

KEEPER 301

Chapter 301. THE KAI'S DECISION

"Finally, someone worthy of killing with my blade," Sagiri said in a cold voice before he moved. He stared straight at Kai of the south, his head lifted slightly, before a smile appeared on his face.

He rolled Nokai once in his hand. The canyon went silent. As the two stared at each other. The general maintained his stance, and the men beside him did the same. How very honourable. Perhaps he and Felunka could go to war, and he could learn a thing or two about a demeanor befitting of a general.

Then Sagiri moved.

He stepped onto the very edge of the wall. He simply lowered himself slightly into a crouch. He swung Nokai and rested the blade on his naked shoulder, where the fore had eaten away his clothing. His wounds had healed, but his shoulder was still slightly tender. For a moment, nothing happened, and there was silence. Then suddenly the stone beneath his feet exploded.

The wall cracked outward as Sagiri launched himself into open air. He dropped quickly this time. He couldn't wait to face the man standing below. He was sure he could be an honourable man to fight. His body cut downward through the canyon with terrifying speed, what remained of his cloak and burned cloth snapping violently behind him while gravity pulled him straight toward the shattered battlefield below. He swung Nokai midway and held it angled backwards slightly, while its other side faced forward.

The fall looked deliberate. Soldiers watched his blackened silhouette descend through the canyon lights. An impact even louder than that of the general shuttered and shook the ground where Sagiri landed in a crouch. Stone collapsed outward beneath him in a violent circle, and dust erupted into the air as cracks spread across the already broken impact field. One hand pressed into the ground. Nokai remained in the other.

For a second, he stayed there, head lowered, soot particles rising from his burned robes. Then he slowly lifted his eyes straight toward the Kai.

"The Kai of the south. Your archery skills only rival one other man I have ever seen." Sagiri said sincerely.

The general nodded slightly.

"That man over there is mine. He tried to kill me twice, even after I asked to enter the city politely. Are the N'folu by any chance not allowed in the capital of Thazir?" Sagiri said with a raised eyebrow. At this moment, his squad had found a way, and they were running to his side. They stood behind him defensively. Sagiri was starting to think he should have dropped them a little further, but that could still be done after he was done rendering the south generaless.

"I will appreciate it if you don't get between a man who tried to kill me and my fighters for no reason and me. Anyone who harms my friends, I don't forgive easily." Sagiri said, turning to the commander.

"Then you will be killing the wrong man." The kai finally spoke. His voice was calm and collected even in this situation.

"The wrong man? I asked him to call a person from the council to give me the chief and last N'folu a warm welcome, but I must have misspelled it because instead of a warm welcome, a fireball welcomed me, and dare I say it was too warm, I could have thought he wanted me to burn alive." Sagiri said his voice laced with sarcasm, but the cold intent would not be mistaken.

"Only the city lord gave an order for the fire cannons." The general said. Sagiri turned around, but his intent was still cold.

"So that is who gave the command? Well then, I am thankful for you stopping me, but will you be kind enough to call the city Lord so I can teach him a lesson on etiquette?" Sagiri asked, his lip trembling a little.

"I can't do that, but my messenger bird dropped a message that you were holding prisoner all the gatekeepers. If someone comes to your house and holds your child hostage, then you will get angry, won't you?" The general's voice was still calm and composed.

"Are you also calling me a stranger, Kai of the south. I almost thought you were smarter and would recognize a blade only the N'folu can wield. Or should I test it on your neck?" Sagiri said his killing intent was growing to suffocation levels.

"I have not said anyone is wrong or anyone is right." The general said. "And neither have I said you are not a N'folu."

"So you neither deny nor accept?" Sagiri said with a sigh.

Sigh

"Now then, if you want to stop me, I think we should take this fight away from the city if you don't want to have to bury half of it by the end of it," Sagiri said. The general looked unfazed. Suddenly, Sagiri felt something slither on his hand.

Sagiri looked down suddenly, and beauty was crawling up his hand to wrap around his wrist. It had grown suddenly longer and thicker. It snarled a small, strange voice, looking directly at the general before it lay its head down and rested.

"Thank you so much for the help, Zaira. But you should wait till you are older before you can throw a tantrum. Your mom will be disappointed if she sees how mannerless you have become, interrupting adults." Sagiri spoke to the little beast lovingly before he turned to face his gaze, turning colder.

The general shifted to look at the beast in wonder, and those beside him were the same. Well, it was indeed a beautiful beast. Sagiri pulled his ripped cloth over the now sleeping beast.

"Well then. What will it be? I am used to being sent away from places, but I will not leave capital Thazir or the south." Sagiri said before he swung Nokai and pointed it at the heart of the general. He cracked his neck and waited. The archive hummed, and the markings on his body crawled in answer to his emotions. Which, at the moment, were a little hurt, though he dared not admit it.

Zafaru, the kai of the south, stood motionless for a few seconds after Sagiri's declaration while over a hundred elite warriors waited behind him in complete silence.

Then, finally, he spoke.

"Everyone, keep your weapons!" His voice carried across the canyon without effort. "Show respect."

Chapter 302. OVERWHELMED

Zafaru stepped forward once, lowered himself, and took a knee in the middle of the shattered impact field. He crossed both fists against his chest in an old southern salute and lowered his head. When he spoke again, his voice echoed through the canyon walls.

"I, Kai, General of War of the South, welcome the last of N'folu... and greet the Chief of N'folu as is rightfully yours." Silence followed. Long enough, Sagiri could hear Zaira snoring. He could not have predicted that it could happen in a thousand years. But it was, and the general of the South was accepting him and taking a knee to him.

Then one warrior behind him took a knee. Then another. Then another. Within seconds, all one hundred elites had lowered themselves and crossed their fists to their chests. Above them, the reaction spread. Soldiers along the canyon walls slowly lowered their bows. The archers knelt. The defenders above the cliffs followed. Then the warriors standing atop the massive gates of Thazir knelt as well until row after row bent in the same salute.

Weapons remained in hand but lowered in respect. The entire canyon changed. A place that moments ago had been prepared for war now bowed before Sagiri.

Then N'varu fell to his knees beside Sagiri in the same beat and followed in the pledge.

"I welcome the last N'folu and the last keeper!!"

The whole squad followed dramatically, of course, but Sagiri could feel their relief and joy for him.

"We welcome the last N'folu and rightful chief of N'folu

Sagiri did not know what to do, and for a moment, he just stood there. He could not believe what had happened. He was just getting ready to fight with all he had, and now they were accepting him?

They tried to kill him twice and now...

Just like that?

Sagiri felt something rise in his throat. An emotion he did not know he had been holding for so long. It felt as if some weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He didn't want to fight with the South most of all. Perhaps there was still a long way to go in terms of acceptance, but the kai of the south had taken the knee to accept him, and that meant leaps for him.

Kai remained kneeling with his fists crossed over his chest, and the canyon stayed completely still. Then a voice rose somewhere among the elite warriors behind him. "We welcome the last N'folu." Another joined. Then another. Soon, the sound spread through the formation and climbed the canyon walls. Soldiers on the cliffs repeated it. The archers above repeated it.

The warriors standing atop the gates lowered their heads and joined in the chorus until the entire canyon echoed with a single uniform sentence. Spoken with acceptance.

"We welcome the last N'folu and chief of N'folu as it is rightful!!"

Sagiri stood in the middle of it with burned robes hanging from his shoulders and Nokai resting quietly in his hand, and suddenly something inside him shifted in a way no battle ever had. He realized, without knowing when it had happened, that he had already prepared himself to be rejected.

Somewhere during the last years away, he had accepted that if he ever returned, he would have to force his way in. Fight his own people. Break his homeland apart just to stand on its soil again. He had carried that weight so long he no longer noticed it was there. But now they were kneeling. Welcoming him. Calling his tribe's name without resentment. Without hesitation. His fingers tightened around Nokai, and for the first time since arriving, his chest hurt in a way burns and blades never could.

Suddenly, he understood something small and devastating: he could go home. He could walk the lands of N'folu again. Stand where they had stood. See what remained. Say goodbye properly. He did not have to steal that farewell anymore. He lowered his head slightly and closed his eyes for only a moment as the chants continued around him, and emotions he did not know he had been carrying finally became too heavy to ignore.

His eyes watered, and a tear fell from his eyes, hitting the ground before him. He was sure the kai could see it, but he did not care. He could now walk the south without having to fight his own people.

The chants continued to roll through the canyon "N'folu... N'folu..." steady and accepting, and Sagiri remained standing in the middle of them with his head lowered slightly and Nokai hanging loosely in his hand. Then, suddenly, Nokai snapped. The blade jerked violently backward in his grip with enough force to twist his arm, and Sagiri staggered a step before catching himself.

Well, someone also chastised him at that moment.

"Don't dare fall now and embarrass me. Act with honour." It was Kaka Asakana.

The sound stopped, but the general did not rise yet. Sagiri stood there breathing once, then again, and realized with quiet surprise that Nokai had not reacted to danger. It had reacted to him. To the sudden release. Sagiri took another step back. His legs felt strange. They felt so heavy he wished he could sit down on the ground and weep, but the Kaka would beat him to a pulp.

He stared ahead and understood something he had never allowed himself to think.

He was tired.

He was emotionally tired, and he had been for a long time.

Tired of carrying Nokai. Tired of arriving ready to fight. Tired of expecting resistance. Tired of preparing to cut down anyone standing between him and what mattered. Tired of being ready every second to prove he belonged somewhere. Somewhere along the past two years, he had stopped expecting doors to open and started believing every place would eventually force him to draw his blade.

He had come to the capital with Kiuga's plan, yet deep down, he knew he had to draw his blade, and he was ready to break through its gates, ready to bleed for a chance to stand on N'folu land. Perhaps he only carried a little hope because his friends believed there could be another way.

And yet now, nobody was making him fight.

The realization hit harder than the fireball. Sagiri stood in the middle of the kneeling canyon, and for the first time in years, he did not know what to do with his hands if they were not holding a weapon.

"All this time... I thought the South no longer had a place waiting for me." Sagiri's voice echoed slowly when he finally spoke.

"I came to say goodbye to N'folu. I have been so unfilial not sending you all off all these years!!" Sagiri cried

Short silence.

"I didn't expect to be welcomed." He added, and there was sniffing behind him and somewhere in the crowd of soldiers. "I was willing to shed more blood to come pay you my respect. How unfilial of me... to wield a weapon and call myself a N'folu." Sagiri's body shook with grief. Grief filled the place. Whether his or everyone else's, he did not know.

Silence stretched as Sagiri shook with grief but fought to stand still.

"Now I can come and finally do my filial duties, oh N'folu, even though I am an unworthy descendant. You will not be forgotten as long as I am alive. I can finally dance for you under the stars and say goodbye..." Sagiri's voice broke, and his shoulders shook.

"N'folu will never be forgotten!" The general said, and everyone chanted. Another long moment went by as sagiri fought between grief and control until he finally breathed.

"You may stand..." He fought to say in a steady voice.

The general stood with a salute, and the soldiers followed.

"Open the gates!!" Zafaru announced.

Chapter 303. INTO THAZIR

"Open the gates!!" The kai announced.

Sagiri turned around to face the position of the gate. His squad did the same. There was a pause. Along one before the gate of Thazir began to open. When the massive structure started to roll upwards, that's when Sagiri began to understand why the long pause was necessary.

The entire structure rolled slowly upward into the rocky mountain itself with a sound so heavy it shook the ground, and the canyon trembled. The gate was forged from layered black stone plates reinforced with veins of dull southern steel. Ancient markings marred the gate. Massive teeth hidden within the canyon walls pulled the weight upward while thick chains, each link larger than a man like Salka's torso, shifted and groaned deep inside the stone.

This was the main gate. The smaller gate beside it could not by any means be used by a man of Sagiri's status or a kai.

Dust poured from the moving sections and echoed through the canyon like distant thunder. Slowly, the darkness beneath the gate widened until the opening looked less like an entrance. Cold air rolled out from within. The gate continued rising higher and higher until the warriors standing beneath it looked insignificant, and finally, Thazir stood open.

"Now I get why everyone from the south is so guarded and secretive. Even this gate takes hours to open." Kiuga mattered beside Sagiri low enough so Zifara could not hear it.

Just as the gate completely disappeared, everyone turned around to look at Sagiri again.

"Don't look at the chief's uncovered body!" The Kai of Thazir announced, and every soldier turned around immediately, whether those on the canyon walls, the stone wall, or on the ground. A covering was brought forth, a black cloak. Before the soldier who brought it could lay it on Sagiri, N'varu snatched it and laid it on Sagiri's body, covering up to his head entirely before he tore the strings at the front, swallowing his lean body entirely. The cloak was a bit long and swept behind Sagiri.

So, as it was in the north, a chief dressing marked a chief's honour, and covering his exposed skin proved to be an honourable thing to show respect. Sagiri needed the cloak even more than ever to hide how grave and solemn his face looked. He was grateful to Zifara for helping him with that, too.

After Sagiri was covered, Zifara remained standing for a moment longer before moving smoothly and stepping to the side of Sagiri. He lowered his head once and extended his arm toward the open entrance.

"After you, Chief." No one moved. That was custom.

The higher rank entered first. Sagiri stood still for a second, then began walking. The dark cloak shifted slowly behind him in the cold air. His squad stepped aside to let him pass, and so he did. He took one step forward, not knowing how he was supposed to act after the unexpected welcome. He had planned to break in and light the city up until they gave him Koru, yet now he was walking through the front gate with the war general of the south walking behind him.

Another step, then another. Nobody moved until he reached the threshold. He stood still, perhaps waiting for them to change their mind and drop the massive gate on him. Nokai rested at his side as he crossed the threshold alone after a while. The open gate framed him until, for a moment, he looked smaller against the scale of the entrance and somehow more dangerous because of it.

This was it. It is not as if he wanted to be chief or the seat so much, but if acting like a chief could grant him a smooth way to go see his clan off and carry out the burial rites, then he would act like it. Sagiri was feeling somehow small and empty and defeated, and he was fighting the urge to look back at the people behind him who could not move until he had stepped past the threshold.

With that, he took one more final step and pushed off the threshold.

Then he disappeared into the city beyond. Only after he had entered did Zifara make a move. The General followed behind him, then the squad, because well by rank they served a man most powerful at the moment. Then the elite warriors followed. Then the soldiers above the canyon finally turned around, but made sure to keep their heads down. They will remain so until the gate is lowered again.

Sagiri finally stopped when she stood at the edge of the city. Thazir stretched before him, endlessly beneath the night. He could not even see its end. It was like Nvaru ha said. The capital was a whole country by itself. Built directly into the canyon walls, it descended and climbed in layers of stone, the buildings cut so seamlessly into the cliffs. Warm amber lights burned from thousands of windows, lanterns, and recessed fire basins, turning the black stone gold in places while leaving others swallowed by shadow.

Narrow bridges crossed overhead from wall to wall, and stairways climbed defiantly, showcasing the prowess of the hands that made them before disappearing into the mountains. Figures moved across elevated paths in the distance, their silhouettes small beneath the scale of the city.

Sagiri could not help but imagine growing up in such a city. Only one city came close to such artistry. Molakwa. The capital of the central plains city. But even it did not hold a candle to this city.

Sagiri inhaled sharply, feeling overwhelmed yet again.

Long banners drifted lazily between structures, and thin streams of smoke rose from night fires somewhere deeper inside. Perhaps families cooking dinner or just chatting around a fire. Just like he used to do with his step-parents. Further ahead, the city widened into massive stone halls and terraces supported by pillars so enormous they disappeared into darkness above. As far as his right eye could see, the deeper into the city, the more sculpted and beautiful the structures got.

A distance away from the wide road ahead. Far, far ahead, he could have missed it if he had not been using his right eye, stood an enormous structure taller than every other building, standing taller than the homes, higher than the towers, something enormous overlooked the city from the upper canyon, a structure cut into the mountain itself, its shape disappearing into the night while a few distant lights burned from within.

"That is one enormous structure," Sagiri said.

"You can see it from here..." The general started to ask, but stopped.

"You will be able to see the supreme chief's premises clearly when we get to the inner city. It is clearer from that distance." The general spoke from beside Sagiri.

"I have grown to hate inner cities," Sagiri said, but he did not make a move to start walking again, and everyone behind him stood still.

Sagiri stood quietly beneath the opened gate with burned robes and his dark cloak moving behind him, looking at a city that had lived without him for years and wondering, for the first time in a very long time, if this was what coming home was supposed to feel like.

"Lord Azir! You can't run around like that. You are now the city lord." Zifara suddenly could not take it anymore when the young man was three feet away, and it was clear he was gonna throw himself at the general and hug him or some dishonourable thing.

The city lord?

The city lord

The city lord of a prestigious capital such as Thazir was this kid? He was the one who had given the order to fire a cannonball at him.

Chapter 304. THE CITY LORD

"The N'folu's chief's house in the inner city has not been used for years. You will have to stay at the war base until then." The general said to Sagiri, who had been standing at the edge of the city unmoving.

"Tell me how it is. No need to lie. I am not a child." Sagiri said in a low voice. He preferred to be quiet at this time, yet he had to speak.

"The council had to gather in two weeks to make a vote. You arriving in the capital as chief of N'folu will not be easy for everyone, you understand." The general said, and to that sagiri could understand. He would be stupid to even begin to think that everyone was going to welcome him like the kai. Perhaps the kai had done it out of guilt, as N'varu had said, or for whatever reason.

The others would doubt him or even wage war on him. That is the least he could expect. There were still thirteen members whose opinions mattered, and since this was Thazir, the city lord of Thazir capital would make the fourteenth member in this matter. That is, if he was willing to join the fun, and by the looks of it, he was not warm and welcoming.

"Two weeks is a long time. I am not too patient." Sagiri said. All he cared about was finding koru within the two weeks and sending the squad north within the two weeks. He did not have time to waste. He had two weeks if he wanted everything to go right. He had to be able to send the squad personally out of the south. He could not trust anyone with the task. Not even the kai.

The Kai was about to answer when suddenly there was a heavy sound of footsteps. Hundreds of them even. By the sound of it, it seemed that they were armed. Sagiri froze, and his hand tightened on Nokai. Had the general set him up to have him enter the gates so he could...

A young man wearing armor that looked too big for him was the first person to burst through a street before joining the main road coming straight at them. He stopped when he saw the gate open. It was yet to start being lowered. His eyes then snapped to Sagiri, and his hand went to the almost-too-big sword on his side. More than a hundred men burst behind him, and they stopped behind him, and when they saw his hand on his weapon, they did the same.

The young man looked at Sagiri for a long time before he looked at the man beside Sagiri, and his demeanor changed.

"Uncle...."

"Uncle! uncle!" He yelled before he started to run towards sagiri and sagiri furrowed his eyebrows. He was not old enough to have a niece almost the same age as him; that was for sure.

"This child! How many times do I have to tell him he is now too old to act like this?" Suddenly, Zifara mattered beside sagiri in frustration, but sagiri did not miss the warmth that emanated from the man as the young man ran to him.

According to the crest on his chest, it was clear that he had a high rank, yet he was acting so undignified.

"City Lord Azir! You can't run around like that. You are now the city lord." Zifara suddenly could not take it anymore when the young man was three feet away, and it was clear he was gonna throw himself at the general and hug him or some dishonourable thing.

The city lord?

The city lord

The city lord of a prestigious capital such as Thazir was this kid? He was the one who had given the order to fire a cannonball at him. Sagiri almost laughed at the irony. No wonder the general was so unwilling to hand over the city lord. Not for the fact that he just called him uncle and ran to him with snout running down his nose, but because the freaking boy did not look a day over fifteen.

The boy came to a stop in front of sagiri and the general. He hung over and breathed before he stood up and started yapping away as if something out of a dream had happened.

"Uncle, it's good that you are here. I was so scared that Thazir was going to fall. My messenger said we have a strange man at the gate claiming to be of the fourth mythical tribe of N'faya. They sacrificed themselves for the peace of the South. So I got so angry and asked them to fire a cannonball at him. Is he dead?" He asked with eyes shining with youthful purity. He did not have any malice emanating from him, and sagiri had never encountered a person so pure like a child.

Did the child think this was a joke? Had he been dying to use a cannonball so much?

"Has Thazir enjoyed so much peace that they put a child in such a high position?" The words tumbled out of Sagiri's mouth.

"Who is this uncle? Did you bring me a friend from the Azreen capital?" The boy asked, turning fully to Sagiri. "Why does he smell like he is burnt?" The boy sniffed Sagiri.

"This is the man you wanted to kill." The chief said, and the young man said, his brows furrowing.

"No way. A fireball doesn't leave anyone alive."

"Yet here I stand," Sagiri said, pushing his hood back, and his right eye rested on the boy.

Nokai reacted to his silent command and snapped out of his pocket.

The blade cut through the air. The young man jumped back with surprising agility. So he wasn't completely useless? Sagiri did not do it to kill him, but let Nokai tear into the ground where the boy had been standing moments ago. One of them sharp ends digging deeply into the ground.

The ground trembled, and dust rose with the force.

"Who is this?" The boy asked in a small voice, looking at Sagiri with fear and fascination. "And what is that weapon?!"

Chapter 305. BIG BROTHER

"Who is this?" The boy asked in a small voice, looking at Sagiri with fear and fascination. "And what is that weapon?!"

Fascination?

That was a new feeling even for Sagiri. Well, many had been fascinated with Nokai, but not when he was using it to take their lives. The little lad moved a step forward as if he wanted to see the blade more. How can anyone put such an innocent child in such a position?

"So you are not completely useless?" Sagiri said, talking about his agility.

"Of course, I know how to fight. Uncle. I mean, the general taught me himself. Why is your eye like that?

And your hair is red..." The boy stopped, and his eyes widened before he took a step back. Only the N'folu, especially the keeper clan, had red hair. And even so, sometimes it skipped generations. Sagiri's hair had kept growing redder, and now the red was almost overtaking the black.

"You remember something important, little boy?" Sagiri asked.

"You...You..." The boy stammered a little fear and more fascination reeking from him.

Zifara suddenly fell to his knees beside Sagiri with a thud, and all his men did the same.

"Please don't kill the boy! I know he fired a fireball at you, but as you can see, he is just a boy, and it is my mistake for not teaching him right when the former city lord left him under my care." Zifara said, and

Sagiri could feel the sincerity and love for the boy coming from him. Words could be faked, but feelings couldn't.

"Please spare our city lord chief of N'folu." Zifara's men sang in the chorus. It was also clear that most of them had a bond with the boy.

"If I wanted him dead, he could already be..." Sagiri started staring at the boy who was now staring at him as if he were an alien who had suddenly been dropped in front of him. The boy had his mouth hung dramatically. He reminded Sagiri of someone who was as careless and obnoxious. Lotaga and the city lord only differed in age. "I don't kill children," Sagiri said, and there was a uniform intake of breath.

"I simply wanted to teach the boy some manners," Sagiri said. "You all don't have to beg for his life. Kai, you have been welcoming to me. The attempt on my life is forgiven naturally since the boy is special to you." Sagiri said, and the general finally stood back up. Sagiri pulled the cloak of the hood back on.

Without a word, Nokai uprooted itself from the ground, and the general's eyes widened a little. The blades retracted violently before the weapon made contact with Sagiri's hand. The weapon then disappeared in front of the general and the young city lords' eyes. Well, technically, it went into the archive pocket.

The boy jumped behind the General immediately when Sagiri lifted his head to look at him from behind the hood of the cloak.

"Azir!" The general called, but the boy did not come out.

"City Lord Azir! You have to apologize and welcome the last of the N'folu and the rightful chief of the N'folu tribe." The general's voice hardened before he moved away. Sagiri remained still, waiting to see what the boy could do. It was more amusing to know he was almost killed by a child, and even more, it made him a little angry.

"Azir, fourteen men died on the wall today because of the fireball. You have to know you caused their death because of this decision." The general added that the boy gasped.

Sagiri could understand the reasons for the general saying such a harsh statement, but the boy was too pure to be tainted. Even so, he had to learn responsibility. Sagiri could not help but marvel at his luck. First, he, the general of war of the south, welcomes him, then the city lord of Thazir, who could have possibly opposed him, was just a child.

They finally moved from behind the general, trying as much as possible to put on a brave face, even though Sagiri could tell the boy was about to cry. Just how pitiful was he?

The boy fell to one knee, finally, and his men did the same behind him. Knees met the ground harshly, making even more noise because of the heavy armor the city lords' men were wearing.

"I, Azir, City lord of Thazir, apologize to the chief and last of... N'folu..." The boy sniffled before he continued. "I welcome you into my city. If you need anything. I will give willingly." The boy said, and his men repeated behind him in the same beat.

"We welcome the chief and last of N'folu. The chief can depend on us for everything!!"

Now that Sagiri was looking at the men behind the city lord, they were all fresh soldiers, not a day over twenty. They looked between eighteen and twenty. Sagiri had a feeling the general was responsible for this.

"I accept you much colder welcome this time. But..." Sagiri said, and everyone froze. The young city lord stared up at him, his eyes watery.

"Anything the chief requires..."

"Those men I killed today tried to kill me first, so their death is on my hands. You don't have to bear the responsibility of it. But..." Sagiri said again, and everyone went even more rigid.

The young chief wanted to say something, but instead nodded.

"But I will not recognize you as the City lord of the city of Thazir..."

"Sagiri, you can't..." N'varu went to say, but Sagiri lifted a hand to stop him. Even the general looked like he wanted to say something, but stopped.

"...until you can land a hit on me in a sparring match. I will not use my blade just to make it a bit fair." Sagiri finally finished, and everyone breathed out again. The young chief's eyes widened with what Sagiri could call madness or mad excitement. Before Sagiri could say anything more, the lass threw himself on the ground in a deep and ungraceful bow made only for very old people with both knees to the ground, hands to his thighs, and his head to the ground. Even grandparents barely got it, yet the boy was here throwing it around. Sagiri had never seen someone show so much gratitude for no reason.

"I thank you, big brother..." Sagiri froze. "I accept your guidance, and I will not fail you. I will definitely beat you."

"I am not..." Sagiri bent to say, but the general cleared his throat as if to tell him it wouldn't work, whatever he was about to say. Seeing as the general had been struggling with the uncle title, he let it go.

Sagiri could feel the amusement from his teammates. They were enjoying seeing him at a loss for words.

"Azir, that is not dignifying. Have some honour!" The general said. Azir finally stood up and tried to act as dignified as possible.

"Azir, will you let your big brother walk to the inner city?" The general asked the confused boy.

"Oh, forgive my incompetent subordinates." He said to the general, then turned to his soldiers. "Go bring the escort wagons now!!" he gave the command. His subordinates scrambled into action. Sagiri was surprised that his subordinates even listened to him, but he was past the point of being surprised that the boy dared to call someone incompetent.

"Welcome to my city, big brother." The boy said again.

Chapter 306. INNER CITY

The journey to the inner city was a distance away, even with the wagons. Only Sagiri, the little lass, the general, and his squad sat on the wagons while the city lord's men and the general's men walked. The city changed as they got away from the outer city. The structure's design became more angular. The

buildings quickly lost the homely feeling, and as the population of civilians dropped lower and lower, and only soldiers on patrol could be seen walking up and down, even a long way, the closer they got to the inner city.

"The outer city belongs to the people. Traders, soldiers, craftsmen, travelers, and civilians. But what you're looking at now..." His eyes moved upward. "...is the Inner City." Their path widened the carriage wheels, and the stone changed darker, smoother, polished until the firelight reflected faintly across it.

Buildings became larger and farther apart. Open courtyards appeared. A long channel of flowing water cut through the district, carrying reflected lantern light through the night. Above the long channel of water sat a wide bridge.

The wagons pulled past the wide bridge and to the gate of the inner city. The warriors of the south just bowed when they saw the general and the city lord and opened the gate. This gate was heavy but not as heavy as the outer gate, and it opened pretty easily, giving birth into the inner city.

"Only those with duty to the South live beyond this point." He pointed west, where a massive stone complex stretched across several terraces.

"That is the War Headquarters." His hand shifted toward a fortress to the east of the inner city

"That is the Council Hall." The general pointed to the left before his eyes went back to the tall structure that Sagiri saw all the way from the gate. only that this time it was visible. It was huge and more enormous. It was carved out of stone and looked ancient, as if it had been there for generations. It looked more magnificent.

"This is where the supreme chef of the south resides mostly. He has a structure like this in the Azreen capital. Behind the structure, you can't see them from here, but four chief residents are built. Your clan's chief residence is further back at the wall of the inner city." The kai said, looking at the structure with respect.

"To the fortress!" The general said when the carriages stopped at a crossroad.

"I hate war fortresses too. I have had my good share of them." Sagiri said in a hard voice.

"I don't intend to hold you prisoner. You can leave after the council sits and decides in two weeks..."

"One week. They invited me. I shouldn't have to wait two weeks." Sagiri said.

"We can't..."

"I can't wait two weeks. If they don't sit quickly, I will just assume whoever is not at the council in a week is against me. I have waited a year to even enter the capital. at this point, I will just have to take what's mine and see who dares stop me." Sagiri snarled.

"Big brother is so cool." The city lord said Sagiri paused. He was beginning to regret not killing the stupid kid.

"It sounds like you have another reason for coming into the capital." The general said, and sagiri turned his head swiftly to him.

He did not answer, however.

"I will advise you to stay calm and not get your emotions into this. If you do, then it doesn't matter how strong you are. If someone finds out you care about something, then you will lose." The Kai said. Sagiri wanted to debate, but he swallowed and let it go.

He had been distressed on this journey, and his mind was in turmoil. even more so after the fight at the gate and the emotional outburst. He wanted his friends to return safely and still go to Nkara to bid his clan goodbye. That had to be done soon, too. Sagiri took a deep breath and shut his eyes.

The rest of the journey to the fortress was quiet. Another towering gate and intimidating stone walls encircled the fortress. The warriors did not hesitate to open the gates once they saw the general and the city lord. Sagiri had a feeling the city lord spent most of his time suffocating the general in the war headquarters, and perhaps the general was the reason the boy's innocence had not been tainted by a fallen puppet to someone.

The fortress was smaller than the one in Tagayia but was still just as intimidating.

"The fortress has six wings," Sagiri said, looking at its shape.

"Yes. The one in Azreen has six wings too. In total, we have twelve wings." The general said, and Sagiri finally nodded.

You can stay in the fifth wing. It is where I stay. The wing is big enough for your men and my men to fit." The general said, and Sagiri nodded. around the fortress and stopped at the front gate of the fifth wing.

"I stay in the fourth wing with my men. Big brother, you can come visit at any time." The city order said, handing Sagiri a golden token. Sagiri did not have time to refuse before the token was pushed into his hand. Just how naive was the boy?

The general looked skeptical, but he did not say anything.

"If anyone wants to kill this boy, all he has to do is smile," Sagiri said lowly, and the general sighed. Sagiri could tell the man had tried to teach the boy but failed over and over.

"I only give one to you because I know you won't kill me and you are kind," the boy said, and Sagiri snapped his eyes open.

Kind?

Him? kind. He couldn't remember the last time anyone had ever called him kind since Rusha and Bakuru. His teammates had called him naive and oblivious before, but kind. With the many people he had killed and the trail of blood he had left?

"Azir is a good judge of character," The general said silently before he stepped down from the carriage.

"You both need to see a healer." Sagiri signed before he jumped down.

Chapter 307. THE KAI'S POV

"General, are you sure about this?" Moga, the right-hand man of the Kai, had not stopped pacing around ever since they had settled the supposed last N'folu.

You were with me, Moga. You saw what he is capable of. He wields the deadliest weapon in the land. I can see he has still not mastered using it completely, but that weapon only responds to the N'folu and especially the keepers.

"You saw his red hair and the beast in his hand. That is no doubt a sand beast. It may be small now, but that thing grows to the size of a house. It did not like that its master was threatened. It will definitely remember an enemy when it grows." The general said. He had not arrived today after his messenger sent a message. He was already on his way to Thazir from Azreen Capital. When the message reached him, he was just a few vaara short of Thazir. He indeed had come ready to flatten the person causing a ruckus at the gate.

Had someone chosen to attack Thazir when he was in Azreen because they thought the city lord was just a boy and he was away?

Zifara had panicked when he felt the impact of the fireball, and he had pulled away from his men. He was not the kai just in name, but he was also a lethal fighter worthy of his name. He might have been in his mid forties now, but his strength had not lessened a day.

He and the previous city lord had not seen eye to eye, but they both had respect for each other. It is hard to trust anyone when you are a city lord. He had also fallen terminally ill just after he had ascended the seat of city lord. It had always been rumoured back then that the disease was not natural. The city lord had called Zifara and tasked him with protecting his little son and his seat. They were not best friends or anything, but neither were they enemies. They were just two men who had big responsibilities.

Zifara had sworn to protect the little lass who was three years old then. The rightful heir of the city lord. To say that he had to protect the boy, his seat, Thazir, and the south as a whole, for the past decade and more, and the boy was now special to him. Everyone knew that, and perhaps the boy was his weakness. He was not going to let a barbarian take advantage.

In the past months, many had come forth trying to act as if they were from N'folu, not just the few months, but over the years, some had tried to, but they had nothing to show as evidence other than their badly cooked fighting skills.

He had given the boy instructions to fire a cannon on anyone who threatened the city in his absence, and that was his mistake. When he felt the boom, he felt proud. He was now at the age of watching the fireball's impact dwindle.

What he hadn't expected was to see a figure within it when it had gone down. The figure was not dead, and it was in fact moving even after being charred black. Then a laugh emanated from the figure. A laugh so sick and tormented it had the hairs on his back rise to attention. He had never gotten such a heavy killing intent from someone that he had been completely frozen.

Then he had not blinked, but the next thing he knew, the figure was gone, and the next thing he saw was the weapon he had thought he could never see. The weapon tore through fourteen men as if they were nothing in a flash of a second, and then. The boy was above ground, so high up. He landed on the stone platform where the commander was standing.

He could not hear what the boy was saying from a distance away, but the next thing he saw was the captain being held airborne before he was dropped from the platform. Zifara could explain what he had witnessed to that point. He knew the person was hellbent on killing everyone. The blade had split into twenty. And with that, he was sure in a matter of seconds, no man outside of the wall could remain standing, and then the next person would no doubt be the city lord. From what he could tell, no one had died before the fireball was fired. The arrows no doubt launched at him were lying on the ground.

So the fireball was the reason he had killed. Damn it! Azir had angered someone he shouldn't have this time.

He stopped them?!

Without thinking, Zifara drew his bow and the central arrow he had never used. He rarely used the Linka, the arrow passed down his clan. The arrow barely stopped the fall of the commander. One second late, and the man could have died.

By this time, his men had caught up. They must have witnessed the death of the fourteen, the suspended blades, and the landing from the stone platform.

Then the figure had turned around just as Zifara crossed the distance in seconds and jumped from canyon to canyon before arriving at the centre. What Zifara saw first was the red eye. Even redder than that of any keeper he had ever seen. Then a smile as that was clear from the eighty feet high place.

"Finally, someone worth killing." The person said. before he jumped off the ledge. No one could fall or jump from that high and still live. Yet the boy was fine when he landed. Only the ground was hurt, Zifara could say. This feat could not be ignored. Zifara could smell burnt flesh and fabric, but from what his eyes could see, the wounds were already gone.

He could not accept what he was seeing, or perhaps he could not believe it.

"The Kai of the south. Your archery skills only rival one other man I have ever seen." The boy's voice was genuine. It was a true compliment.

Zifara just nodded slightly. He was still unsure what to do. The killing intent leaking from the person was still deadly.

"That man over there is mine. He tried to kill me twice, even after I asked to enter the city politely. Are the N'folu by any chance not allowed in the capital of Thazir?" The boy had asked. So it was true he was the one claiming to be N'folu. "I will appreciate it if you don't get between a man who tried to kill me and my fighters for no reason and me. Anyone who harms my friends, I don't forgive easily." Sagiri said, turning to the Zifara. Zifara had long been about a report from the veiled speaker. The supposed N'folu was indeed a boy not to be underestimated. He was also aware that the boy had conquered a clan that had grown from war between Safaya and Tagayia and had settled in the south.

So this was the boy? No one had dared act recklessly yet, but his presence in the south had not gone unnoticed.

Chapter 308. THE KAI'S POV II

"Then you will be killing the wrong man." The kai finally spoke. His voice was calm and collected even in this situation.

"The wrong man? I asked him to call a person from the council to give me the chief and last N'folu a warm welcome, but I must have misspelled it because instead of a warm welcome, a fireball welcomed me, and dare I say it was too warm, I could have thought he wanted me to burn alive." The boy said,

So the fireball was the reason he had been angered.

"Only the city lord gave an order for the fire cannons." Zifara said. He could not let the commander die for no reason.

"So that is who gave the command? Well then, I am thankful for you stopping me, but will you be kind enough to call the city Lord so I can teach him a lesson on etiquette?" The boy's wrath had surged.

This was bad, but Zifara couldn't hand over the boy either.

"I can't do that, but my messenger bird dropped a message that you were all the gatekeepers' prisoners.

If someone comes to your house and holds your child hostage, then you will get angry, won't you?" Zifara said as calmly as he could. He just hoped the boy was reasonable. After all, he had stayed in the south for a year, and in that time, he had not sought trouble.

"Are you also calling me a stranger, Kai of the south? I almost thought you were smarter and would recognize a blade only the N'folu can wield. Or should I test it on your neck?" The killing intent grew. Zifara might have appeared calm, but he had never felt so close to death as in that moment. The matter was fragile and needed to be handled with care and absolute calmness.

"I have not said anyone is wrong or anyone is right." The general said. "And neither have I said you are not a N'folu."

"So you neither deny nor accept?" There was disappointment in the boy's voice.

"Now then, if you want to stop me, I think we should take this fight away from the city if you don't want to have to bury half of it by the end of it." The words were not a bluff. Then the little angry growl of a beast. Zifara could not deny that fact either. The weapon had only sheathed after he recognized the boy as N'folu. There was no way out tonight. If he denied that the boy was N'folu, then Thazir could pay.

Even though he was not totally convinced or refused to accept him, tonight had been the only way out. Then the cry had followed, and Zifara had felt the pain as deep as the killing intent.

The boy meant to come say goodbye. Even Zifara was touched by his grief. That was no doubt a howl of pain. He was even more grateful that he had accepted him. The pain he carried could have consumed Thazir and everyone.

"All this time... I thought the South no longer had a place waiting for me." The boy had howled. With the way he had fought, Zifara could have sworn he was mad. Perhaps maddened with grief, it seemed. "I came to say goodbye to N'folu. I have been so unfilial not sending you all off all these years!!" He cried. A tear dropped right in front of Zifara.

"I didn't expect to be welcomed." He added, and there was sniffing behind him and somewhere in the crowd of soldiers. "I was willing to shed more blood to come pay you my respect. How unfilial of me... to wield a weapon and call myself a N'folu." Sagiri's body shook with grief. Grief filled the place. Such grief Zifara had never witnessed. The whole of N'faya had grieved for years.

They had hoped to find even one survivor of the Nfolu, and when one had claimed to be. Even after he had proven to be Zifara beyond any reasonable doubt, everyone, and even he, had still doubted him. How very painful to be rejected by your people after losing your own clan. Zifara felt so much guilt at that moment.

Silence stretched as the boy shook with grief but fought to stand still.

"Now I can come and finally do my filial duties, oh N'folu, even though I am an unworthy descendant. You will not be forgotten as long as I am alive. I can finally dance for you under the stars and say goodbye..." It was just painful to watch. The blades had long snapped shut, free of any fighting intent.

"But the echo archive was destroyed that night," Moga said. He and the captain were among the first to arrive after the massacre.

"Its holder was destroyed. The echo could not easily be destroyed. What I saw today is nothing short of what the N'folu could do. You also saw that."

"Could it be that the boy is now the..." Moga started asking.

"Don't speak of such a thing. That would be a dangerous thing to presume, Moga. We have been friends since we were boys. You do know what to say and what not to. But still, that will now change the entire situation." Zifara said. He had thought of that himself, but he dared not presume to assume.

"The sandshade of the last keeper remains silent, doesn't he?" Moga asked.

"Even more reason to not assume. I can bet my life that that boy has come to collect the Sandshade. The man has stayed alive for years, and yet he has not opened his mouth to say anything. I believe he knows more than all of us, and someone in the council knows that too. There is something I wish to know, too." Zifara said.

"What if you are wrong?"

"I'd better be wrong on this."

"What are you going to do? The boy demands a meeting in a week."

"You worry too much. Word travels quickly, and what happened at the gate will be the topic tomorrow. As bees flock to honey, they will come looking for me. They have always been threatened by me. If they think I have a boy of such abilities in my hands, they will fall over their feet to kill him or gain his favour." Zifara said.

"What do you think the council will decide?" Moga asked, finally stopping his pacing. Of course, his master had not held such a position for many years because he was stupid. He was choosing to play a long game. If the boy proved not to be N'folu, which was almost impossible, then he could have nothing to lose, and if the boy was N'folu, he could still have nothing to lose. In fact, he stood to gain.

"That, we will have to wait and see. This is going to be interesting." Zifara shook his head, a small smile taking over his face.

"You can't go out," N'varu said. He was back to nagging like he was his mom.

"And I can't sit still either. I did not come to this city to sleep and play house." Sagiri said, tying the cloak over his new set of clothes, which Zifara had been kind enough to provide.

"What did Zifara say about meeting the council?" Kiuga asked. They were all gathered in Sagiri's room now. The wing was big, and everyone had been afforded a room on the same floor. Zifara had been kind enough to let them have a floor to themselves.

"We didn't agree, but a week at least. I'm not going to wait for them to gather anyway."

"But you don't know where he is, for all we know, he might be in Azreen capital," N'varu said.

"Even more reason for me to search this city. You guys have to be back in the north. You have to return to the war college in two weeks. Or have you forgotten that Tagayia will notice your absence?" Sagiri said. "Remember to watch your mouths and keep your tribal tattoos hidden."

"Kaka is going to give us away anyway," Kiuga said.

"I won't. I have perfected my disguise." Kaka said.

"Your size is the issue, dumb dumb. Try not to grow anymore while we are here, and keep quiet. We will call you Big Mute as your new disguise." Kiuga taunted.

"You wouldn't dare. I will kill you and bury you in this city." Kaka threatened.

"So much for perfecting your disguise. The next thing you know, you are bragging about how the Asakana are great." Kiuga sighed.

"The Asakana are the greatest clan," Kaka said, and Kiuga let out a groan from deep inside his throat and face-palmed.

"Well, try to keep your coverings intact. Your clan tattoo runs all over your chest." Sagiri said. Kiuga had a habit of showcasing his chest, and Sagiri needed to remind him.

"I have perfected my disguise. I am not like dumb dumb over there." Kiuga said.

"Call me that again, and there will be no corpse for the Tinega to bury." Kaka snarled.

"Cut it out, you two. There is a lady in our midst." Banga said.

"Can I come with you?" Lira said almost immediately. She had at some point seamlessly fit into the group like a clingy pet.

"No," Sagiri said immediately, and the girl's face dropped.

"Your charm when it comes to talking to women is only rived by the desert we travelled through." Kiuga shook his head in disappointment.

"Lira, not just you but everyone. Only I can spy and step out of this fortress without getting caught. Do you understand?" Sagiri explained again.

"You have to keep to the inner city or just map the fortress tonight. Don't miss a detail." Kiuga said his mood shifted to a serious one.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say the north sent you to spy on the south," Sagiri said in a light tone, standing up from his place on the floor.

"You do know the north like the back of your hand. It's only fair."

Sagiri shook his head before heading to the door, but a hand held onto his cloak, stopping him.

"Don't get hurt." It was Lira, and she had a strange expression on her face. Sagiri wanted to laugh, but he was beginning to admit he would never understand women fully. Even Bakuru had always said he had never understood Rusha. She had wanted to kill him and almost succeeded, but now she was attached to his side. Even Gavina wanted to beat him to a pulp before accepting him as a spouse. Sagiri just sighed.

"Okay. You keep those boys grounded till I'm back." Sagiri nodded and said. She let go of him, and he finally moved out.

Sagiri could have moved within the archive, but he did not want to. He moved silently, keeping to the darkness till he stood at the top of the sixth wing fortress. The top was just as separated as the wings. Each wing had its own triangular top. A wall rose slightly between the roof of the sixth wing and the next. Sagiri walked slowly and stood at the edge. He jumped up and perched at the edge of the high wall. He was a hundred and fifty feet off the ground, to say the least. It was almost midnight, yet the inner city looked light.

Every corner was lit, making it hard for anyone to lurk in many places. From where Sagiri stood, he could see the supreme chief's residence or fortress. The building stood tall and intimidating. Sagiri did not doubt in his mind that the supreme chief sort of shadow corps resided there, just like the ones of the north.

Breaking into it or going close to it could definitely prove impossible. He did not know where to search and how to search, but he was going to search high and low in every nook and cranny of the inner city. First, he needed to have a good view of the fortress from every rooftop of every wing. There was no one watching from up above every wing, and he did not have time to wonder why before he was moving around.

From his place, he could see the warriors of the south on the walls around the fortress, facing both in and out. Perhaps there was no one watching from above because they did not expect a person to fly in. Sagiri made sure to memorize every detail, even how far apart the warriors stood and their number, before he walked across and jumped from the fifth wing rooftop onto the sixth. then to the first, then the second, then the fourth. He had just landed on the wall of the fourth wing when he paused. He had felt the presence of someone, and he stopped.

His eyes moved down, and then he saw him. A small figure was holding a press-up. Their hands were shaking violently.

Azir?

He was sweating bullets, and his breath was laboured. He was also shirtless and did not look anything like a city lord.

Just then, Azir turned his head around as if sensing Sagiri, and their eyes met.

"Big brother!" The boy yelled but did not move to leave his position. Sagiri placed a finger to his lips, and the boy nodded. He continued holding the position with as much determination as possible.

"Uncle is punishing you for almost killing you. I have to hold it like this for another hour." Azir said.

"The way I see it, he is letting you off easy. He should let you hold that position this morning." Sagiri said, and the boy looked embarrassed.

"I have failed as the city Lord. I will officially sit on that chair when I turn sixteen in eight months, but I feel like I have failed." The boy said in a small voice.

"If you think you have failed, then you have. You have to know that the lives of all those in the capital depend on each decision you make. You have to think carefully and follow the general's lead." Sagiri chastised.

"I will consider big brother's words. I will take my training seriously and listen more in political lessons." Azir said with determination.

"You have not caused much damage, so consider it a lesson. Since you are taking the punishment seriously and the words of your seniors seriously, it means you have taken your first step to being a better city Lord." Sagiri said, and he meant it. The boy was kind and naive, but he was going to grow to become a great leader one day.

"You think so?" Azir said his happiness was palpable.

"I know so. Now don't disappoint me." Sagiri said. The boy nodded and continued holding the position.

"Why are you not sleeping?" Azir asked after a moment of silence.

"New places give me nightmares," Sagiri said, and the boy looked in his direction again.

"Big brother!" He said with pity. "You are so pitiful." He added.

Such a bold statement for someone who was serving a punishment. The boy was just bizarre.

Chapter 310. THE COUNCIL'S EARS

The council in the shadows was sitting with urgency this time. There was tension. Since everyone in N'faya had kept their cards close to their chest, daring not to attack him. Those who always worked in the shadows could not be the first to show their hand in such a situation. For a whole year, there had been silence, but then everyone had gone down a rabbit hole trying to find anything to give them an upper hand against the other. Yet they had not expected to wake up to the news that Thazir had taken the knee to the boy overnight.

Bad news sure travelled quickly.

"A gatekeeper says the boy was burned alive by a fireball, but he didn't die."

"I did not take you for one to listen to rumours," Another said.

"I have heard the same news. The boy slaughtered fourteen gatekeepers before pointing a weapon at the heart of the Kai." Another said.

"Some say the Kai gave in willingly." The second said

"So all you are telling me today are rumours, and none of you knew the movements of the boy." The man at the head of the table said.

"Perhaps we greatly underestimated the boy." The first said again.

"So your men failed to kill one boy is what you are telling me." The man at the head of the table said.

"He did come alone to the capital with only ten with him. That is a fact," another said.

"So his army of ten beat Thazir to submission." The man at the head grew angrier. He could not believe what he was hearing. He had expected the boy to give him a chance to use him, but he had acted like the dead when he came south, keeping silent for a year. Then suddenly, he heard the general of the Southern armies had taken a knee to him.

"What about the city lord?"

"It is said he was the one who gave the order to fire the cannonball." Another answered.

"Is he dead then?" The man at the head of the table asked. He had wanted the boy eliminated for as long as he could remember, but somehow the Kai carried everywhere and had him protected like a hawk.

"He wanted to, I hear. but changed his mind when he realized he was a child. Even so, he dared say that he would not recognize him as city lord," the first one said again.

"Kind and audacious. If I didn't know better, I could say you are full of praise for the boy." The man at the head of the table said.

"Well, he managed to take a whole city with just ten men by his side, and they did not need to lift a finger.

"The veil blades did not return after they faced him." The woman at the council spoke for the first time.
"Yet you claimed they are undefeated."

"It could be a difference in strength or blades. The boy wields the weapon we have been searching for. The last whisper, or should I call it silent sand?" Another said.

"He wields the last whisper!!" The woman almost lost his cool. " Only the N'folu could wield that, and even so, it chooses its owner. Not all N'folu can wield it."

"So then he is N'folu..." The man at the head of the table said after a moment of silence.

"Impossible!!" The woman said losing his cool. "It can not be!!"

"Yet he wields the long-lost weapons and he cleared four squads of veil blades. If he holds that blade, then it could explain why the veilblades stood no chance."

"Even the blade wielded by Sigan has been returned by the veiled speaker to the Inkali tribe. Not even Yanki held a candle to the last whisper," Another said. Silence followed in the dark place where they gathered.

"If the Kai took the knee willingly, then that old fox could have known he was coming. Perhaps he wishes to use the boy." The man at the head of the table said. "He couldn't possibly have done that without a reason."

"He has not held that position and protected the city lord of Thazir just because he is kind. He is a cunning fox." The woman said. "His power surpasses that of the chiefs of the three tribes, well, now four, yet he acts like he is powerless. Even now, he has chosen to take the knee first to welcome the chief. Just what is he thinking?"

"Perhaps he was scared this time. The last whisper is not to be toyed with. Even I could take a knee to keep my head." Another member of the council said.

"The boy requests a meeting in a week on top of that. Only he knows what he wants to discuss with the council." The first sneered. "He has been in the capital less than a day, yet he dares to think the south will dance to his tune. "

"So we have to have something over his head or Kai's head before then. We can't have him thinking he runs the place." Another member said.

"A sentiment some in the council share."

"So then, where should we start?"

"The general has one weakness, and everyone knows that. We have to have him in our clutches, and without support, the boy can not wish to sit on the council. A chief without a clan is like a head without a body."

"Yet everyone is now chanting N'garu. N'garu has returned. The four winds of the south are complete. The most honourable clan of the south. Even people from other clans support him. Going against him, even for a chief, would have their own people turn against them. Besides, the boy came south with his own clan of rogues and war orphans."

"The South won't welcome them. They don't matter. If he is rejected, they will have no option but to return to where they came from."

"It will not be that simple. I hear the boy also wept for his clan. He claimed he wished to see off his clan. If that will be his request, and anyone denies him, then they will become his enemy."

"Interesting."

"The former keeper's sandshade is still imprisoned, remember. I don't think the boy's reason for coming to Thazir is that simple."

"Then, for now, we weakened the Kai while we wait for the council to sit. We can't have him hold more cards over us." The woman said.

"The meeting ends here then." The man at the head of the council said.