my sentiment. Tagayia does not need another war. War can never be solved by war, nor blood for blood. As diplomats, our mission is to maintain the peace in Tagayia. So, we have come to a conclusive agreement that it is in the best interest of Tagayia if the boy is returned south in one piece."

"Two votes for the boy to go south!" Tsaka announced.

Next to take to the stage was Linga Maaka, the chief of the east.

"The boy must have been raised in the east, and it fills me with so much pain that even having been raised in a place so peaceful, he could turn out like this. It seems someone has misguided him into thinking that the north had a hand in killing his clan. Such a vengeful and twisted young boy cannot be allowed to grow into adulthood. Who knows how many lives he could steal?" Linga was talking as if he was deeply disturbed, but sagiri could perceive his feelings, and they were those of fear. What a coward. He was the worst of them all. "To take full responsibility as his chief, I have to show how sorry I am that I personally gave an okay for him to be an aged student and a rare talent. To pay for this sin i and the east council have come to an agreement that the boy should be put to death. The hate in his heart is a burden that can only be lifted from his heart once he is dead." Linga said, keeping his voice steady and practiced regret.

"Two votes for the boy to die!" Tsaka announced. Many had not expected the chief of the east to give such a vote, and he was the only one who had voted in controversy with what anyone had thought.

Chapter 229: THE VOTE II

The next to take to the stage was the head of the ten council, Sissara Kano. He took his time to get to the stage. He looked tired and ready to get it over with and go to sleep.

"The council of the ten schools, after much consideration, the odds stack against the boy and the many assassinations he has faced and the many testimonies from his teammates, captains, and instructors.

The boy was pushed to this point by someone, and I do not wish to sentence a person to death because they have been pushed for a long time and snapped. So I vote that he is put under my care for rehabilitation, after which he can decide if he wants to remain in the north that raised him or the south whose blood runs in his veins," Sissara said in a long, bored statement before he turned to leave.

"Sissara, you can be so endearing. If I weren't already married and now a widow, I would have loved to challenge you," Nakia said with a sick smile, looking at the tall, handsome yet unreadable man that was Sissara. Sissara indeed carried an air of mystery. He did whatever he saw fit, and his opinion was always of what he thought and never allowed to be tainted by anyone's opinion. He looked at sagiri with a conflicted expression before he turned to leave.

"I have no desire to die young," Sissara said, not even sparing Nakia a glance before he dragged his body back to his seat. Nakia scoffed, but she did not say anything more.

"One vote to rehabilitate the boy!!" Tsaka announced before giving way to the next vote.

The guild master was the next to take to the platform to cast his vote, and he did say a lot of nothing.

"The guild is very pained by the loss of many warriors. We mourn for their death and grieve with their families," he started, and sagiri almost burst out laughing. The man did not elude any form of grief. It could even be said that he did not care at all about the diseased. "We of the guild care for the warriors' lives, and no life of a warrior should be lost, especially in a time of peace. Sagiri, whether from the south, had been raised in the north, and he was so close to becoming a warrior. I have to say that he is a protege, and I happened to be in the arena when he did the six-blade dances. I have not seen such ever since the last guild master. It pains me that the boy distrusts the north because of some misguidance. The guild deems all three judgments worthy of his sin, but killing him after many warriors have just been lost will fill me with so much grief. Sending him south after he has trained in the north and become stronger because of the north will be a fate for him even worse than death. I hereby agree with my council vote that the boy be given to the guild for rehabilitation, and if he fails, then we can grant him death." Bakizize finished, and sagiri did not know whether to stand in awe or be outraged by the man's greed and selfishness.

"Two votes for the rehabilitation of the boy!!" Tsaka announced.

There was now visible tension in the hall. The votes had tied at two, and only two council members had still to vote. Counting the supreme mandra's vote that could make it three. His vote was meant to break

the tie, and if things kept going like this, then there was a chance that even with his vote, the vote could stand at a tie.

Chief Zaka Asakana was the seventh council to take the stage. His face gave nothing away, apart from the aggressiveness he always carried.

"The boy seems to have a lot of anger and hate. Yet he shares a squad with my son, and my son spoke highly of him. It takes a lot for a man like my son to acknowledge the strength of another. That said, I wish to punish him myself and shape him into a weapon fit for the north. So I vote that I rehabilitate him, and if he doesn't change, I'll kill him myself." Typical Zaka. No sugarcoating or hiding his words behind many phrases and fables like the guild master.

"Three votes to rehabilitate the boy!!" Tsaka announced.

At this point, Felunka was pacing in his chair. He could not wait for his turn. Everyone knew what he wanted to vote for anyway, but they could not assume.

"Our last vote!!" Tsaka announced, and Felunka almost jumped from his seat. The last to take to the stage was Felunka, and there was a leap in his steps. It looked like he had been waiting for this moment since the beginning of the night.

"The war council has suffered the most losses. First, my two warriors were killed in a time of peace. Second, a warrior was killed up north when someone came to get the boy. Perhaps a person in bed with the boy to destroy the north," Felunka started, still sticking to his delusion, but no one cared to correct him anymore. Did whatever he said even matter? It did not matter if it was the truth or not. Felunka wanted sagiri dead, and everyone knew his vote before he cast it. "I have decided... The war councils have decided that the sin he has committed is too grave. The boy slaughtered a hundred and twenty warriors of Tagayia, who were all honourable men. Perhaps the South is made of beasts like him, and after he dies here, the North should take the step to wipe out the South!! Perhaps his clan was eliminated because they are all just like him...!!"

Sagiri had been unable to bear all the other words of others because they did not really touch him that much, but Felunka had done it. He had taken his worst memory and used it to twist the knife the north had launched in his heart. Whatever felunka had snapped something inside of him, and his pupils turned black. The restraints against him hummed even more violently.

The pain caused by the power taming threads, however, could match the pain in his heart, and sagiri let a roar of rage and pain from deep inside of him. The sound was so disturbing and so wrong, even Felunka paused in his pause sentence. He had started to say something along the lines of "death to the south!"

Felunka had finally crossed the line.

"Nokai!!"

Chapter 230: THE ART OF THE BEAST

Before Nokai could answer his master's call, two things happened simultaneously. First, Nokai could not resist the call. Even in under a thousand bindings, the call was impossible for it to refuse. Sagiri could hear his own rage and desire for blood merge with it, and wherever Nokai was, he had answered, and he was coming.

The other thing that happened, Sagiri did not expect it. It was as if in that second, he called Nokai, time stood still. Felunka was still chanting death to the south, his rage and excitement blatant. Sagiri's rage was also blatant, but that was to be expected from anyone. What he did not expect was the dangerous calmness that had been emanating from the supreme mandra to change into the most deadly and raw feeling of danger he had ever perceived from someone. The man had not moved a muscle apart from his finger to give commands to Tsaka all night during the hearing, but now, at the moment he had moved, and it was not just a finger.

He had sprang and disappeared from his line of sight.

It was as if he stopped time, or he was too fast; time had to catch up to his movements. It seemed like time had to catch up. He was gone from his chair in one second. Sagiri only grasped the dangerous air he carried passed over him like a wind before something made contact enough to shake the entire building. The chants from Felunka died in that instance, and sagiri almost missed the movement if it were not for the archive following his movements. The air suddenly grew even colder, and goosebumps rose on Sagiri's hands. The room that had been heated a long time ago was now cold. Ice cold with predatory power.

Sagiri's right eye almost missed as the man wrapped his hand around Felunka's neck in one move. Felunka did not see him move either, and he barely had time to register before he was thrown as if he weighed nothing into the air. The mandra followed him and met him mid-air at the peak of his ascent. He grabbed him by the neck and this time threw him to one end of the hall as if he weighed the same as a feather, where his back met the wall of the hall. The impact that followed was thunderous. Felunka

was driven into the obsidian wall with bone-rattling force, cracking spider-webbing outward from the point of collision. Before Felunka could fall limp to the floor of the hall, the mandra had already landed on one foot, soft like a feather.

His movements had not stirred even the hair on his head, but the veil covering his eyes had slightly moved, and Sagiri caught sight of one of his eyes. The iris was narrow and elongated, like that of a predatory beast. It gleamed with a primal intensity and was terrifying. In that instant, Sagiri understood the power before him. His whole eye was unnatural and did not look like that of a human in the slightest. So this was the secret art of the ruling clan of Tagayia. The art of the beast. His pupil moved slightly in the direction of sagiri and sagiri had never felt so startled. Unlike humans, whose eyes you can easily read, it is difficult to read the eyes of a beast.

The Art of the Beast is an ancient discipline practiced solely by the ruling clan of Tagayia. The Tagan clan. It is not merely a combat technique, but a state of existence, one that bridges the divide between human intellect and primal instinct. The art of the beast, if not controlled, could mean the user loses his mind, but yet it seemed the mandra had reached the apex of the art, and he could still manage to wield the strength of a beast and keep the calmness of a few humans. Through rigorous physical and spiritual conditioning, practitioners awaken the dormant predatory essence within them. Their senses sharpen beyond natural limits. Time appears to slow when they sprang. Their movements were reduced to instinctive rather than deliberate. Strength, speed, and perception are heightened to extraordinary levels, yet remain perfectly controlled.

The art of the beast. The archive finally recognized it. The art was one not many could witness since the clan, even being a ruling clan, owned land after land where they stayed hidden. It could explain why Tsaka ran most matters. The mandra had to be away to practice the art and to keep his mind more tame. The power was explosive and deadly indeed, now that sagiri had witnessed it. It left an uncanny feeling in the air as if something could tip over at any moment. He paced slowly, his footsteps echoing across the hall.

"I, Taziraka of the Tagan clan, am not dead yet." The man finally spoke before he turned around swiftly and started walking to the very centre of the room. The room went silent before all the grand chief and all council members descended from behind their platforms and fell to their knees. Their faces to the earth. The Mandra paused, his gaze sweeping across the councils who were now kneeling in their utmost respect position, their faces to the earth. If a ruler is not pleased, one could beg him, but if he is angry, perhaps one could kiss the earth and pray for his anger to pass.

"I have not taken my vote, yet you have started chanting death. Am I no longer the head of this Hall?" he asked, his voice low but deep and deadly.

"Forgive us, supreme mandra!! Long live supreme mandra!!" the voices echoed in the hall, making it tremble.

Before they could rise, however, Nokai tore through the door, breaking it in half as it tore through. It was pulsing with so much intent, and its glare was deadly upon coming in close contact with its master's presence. The threads holding sagiri down were many, almost burying him under their weight. Of them. Sagiri had never known Nokai could do that, but then he split into two and got to work.

"Nokai," he murmured with relief.

The blades spun through the air with deadly grace, their surface drinking in the light. Gasps erupted from the council platforms as guards rushed forward, unsure whether to intercept or retreat. Within seconds, the threads were lying loose on the ground.

The council members who had been licking the mandra's shoes had now taken defensive positions behind the mandra. Sagiri could still hear Felunka's heartbeat slightly. He was not dead yet, but he would be soon enough. Sagiri stood to his feet with the help of Nokai before he popped his head to rid himself of the tension that had built in his muscles and neck.

He turned around slowly, and his eyes fell on the formation behind the mandra formed by the eight councils and the shadows that were now closing in. He might have killed a hundred and twenty-seven wing warriors, but these were the most powerful men of Tagayia, and the palace was swarming with the shadow corp, and to add to that, he could feel the strength of the supreme mandra. He was convinced that the man was strong enough to bring down a building by himself. He had a feeling he had not seen half of what the man could do and how many beast arts he had mastered. Even so, he did not plan on going down easy, and he would take at least half the room down with him if it came to that.

Sagiri swiped Nokai around and sank into a defensive position. Silence and tension filled the room as the two sides fell into a staring match. The auras from everyone and the deadly intents on themselves were enough to bring the entire Alike City to its knees and flatten it, but no one was willing to back down.

"Should we kill him?" Nakia asked. It was clear they were all waiting for the supreme mandra to give the command since he was the one with the highest rank in the room.

"I have not taken my vote yet," the supreme mandra said after a while, as if the whole standoff had not fazed him. His aura was calm. Deadly calm, even, and his words were even calmer.