

THE LAST KEEPER

Chapter 101 101: 99. WISH

"What is your wish, son? I will give you whatever your heart desires. A rule is a rule, and I am a man of honour," Vanka asked when sir black was thrown at his feet. He had been battered so badly he wasn't able to stand, and the other reason was that he wanted to appear as humble as possible. He stooped so low his head touched the earth. He had mastered the art of licking boots since he was young, so the act had been perfected.

"Dear King. Sovereign ruler of this prosperous land of Vanka, whatever shall a filthy man like me ask of you?" sir black sang praises, and humans would always be human, and praises always softened even the hardest of hearts.

"What could such a humble servant of Vanka have done to deserve being in prison?" the king asked, moving forward on his seat.

"Your servant is guilty of standing in front of the sovereign ruler of Lanka, and for that, I deserve to die. Simply asking for more could be greedy. It is my dying honour to have breathed the same air as the sovereign and most powerful ruler across all the lands." sir black licked his boots even further. If he stooped any lower, he could have lain flat on his tummy and become one with the earth.

"I could have thought you'd be prideful after taking down my champion of five years," the king said, his ego having been stroked by sir black's humble display.

"My apologies, dear king. For this wrong your servant deserves to die. I only did it out of desperation. Your servant is not long for this world, and I only got myself in this situation out of desperation," sir black said, wiping away a tear at the pitiful lie he was about to spew. He had set the bait of being humble, and now all he had to do was sound as pitiful as possible to have the king in his grasp before he made his final move.

"Such a kind man indeed. What desperation could have dragged you to even fight my champion? say your wish, and i the sovereign ruler and most powerful son and ruler of Lanka, will fulfill it," the king said, his chest swelling.

"I dare not disturb the king with a mere wish. I only wish to see my brother in the no-return prison of the land of Lanka if only to say goodbye before I depart from this world," sir black coughed, wiping away blood. Silence stretched for a while, and sir black dared not move his head. The king might have given his word, but what he had asked was too much even for a king to just grant. Even so, he had already licked his boots so much so that they could slide his fat body down a mountain.

"It must be such a tragedy for such a man of integrity to have a brother so sinful he had to be put in the no return," the king sighed.

"Loving such a person is even a bigger tragedy, sovereign king. Yet blood ties are prisons we can't escape from," sir black said, touching what every human could relate to the most. It was true that blood ties are the only prison one can't escape from. He might have killed his father, who was a minister to this world, yet he had never been able to escape the reality that even in death, he was still his father, and killing a parent, even a monster, was still a sin that even nature condemned. Perhaps he was a monster because he had been born by one, and he was no better than his father in the things he had done.

As father and son.

"A wise man indeed. Who can escape the prison of blood ties? What a person you share blood with does can not be escaped. I don't regret killing all my siblings to never have to endure betrayal. You should do the same," Lanka said, and of course, it was common knowledge that when King Vanka took over the rule of the land of Lanka, he wiped away all his kin, even the children, both male and female. Women could never sit on the throne of Lanka, yet he had not spared them. He had claimed that women give birth to men as long as even a spec of loyal blood ran in their veins; he was still a threat. The man was ruthless. He did not have a weakness, and perhaps only his son could dare challenge him in the future. If he didn't kill it first.

"You are wise, my king," Sir black said as the king finally stood from his seat.

"Grant his wish, but the rule stands that those of the no-return prison should not see the light until they die. Make it quick and say your goodbyes. Though you are not long for this world, you should count your brother as not long for this world either, well, that is if he is still alive down there." The king went to turn around, but sir black spoke again.

"i have one more wish for the king of this sovereign land." The king stopped but sir black knew better that he had already pushed the man so far and he did not have much patience.

"I dare ask the king that I be granted a bath and a change of clothes so that the last image of me my brother sees is the best of me." he almost begged as he moved on his knees quickly almost clinging to the king's boots.

"Make sure it is done so," the king said without turning around before he continued walking his guards right behind him. sir black maintained his position on the ground even

longer after they had left. He only lifted his head when a bulked prison guard picked him off the floor as if he were dirt.

just because the king allowed for him to have a bath did not mean the guards had to it right and as it turned out unlike the king who had accepted the death of his champion well maybe he had grown bored of him winning and wanted someone to take him out so that he the fights in the pit could get more enjoyable, the guards were not happy and if not for the fact that if they disobeyed king Vanka he they could die with their entire family, they could have beaten him to a pulp.

He was thrown into a large basin of cold water. freezing water, and he almost died of shock.

"Why do you look at me with so much hate? I won fair and square," sir black articulated each word with mockery, looking at the prison warden who had carried him and chucked him in the cold water.

"What was the liquid you poured into Tofara's eyes?" he asked, and it seemed the warden had a personal relationship with the guy.

"I can show you if you come closer," sir black said, opening his mouth to show them his half-burnt tongue, and the three men stepped back. He could have lost his tongue if he had delayed taking the antidote for a split second and lose its chance of regenerating. Even now, with his broken and dislocated jaw and half a tongue, he had trouble speaking. It was a wonder he was able to talk with the king without screaming every time he stroked his ego. Well, nothing could be achieved without a little sacrifice here and there.

sir black placed both his hands, and with a little groan, he returned his jaw to its original position, and it snapped in with a snap that had everyone in the room looking at him as if he was sick in the head, and on that they were right. well he could just walk around and keep struggling to speak with a broken jaw. The jaw being crooked might have earned him some pity from King Vanka, and his speech about dying soon might have sold the deal, but that was out of the way, and now he needed to look his best to meet his 'brother.'

"I don't know what kind of poison you used to burn Tofara's eyes and why you want so much to go to the 'no return' prison to see a damned who I doubt is your blood brother, but I will tell you this. No one stays in that place for more than two years without losing their mind. So if your brother has been there longer. You won't be able to get what you want from him. Nor will he remember your face," the prison warden snickered.

"Well, I'm not long for this world, and I only wish to see the face of my lovely brother before I go," sir black said with a humorless smile that was creepy to anyone who saw it before he cackled. well he had come so far to give up now, and he was not going to live empty-handed.

"You are sick," the prison warden said with disgust before turning around. "I can't believe Tofara lost to such filth. What a shame," he said over his shoulder as he walked away. sir black laughed even harder. He had gotten used to those words; they started to sound like a compliment. He had, however, never understood whether he was sick or if it was the world that was sick. Perhaps they both were.

Chapter 102 - 100. PRISON OF NO RETURN

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The warden had not been lying when he said there was nothing that could survive in the prison of no return. Just like its name, it only had one way in. It was built under the normal prison, or perhaps it had been there before the real prison, and the prison had been built on top of it. Sir black had been allowed a few hours to wait for his garments to

dry after he cleaned them, so he could wear them. It was not as if clothes were lying around in the prison waiting for him to wear them.

Sir black had always prided himself on having his experimenting labs under the earth, but he had not been prepared for how deep the Vanka Prison went. They had been going lower and lower, sometimes in circular motion for a few minutes, and the warden had no sign of stopping.

"Not to be impatient, but where do you keep the damned prisoners. all the way down in hell?" he asked as the place got darker and darker and more stuffy as if it had never touched the sun in centuries. The rocks that surrounded the place had moss growing on them.

"Yes," the warden answered without explaining further. His two companions were accompanying them too, and they were each carrying two flaming torches just like their leader in the front. sir black had said it as a joke, but he was starting to believe that the place was hell on earth. The man he was looking for was imprisoned ten years ago, and not even he could have survived in such a place for a year.

They kept going lower for a few minutes again, and the lower they went, the air started getting thinner and thinner. It was getting harder and harder to breathe and beyond a certain point, sir black was having trouble breathing. How could a person possibly breathe so far under the earth? King Vanka was truly ruthless. A sane person would stay away from criminal activities if this were the verdict.

"You don't seem as passionate as before about seeing your brother," the head warden said, putting emphasis on the word brother, and sir black had never been one to regret his decisions, but he had to fight everything in him not to run around and run back to Tagayia screaming.

"How can I leave without seeing my dear brother. I'm sure he has missed me," sir black forced a steady tone. He, after all, treasured his life, and it was only natural that he was scared to lose it. He, however, was not about to show any sign of weakness.

After several minutes of the walk, he was panting for air. The other men seemed just fine, and he was about to swallow his pride and beg to be taken out when the path opened into a big circular place. If it were not for the flaming touch, then he could have gone tumbling into the hollow space below.

"Be careful, it's a long fall from up here. You and your brother might meet in hell," the head warden said sarcastically. Why was he mad that sir black had killed his friend? It was a fair fight to either kill or be killed. so petty.

The warden flickered his light to the other side, and there was something like a ladder going down. They went down one after the other, and midway through the ladder, they broke into a corridor between the ricks before they finally found the prison. First it was the smell that hit him. the smell of rotting. The smell of human flesh rotting. The prison was circular, but the inside looked like shelves where one could only sit and never stand.

"What do they eat down here?" sir black said, wondering who brought food all the way from up there.

"Well they have a lot of meat to eat down here," the second warden said, chuckling, and sir black was beginning to think the entire Lanka and their king were mad. It was a land of monsters, and when he and his master finally cleansed Tagayia of monsters, and his general became the ruler, he would extend his kindness to wipe out the north. I mean, enjoying killing people was better than what he was witnessing.

Sir black had used metaphors enough to know that the meat they were talking about was not a delicacy.

"Don't tell me they eat each other," sir black said, even himself repulsed at the idea of having to eat another human to survive, that could make his father's actions seem like a soak in a lake on a sunny day.

"Why would you even think of such horror?" The head warden faked surprise. "We are not monsters," he said, but the look on his face was too familiar. Perhaps being the guardian of such a place had driven him mad.

"You know the white rats love such an environment and..." the third warden started, and sir black's face felt blood drain from his face. He had never had such a troubling set of sentences and events since he had to sew his dead mother's flesh together with the carcass of a donkey. raw rats? Were they making the prisoners eat raw rats to survive? What about the waters? His question was, however, answered in the next moment.

"The back of the cells is open, and they open to the freshest of underground water. They get to just stretch a hand after they eat meat to their fill." The second warden said. If he had any doubts before, then everyone in Lanka was mad. Now, he was sure beyond a reasonable doubt that he had stepped into a mad state, and he hoped for Tagayia's sake they did not start a war with the savages. Tagayia could win, yes, but the mayhem that could ensue could bring the world to its knees.

They made him look normal, or perhaps he fit in.

"Only eighteen prisoners are left down here. Others finished their sentences. Which one is your brother?" the head warden laughed, and sir black could just shake his head before he snapped a flaming torch from the second warden. He walked from cell to cell, looking through the cage, but all he could see behind the bars were not human anymore, but just monsters. It was strange how the body could turn out when forced to extremes. long hair, long nails, white skin, and eyes with pupils so dilated he could not see the white.

The measures the king of Lanka took were too cruel, and there was no way a man could serve ten years. He could not tell who from whom, so he just spoke the Korun tongue or Wenji. The man he was looking for spoke more than twenty languages from four states, and he just whispered then hoping someone could reply. He was in the last cell at the end of the other side when the thing behind the cages finally stared at him. yes a thing because that was no longer a human.

"Hey, are you the genius of many arts?" He repeated the question he had been repeating to all the others, and the man turned to look at him as if he had been blinded or lost half his sanity. His hand stretched to the light, or before he started banging his head against the cages and snarling like an animal. The only word he could speak was.

"Soulless!" He repeated the word a few hundred times, ignoring whatever sir black said, and Sir Black was about to leave when the man said one word in Wenji.

"Ink keeper," he said as if he had been holding onto the world for the whole decade, and it was the only thing his tongue and brain still remembered. He then moved to the back of the cell and threw himself to the back going into the water.

"Hey, crazy, I think your brother just threw himself in the warm pool," the head warden said, and sir black had always tried not to feel angry, but something about how the wardens spoke pissed him off to no end. He had long stopped feeling angry or phased by the monsters the world brought forth each day, but sitting in such a place for ten years, drinking where defecating, staying in the dark all the while, and dying like an animal was not a death anyone deserved. Even when he killed his father, he had done it quickly, yet this monster here tortured a man for a decade for loving secret arts.

Sir black stared at the now-empty cubicle behind the cage for a long while before he stood up. The man who had just died was a man he had looked up to, and to think his last moments were so inhumane. He finally stood up and just let the lamb fall through the rails separating the circular cages and the deep hole in front of them. The torch fell for a few seconds before it hit water.

"Hey, you might be mourning, but that touch was important," the head waiter said.

"He was a man I looked up to," Sir black said silently.

"Yeah whatever the wish you asked from the king has expired. Time to leave. The head warden said, turning around.

"I didn't know he could get emotional," the second warden said, and the three men chuckled, starting to leave. They did not even care to see if he was following. Well, it's not like he was going to choose to remain behind willingly.

sir black followed after the three men and through the small stone-carved corridor and up the ladder before they emerged at the top.

"Wait for me," Sir Black said, hurrying up. "Help me up, my up," he said in a level, calm voice. The head warden was walking at the back, and he just snickered in irritation, but turned around to help the guy.

Sir black wrapped his hand around the head warden's arm and pulled himself up. He however, did not climb all the way up and instead used his hand yank. The others had already walked ahead into the spiraling stairs pathway between the rocks.

"What are you doing?" the warden asked, his eyes widening with horror. The ledge he was standing on was flat, and there was nowhere to hold himself on.

"Giving you a taste of hell." sir black smiled before he yanked hard, and the man went tumbling into the darkness and fell in a small splash.

No one was going to get out of there alive. sir black thought as he stepped behind the two unsuspecting wardens with his daggers drawn. There were just too many monsters, and he could only be the only monster to live. One of them was already enough.

Chapter 103 - 101. TEAM WORK

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"Again!" Matasi announced. He was the formation instructor, and he was really brutal. "That was the most careless attack I have ever seen. " Moving like that, you will kill all your teammates before you even kill the enemy," he said, shaking his head. Teams had

been broken into twos. sagiri had conveniently ended up with Kaka as an inside joke for Team Ten, and their teamwork was impeccably terrible.

Kaka hit all the targets, and before sagiri could even pull out his blades, he had conveniently thrown sagiri to the ground and cursed him to get out of the way. They really were the worst march up, and Matasi had to break it up before one blade could go in between sagiri's eyes. The only one to match Kaka was kiuga, and it was still a terrible matchup because of their different personalities, but they managed to work like a bad case of madness.

The teams have been failing badly. Matasi had started teaching them how to fend off and attack three opponents of almost the same strength as the two. sagiri had finally been paired with nvaru and he had fared so badly, too. Their teamwork in an attack was terrible.

"i cant believe you killed a muddy water scorpion by yourself, and you have almost stabbed your teammate in the back six times," Matasi cursed. Other teams of two were starting to fit in, and yet sagiri could not. "If you can't work in a team of two, how are you going to work in a squad of ten. Matasi continued, but after he said the first sentence, the whole arena went silent, and even Kaka wheeled around to look at him. Everyone turned to look at him as if he were now interesting.

The mission with Salka squad was a secret, or it wasn't, but sagiri did not think it was supposed to be public knowledge. He could feel different unfiltered emotions flooding the air, and they pressed onto him like a wall of bricks.

"I did that on instinct. I was only thinking of protecting myself," Sagiri answered in a low voice, but with a lack of movement in the arena, everyone heard it loud and clear. It was as if he couldn't escape the spotlight, and he had given up on trying to.

"That is the same way you will be attacking your opponent. attack like your life depends on it. the only difference this time is that you have to coordinate with your teammates," Matasi said, ignoring the blatant curiosity from everyone.

"What are you looking at. Get back to your training. yes the recruit's senses can not be rivaled, and he is more vicious than he looks. you better work hard before he surpasses you," Matasi said, and the tensions rose in the arena, and hostility came with it. Did Matasi want him dead? well it was too late to hide what he was capable of, and it was time he lived up to it. There was nothing to his anymore since his benefactor came for him, and he was sure the hypnotized girl and manboy escaped. The two already witnessed him in action, and he only tried to hide his capabilities so his benefactor wouldn't know, but there was no reason to hide it anymore.

"Sagiri the blind, I did not know you were that skilled. you have to tell me everything," Kiuga cheered and pulled sagiri under his armpit. "Kaka i think our sagiri here has finally surpassed you," Kiuga said, and Kaka drew his weapons. It was as if Kiuga and Matasi were working together to finish him off.

"I was just lucky," kiuga said.

"At least own it with pride and give the creature the honour of dying by your blade," Kaka snapped, and sagiri moved away instinctively from Kaka. The man was always irritated, and he could not understand sagiri at all.

"kiuga, bukata zazarie, get into position," Matasi said. "All three of you attack me, and maybe everyone can see what moving as a team means," Matasi continued. Just like always, the three always complemented each other's skills.

The three sank into position their small blades drawn in front of them. There was no signal ordered, but after three heartbeats, the three boys charged. Zazarie went for Matasi's feet right away, slashing. While Kiuga, the blade, aimed at Matasi's middle body. Matasi evaded both attacks by jumping back and up, and one of his blades connected with the incoming blade effortlessly.

Bukata followed with a kick to the head, but he was deterred with a back elbow from Matasi, which sent him back a few feet. Even in his absence, the two continued their combined attack before Bukata finally joined. Even though the boys were still far below Matasi in skills, he still had to move as fast to fend off the three boys. Their teamwork was so impeccable that they almost appeared to be cornering Matasi. The attacks finally stopped when Matasi announced an end.

"These three are the closest thing to a team we have. They almost have no loopholes, and they know each other's movements so much so that even with one gone, they still held on without colliding," Matasi explained what everyone had already seen.

"Now in teams of two, now, in your individual squads I want you to train together and merge your skills so much so when I come again in the next class next week, I don't want to see those terrible moves," Matasi said before walking out of the arena, and immediately he stepped away, squad 25 swarmed Sagiri demanding to know what had happened on his day away.

Sagiri did not expect the sudden attention, and even the other teams close to them were listening.

"They just needed me for my senses to locate a nest of tree snakes. Something was wrong, however. The snakes were held hostage, so Salka's squad had to eliminate the scorpions fast before the nest. I was only there to perceive the number," sagiri said, trying to reduce his achievement in the battle as much as possible.

"Matasi said you killed one," Maita said.

"It came for me out of the water, and I took a blind hit," Sagiri lied again. he had always lied to hide his weird abilities, so it was not hard. "It had already been wounded by Salka," he said, trying to downplay his achievement. It was for the best. Rivalry was good, but too much achievement could breed hostility.

"still you got to join squad Salka," Ulekai said with envy.

"Only because their tracker was hurt during the attack," sagiri said, and everyone nodded.

After a few more questions, they finally let him go. Unlike the other fourth-year students, who had to continue perfecting their skills. sagiri had to train in the basics of bow and arrow handling and the art of the sword. He was excited to finally be able to start his training in the two.

The next two months will be spent training with the weapons, and after that, in three months, they will be evaluated again before they start on squad missions for a month, then spend the remaining two months preparing for the finals.

The final examination would take place in the Galka War Academy since it was the biggest of all schools and had big enough terrains to hold even entire villages. The exams were so complex and famous across the country of Tagayia that even dignitaries came to watch. Generals of various military guilds would be there to scale out raw talent. Two batch grand marshals of the four colleges would also be there. Nginkas and kuns also attended. Grand zoraths would also be in attendance, and sometimes even the supreme ruler of Tagayia could show up.

That is how famous warriors were made, and their fame could spread before they even joined a college for two years, and perhaps jumpstart their careers. sagiri knew for sure his benefactor must have been one of those dignitaries, and his only hope was that the man was not too powerful. Powerful enough to alter his fate. He had finally figured out how to merge with the archive during training and even send out his senses while he trained to increase his perception radius, just as Kolu had said, yet he still knew he was not strong enough.

To the others, the six months might have been a time for them to prepare for an exam to get into college, but for him, it was a time he only had to get strong enough to be able to fight the man pulling strings and even protect his friends if it came to that. He hated to admit it, but his strength alone was not enough. No matter how good he could get in weaponry in the coming six months or how tall he could grow since he had not stopped growing each day, he knew it was not enough. He needed the archive inside of him. he needed to borrow its power to protect them both.

To do that, he needed to break the barrier that was blocking his archive. He had to get strong in six months. Something inside him could not help but think that the six months remaining till the final exam, cutting across the ten schools, was the only peaceful time he could ever have.

He planned to ask senraki to allow him into the central Pentagon, too, so he could widen his studying pool. He was going to train harder than ever now. Even if his skills might never get as good as Kaka Asakana's, he still needed to rise in skill, not to depend on the archive entirely. When they finally merged, it needed to be a combined strength.

These three months were going to be where he pushed himself the hardest in every area. It was necessary.

Chapter 104 - 102. PERFECTION.

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They were perfecting just another formation with three working together and and sagiri standing at the centre of the formation. It had been almost three months of training, and the team was beginning to look like a team. Kaka still thought that it was a waste of time, and it had earned him a journey to the suspension chamber a few times before he finally decided to even try to cooperate.

In this current formation, it was three, and the setting could be in the dark, where they could not see and needed sagiri's sensory. All he had to do was stand at the centre and give instructions. Or just squat and yell instructions. They had even come up with code numbers for each person. kiuga wanted to give him the number bone, but King Bami said one would always belong to him. Sagiri ended up with number six. he could not have the enemies understand their movements, so he could just yell a number and yell a direction and let the guys use their perception abilities and their limited sight to maximize their output. It's not as if they were blind and could not help themselves. They had also been taught to fight without their six senses. It's just that sagiri was better at sensory, and he acted as a catalyst.

Even if it was just practice. Matasi always invited junior or senior instructors who wanted to take part, and being a war school, the instructors were just bored since there were no more classes for the fourth-year cadets, except for

Always training in the outer pentagon district in the natural training fields like rocky climbing ridges, sand pits, manmade lakes for water drills, long distance running routes, ambush and stealth fields, for weapon and combat training. sagiri had spent quite some time in the archery lines, spear-throwing courts, and obstacle arenas. His hands had hardened and scraped from how hard he had been pushed and pushed himself. Salka was right when he said that the place is where students prove their physical and mental endurance.

Beast Combat Grounds were also a thing, and students, especially from bami tribe, battled against big cats in strength, like in a game of tag where a rope could be put in the mouth of a beast, and a student could pull to see who could budge first. Kaka had been the only one to rival a big cat, and he was being trained especially under Captain Salka, who was the instructor for that.

For Sagiri, it was futile to try. he had grown a few inches tall in the past three months, and now stood at the same height with Bukata Zazarie and zoliath who were neither too tall nor too short. His build had also become more athletic, and Kaka no longer gave him trouble because he could now eat ten. Yet he could still not compare in strength to Kaka, who was the one who loved to play the game of tag and even spar with the big cats sometimes.

sagiri had finally understood what Salka's pets were. The man kept all types of big cats, and turns out they ate a lot, and that is why he always hunted a lot in the outer nonagon. It turns out that pet duty involved cleaning their kennels and seeing how much he fed them sagiri could only imagine the waste and smell. No wonder Lotaga begged every time he was put on pet duty as punishment. Turns out the Galka War Academy logo descended from the Bami tribe; their love for keeping big cats like a lion, and for a man to be respectable, he either had to battle one and win or bring it to total obedience and tame it. Salka had kept his big cats since they were pups. He had lions, tigers, jaguas and even some leopards.

He had even acquired a secret tribe arts zone where he tried to train with his weapon. It had taken him over two months to finally make progress, and even so, the blades had only responded twice during his time training. He had started to learn how to merge his will

and the archive, even so, and even that always dwindles fast. he could not understand the reason, so he just worked on getting stronger in other ways. He was given the deep brown sash after the midterm exam and a month later, a forest green sash after he perfected the spear dances and scored eighty point sin small blade handling. Of course, only him was tasted alone on this.

A month later, after his skill with the sword improved again and he was able to hit just outside the bull's eye after many failures and long nights of training, he was given the forest green sash, and every step of this required him to earn initiation punches from his teammates. They had said it was only required in the first exam, and he guessed they were doing it for fun, but he just let them. He had grown to get fond of the nine boys, even Banga, who talked the least and always looked at him as if he were some equation he was trying to figure out. well he was one of the best innovators of Galka War Academy, and it was only natural for him to be curious since he was from the central plains, and Sagiri was someone who made him curious because he couldn't figure out how he worked. he wanted to figure out his mechanisms just like a machine.

The team had also been doing patrols on the outer walls for patrol training, but always under a senior instructor. It seemed Salka was not taking any chances after the attack on Galka War Academy and after the intruder made it in. The instructor, of course, tried to remain invisible and just watch, and only get involved if it was necessary or fire a red flare for backup.

sagiri had earned quite some respect in the last few months for himself, and he did not get any scornful glares anymore. He had to admit it felt good to finally rise in the hierarchy and be seen as a rival and not a nuisance. his emotions growth had not progressed any further, however, as if everything triggered by the archive had stagnated again, and he couldn't quite break the code of why.

Kaka 1 kiuga 2 bukata 3 zazarie 4 maita 5 ulekai 7 zoliath 8 banga 9 nvaru 10. That was their code numbers. They each had their sash tied around their eyes, even sagiri. They were all standing in the middle of the combat arena in three-man defensive positions, with sagiri at the centre with his forest green sash across his eyes. he had his hands folded across his chest, his oru seals tightly on his ears. he did not need to use both his

hearing and eyes to know where each of his teammates was. The other teams were now gathered around to watch, and even Salka and Senraki stood at the highest point looking down. Sometimes the captain and the grand marshal came to see the progress of the students themselves.

Six junior instructors surrounded them on each of the three sides. sagiri pushed his senses out. He had gotten better at that, and he could not only perceive his team but the whole team. He concentrated harder on his team, however. In front of him was Kaka's team with ulekai and banga right behind him, both in a low defensive stance, forming a triangle with banga at the back and the other two at the front. The three always worked well because they were not as competitive as Kaka, and they could let him do almost all the work while they watched his back.

The other three, sagiris, right, and back were kiuga bukata, Zazarie, Bukata, and Zazarie at the front and kiuga at the back. His position will be to protect sagiri if necessary and still watch the backs of the two in front. To Sagiri's left and back were Maita, N'varu, and Zoliath, and the three were a powerhouse. Maita and N'varu were front with Zoliath at the back of the triangle. the three triangles formed a shape like a hexagon on the outside and a triangle on the inside around sagiri as if to protect him if necessary, because if he moved in such a situation, then the whole team could crash.

"Ready?" maita announced, and the nine unsheathed their blades finally. Of course. The sound of small blades filled the arena that had now gone silent. The other cadets had seen this formation a hundred times, but they still came to see sagiri in action. He had become quite the talk of the Pentagon after the first time they tried it out.

"The tamelku can see in the dark with their eyes open, but he doesn't even need to use his eyes." A whisper reached his ears as always.

"yes sir!" Both the cadets and the junior instructors got into position.

"Start!" his voice announced, echoing in the whole arena.

There was a momentary pause before there was motion, and Sagiri's mouth moved.

Chapter 105 - 103: DON'T FIGHT IT

Chapter 105: 103: DON'T FIGHT IT

"Move!" Matasi announced, and there was a long pause before the squad moved. Of course they had to hold their defensive position until the junior instructors attacked. Kiuga was the one to come up with the strategy. The man hated working as much as possible, so no wasted movements were allowed in his plan. Squad 25 was the only team with such a formation because they had Sagiri and so it was Kiuga who had come up with the formation.

As soon as the instructors moved, so did Sagiri's mouth.

"1, two coming for you, 7 offer support," Sagiri said, and Ulekai moved closer to Kaka so he could help.

"2, 3, and 4. One airborne, another coming centre. 5, 8, 10, you have moved far forward from the formation." Members of Squad 25 moved fast, barely after his words left his mouth. Team N'varu was holding up well. N'varu's was good in sensory too, but of course not as good as Sagiri. Everyone was, and Sagiri only had to step in when there was a need. The team worked well at the start, but halfway through Sagiri could tell that the junior

instructors were holding back as if they were leading them by the nose. he pushed his senses outward again, though it could take a toll on him, and just then, he could feel them. Six more appearances. They were standing beside Salka and senraki in the raised platform.

Just when he perceived them, one released a blade from above coming for him. he had only two options. to alert his teammates, which could make them panic or just defend the blade on their own while still keeping tabs on his teammates. Just when the dagger got released, as if receiving a signal, the junior instructors started going harder. It seemed that someone had planned to orchestrate an ambush while they were deeply engaged in the battle. The someone and the agenda did not seem like it was to test the whole team, but sagiri in case something out of the ordinary happened while they were in the middle of battle.

The blade whooshed through the air, coming straight for sagiri and he was sure others could hear it too, but now the junior instructors were going twice as hard, and he knew that they were pinned down, and a sudden call for help would cause the whole team to go into a frenzy and lose it, which would in turn be detrimental.

"2, six unaccounted incoming, might need a change of plan," he said loud enough. Even though he could not hear his own voice because he was wearing the oru seals, he knew kiuga heard him. However, he needed to take them off quickly, and with the blade incoming, he needed to make haste.

His right hand shot out and caught the blade just when it was about to go between his eyebrows. With his left hand, he pulled out his left seal and barely had time to put it away before another blade was launched at him.

"6 is under attack, don't break formation, don't pull in all out," kiuga said, and everyone tensed, but if anything, they were now fighting harder than ever. sagiri knew that if he just fended off the attack by swatting the blade, it might land in the back of one of his

friends, and so he could just stop the second blade with his left hand before it could get itself embedded in his heart. It was as if they were trying to kill him or put him in a position where he would not be able to help his squad. Everyone around gasped, and sagiri knew every member of Squad 25 could hear. After all, it was only their eyes that were covered.

sagiri had just managed to catch the two blades launched at him, but before he could do anything else, two more were launched his way. At this rate, he would not have time to help his team and block his attacks at the same time. yes squad 25 had perfected the formation so much so that it did not have a loophole when against the set number of instructors, but it seemed that Salka and Senraki wanted to taste him. he was used to having his teammates watch his back, and he was just watching all their backs and fronts.

It was as if someone was asking him, what if your teammates were so pinned down they could not defend you, and you were required to fight as well. he needed to defend himself while he still watched his team's back, especially if they could not see where the attack was coming from and it was aimed at him.

sagiri turned around swiftly and sank low on one knee before catching the first blade and pulling even further back.

"zoliath i need you to get a boost," sagiri yelled, and Zoliath moved back, breaking the triangle. He got on his knees quickly as three blades came for sagiri. sagiri jumped on Zoliath's shoulder, using it as a pivot. He tapped his foot on his shoulder and used the momentum to propel himself in the air a few feet. His right foot hit the first blade's handle and sent it flinging. he caught the second blade barely and missed the third by a whisper. He twisted his body to escape the blade, but it ate his skin.

sagiri hissed. damn it, they were not holding back.

"1, two blades coming at you from above." sagiri managed not to break his sensory radius even as the pain caused him to almost break concentration.

"2 the six are coming from all sides," sagiri said as he landed and released the blades from his hands, letting them clatter to the floor in a thud. His hand reached into his pocket on instinct and he pulled out his blade. It was already humming responding to his distress, and the blades snapped out with a violent snap when he wielded them. Even with his eyes covered, he could almost taste the dangerous glint. Such a treacherous weapon. Refusing to show its blades, but now in front of everyone, it was excited.

leech blade. only using me for attention. sagiri thought

It was the first time the cadets watching were seeing it. gasps filled the place, but four more blades were released from above. It was as if Salka was determined to push him to the corner. The six who had been beside him must have come down when the assault on him started, and now they were closing in on squad 25. Even squad 25 had never seen him use the blade.

But just at the same time, Salka released three more blades. Squad 25 was on the verge of disarray, and it was kiuga holding it together as sagiri was left barely any breath.

"6, don't get too excited and take our heads off," kiuga said, managing to laugh even as the situation grew tense. The instructors were more skilled than they were, and they were not blindfolded. "Kaka i think it's time you got excited," kiuga said, and Kaka snickered. He was managing to hold back the two junior instructors without even the help of banga and ulekai.

The three incoming blades this time met Sagiri's break in crushing contact, and they were shattered into pieces, but Sagiri made sure to send them flying in a direction where he could not end up stabbing his teammates. more gasps as he whipped the blade around violently. It felt easier to use than any other weapon, just like when he used it to kill the muddy river scorpion, and he was getting excited.

"The six finally made contact, and it was now twelve against nine. The instructors were holding back except those going against kaka but somehow the squad was now pinned down.

"Stop protecting me. Zoliath, give me a boost," sagiri yelled, excitement of some sort filling his lungs. Whenever he used the blade, it was as if he could finally taste battle, and he loved it. Zoliath barely managed to move back, squatted, and went back to battle. That was all sagiri needed. He was feeling light as he launched himself in the air and landed in front of N'varus team. His blade connected with that of two instructors, and as if he had grown a new pair of wings, he went berserk.

He pushed the instructors back, and with his blade, they were soon pushed on the defensive. He could feel the archive hum, and his veins started getting buzzed with the power of the archive.

"he is fast," one instructor said, and as if feeling the shift, team 25 peeled back their blindfolds. They had never seen the blade he was wielding except for nvaru who had seen it once when he was in his private art arena. One of the two times it came to life before it retracted, he had never seen it use it to kill.

"Put your blindfolds back. We don't break formation." Kiuga managed to keep a level head and saved Squad 25 from another lecture. The team always listened to Kiuga and they got back their blindfolds and resorted to fighting even though now they had clearly lost some advantage.

It was Sagiri against four with his blindfold on. The fight with the other instructors continued. The four were barely holding the blindfolded boy back, and Kaka was now fighting three by himself, leaving Banga and Ulekai to hold back one while the other two teams of three were holding back each other.

The fight had just gotten interesting, and Sagiri could feel different emotions crashing into him, and it made him more excited. He spun the double blades in the air, and the air around them cackled. The instructor had gotten into formation of two, and they were not holding back anymore.

"What are those blades?" Sagiri could hear one of the wonders. Sagiri with the blade was no further in prowess than Bekuro with the daggers. It was as if the weapon was made for him and him alone, and suddenly, echoes of images flashed in his and he suddenly fell to his knees. They were not so intense at first, and he continued to hold his own, but they intensified a second later. It was as if a hammer was splitting his head behind his eyes, and he lost his footing suddenly.

It had been a while since he got the memories and images of places he had never been to, and this one was more intense than anything. He staggered back, avoiding two attacks from the instructors who had been pushed and forgotten for a mere second.

"Stop," Matasi said after seeing Sagiri stagger back. Sagiri groaned loudly, letting his blade fall out of his hands. The blade, now out of his hands, snapped its blades back. Squad 25 pulled their blindfolds away, and Nvaru was by his side.

"What is it?" he asked in a low voice, but with the current tension, everyone could hear. sagiri could not answer and instead fell back down and groaned again.

"Don't fight it. The more you fight it, the more you will get hurt." N'varu mattered lowly, and sagiri wailed.

"What happened?" sagiri had somehow jumped down, and Senraki was beside him.

"We have not harmed him. He just fell," one instructor said, and Salka inhaled sharply.

sagiri followed Nvaru's instructions amidst the chaos, and he forced his mind into meditative slumber. He needed to relax so that his mind would not fight with the broken images in his memory.

Chapter 106 106: 106. NOKAI

sagiri followed Nvaru's instructions amidst the chaos, and he forced his mind into meditative slumber. He needed to relax so that his mind would not fight with the broken images in his memory.

A hand was carrying a blade. the same blade he was holding now. The hand's owner was standing in the middle of the desert holding the handle at the centre of two blades. The blade glimmered even more dangerously with every touch under the sun. It was even longer now, longer than the man holding it. It was as if the blade always grew to fit the wielder.

The man is covered in brown clothes, the colour of the desert. The only thing sagiri can see are his eyes, and they are red, just like sagiri's left eye, which is always covered in an eye veil that merged seamlessly with his eyeball. He had never taken it off since Bakuru gave it to him.

The man is not hiding his red eyes, and he, in fact, looks eyes in front proudly. The blade he wielded touched the sand under him, making it rise with it, making a swirl of sand around him. With every move he makes, the sand responds, and it dances with him as if they are one.

sagiri feels so much kinship with the man, and when the man spins the blade and turns around in his place, now there is a woman wielding the blades he wielded them with so much vigour, just as the man and the sun danced with her elegant moves as if the dance was meant for the desert. She smiled widely as the sand around her formed shapes around her made by the moves of the desert.

She moved again and again, and when she turned around, it was a man wielding the blade again, then another man, then a woman. Just like what happened when sagiri wielded the bow and arrow that day and touched the words engraved on it. When he had seen the very history of that blade, how it had been passed down from generations. It was as if he were going through the history of the blade he wielded. the red eyes strangers in his echo reflections must have been the wielders of the blade. Now thinking about it, he did not yet know the name of the blade. It was as if with every person it was passed down to a name that sat on sagiri's mouth, yet he could not yet find it.

The exchange continued, and they all wore the same brown that matched the desert as if they had risen from the very desert itself. Now that he was not fighting the echo reflection, it did not hurt his head. It was as if giving in was taking him, father, into the archive memories. Finally, the blade was handed to a woman, and sagiri had seen this woman again and again. The woman had a striking appearance to him.

Her movements are even more elegant as if she had elevated and added to the moves, and the desert around her danced with her. To him, she was the strongest wielder of the blade, and he was not even fighting the echoes now. He had willingly surrendered to her dance.

She spun the blade on top of her head and behind her back before she jumped backwards as if she did not need her hands to be propelled through the air. As if the desert was aiding in her moves, making her seem like she was floating in the air whenever she jumped. He could even hear the desert's excitement as she danced. The dance started slow and elegant, but grew faster and more violent, yet it did not elude any violence. No move in the dance was made to kill, and every move seemed like it was meant to please the desert.

The more she danced, the more sagiri wanted to dance. Everyone who had gathered was now looking at him, wondering why he had wailed in pain, then sat in silence. total silence. It had been a few minutes to them, but sagiri had been watching the dance for months as the blade was handed over. Just like with bow and arrow, he was it was as if he merged with her rhythm. His hand stretched out and grabbed the blade, suddenly making everyone who had gathered move back. The blades responded to his touch and snapped out, and the snap was even stronger now. He still sat, but everyone moved a few feet away from him as if they were watching something bizarre happen in front of him.

The tension around him rose, and she was suddenly aware that he was standing in the desert band he had never such a sense of belonging and oneness with a place and even kinship with the woman. It was as if for the first time, he was begging to understand the blades. He was not in the arena anymore, and he was sitting in the middle of the desert. His eyes were red now, and there he did not have to hide the red eye. he had never felt so free as if he was not carrying the weight of the entire world.

He did not have to learn this dance because he somehow already knew it. Unlike the sword and spear dances and other weapon dances, this one he did not have to learn, and yet it was the dance he knew most. Still with the forest green sash covering his eyes, he suddenly stood to his feet and got into position to start the dance, just like the handlers of people that he had seen in the echo reflection. The woman stood in front of him in a starting position again, and he got into position behind him.

As if announcing the dance, he sank low with the woman, and after a second, they both moved. The desert around them rose to meet them. It rose even higher, and sagiri moved easily. In the arena, the cadets and the instructors had moved further back as they watched him dance. It was clear they had never seen such a dance, but they could not deny the beauty. To add to the beauty was the blindfold on his eyes, making it more melancholic and beautiful. The arena was completely silent as they watched the boy move in a dance they had never seen before. Everyone held curiosity and questions, yet no one dared speak or move their eyes from him as if they were enchanted by the dance. Even Matasi did not move to stop the dance, nor did Salka and senraki who were standing the closest to sagiri's position.

Just like the woman sagiri seemed like he was floating. The dance started slowly and then grew more violent. The blades cut through the air violently, yet the blade and the moves held no killing intent. It was a dance that felt like time itself. He bent his body backwards, but he did not need support, nor did he need the support of his blade. He held the position for a while before he stood up and spun around with the blade.

just like the woman in the reflection, he threw the blade into the air, where it spun around for a while, lifting the sand around him in circular motion, before it started to land. Sagiri jumped in the air to meet it halfway, and it landed on his hand. They both spun around a few times before he landed softly, facing forward, where the woman was. In the arena, however, he was looking right at Salka and sagiri. The desert around them calmed down with the end of the dance, and the woman vanished as if officially handing over the blades to him.

sagiri bowed slightly to the place the woman had been standing. As if he needed to finish the dance to finally know the name of the sword, he finally knew its name.

Nokai, the last whisper.

"Nokai," he whispered, and he could feel the blade responding to him finally. It hummed silently in his arms, making the echo stir violently in response before the blades snapped back into the handle.

He suddenly felt boneless as the world around him came crushing to him with the hundreds of eyes watching him. he had not been aware of them as he danced in the desert. He could still feel the desert around him, and he had never felt so distant from everyone as in that moment. Everyone felt faceless, and he wished he could be back in that desert and not in the arena with the three hundred or fewer people. He had also never been so at peace and felt more connected with Nokai.

Perhaps Nokai had not been responding to him because they had just been strangers till then. now however, they were one.

The dance and the echo reflections had exhausted him completely, and he felt as if he were made of rubber. The blade fell from his hands, and he fell backwards, boneless, and the world went black.

Chapter 107: IT IS STILL A 'NO'

Chapter 107: 107: IT IS STILL A 'NO'

Sagiri jolted awake, lying on a soft surface. He sat up, wondering if he was in the healing wing again, and sighed in relief when he found out that he was not. The room was too small to be in the healing wing. It seemed to be in the middle of the night because he could hear snores from their rooms. They were supposed to go on a patrol with their team before bedtime and another early in the morning with twelve other squads. Apart from training, they had also had patrol duties. He felt rested, and his body felt fully charged even though he had slept all the way through supper.

The patrol will be their last before they are assigned missions within Galka City and northern regions for a month before they come back to prepare for the final. Every school could be around this time to go out on field work in areas generally around their school. At this time, they would live as a squad among the people in an institute, especially those from innovation schools, as interns and even in healing houses for those from high schools from the east. For war schools like Galka and Konate they would be assigned to military bases or whatever the instructors thought best.

It was already three in the morning, and there was no need to go back to bed since the school would be up in an hour. The first thing he did was to look for Nokai it was nowhere to be found. He shot up and looked around the room, but Nokai was gone. He did not even care to be silent anymore as he threw the door almost off its hinges and spilled out of his room in panic.

He now knew the weapon connected him to his clan, even though he still did not know the name or who they were. The red eyes were evident enough, even if he only possessed one. It was the only thing connecting him to a line of people he did not know, but who he now knew wielded the weapon he had so carelessly left in a fault for months in Galka War Academy when he could have connected with them sooner.

He ran across the corridor, and of course, a warder was standing at the gate. Some junior instructor rank. Junior instructors were the ones who took the role of wardens, too.

"Go back to bed, cadet," is all he said, not bulging from his position.

"Where is Nokai?" he said frantically, and the guy just stared at him as if he had grown another head.

"You better not be sleepwalking," the warden said, adjusting his obsidian black sash.

"My weapon. I was unconscious when they brought me here, but I had a weapon," Sagiri said, and the archive stirred silently at his distress and the absence of Nokai. At the mention of the state he had been in, the warden finally turned to look at him as if he had suddenly become a person of interest.

"You are that boy?" he asked, looking him up and down. sagiri could now recall what he had done in his trance because it was in the memory of the archive. He had really gone and done it and made himself not only the talk of the students but also the instructors. What a bother. But he did not care anymore, he wanted to see nokai and he wanted to see him immediately.

"Yes. now where is my weapon?" sagiri asked, and he did not know how long he was going to be patient for. He suddenly did not have any patience when it came to Nokai. He did not want to ever part with the weapon.

"I don't know about the weapon, but it was Captain who carried you here from the arena," the warden said, and sagiri could not perceive any lies from him. "He should be awake right now in the pits," he added, stepping aside.

"But come back immediately. students shouldn't be out at this time," the warden added as sagiri walked through. He made his way to the central pentagon, and the wardens just let him through. It was the warden at the door of the dormitory wing who had the biggest say, so if he let him out, then the others could just ask his destination.

The central pentagon was awake, but a silent commotion befell it. sagiri knew the central pentagon well by now, and he just walked in the direction of the training pits. It didn't take him long to reach the one with the highest probability of Salka being there. The sound of bodies making contact was the first to reach his ears before he even broke through the doors. The pits were situated underground, but it was well lit with artificial lighting.

It seemed that Squad Salka was training in the pits, and sagiri was not prepared for the level of violence the five men eluded. Lotaga was in attendance, and it seemed like Salka had finally allowed him back into the squad salka or maybe not. sagiri could not tell what Salka was thinking.

The formation looked like Salka and Lotaga were standing at the centre backs to each other with spears drawn out, while the other three surrounded them. The three attacked suddenly in unison, and it was not one at a time in different places, but the formation was so perfect that they almost left Salka and Lotaga no loophole to defend. Because the weapon in question was spears, they kept a distance, yet no loophole.

Salka did not look cornered, even so, and he attacked quickly, pushing Matasi and yavaga ta the same time. They moved back a step, but Kolu closed the gap immediately. Salka stuck his sword to the ground, and as if on cue, Lotaga stepped on the elevated position, jumped in the air, and landed a solid hit on Kolu. Their weapons collided in a thundering collision that the air cackled, but Kolu was only pushed back a few inches before he launched the next attack. Salka was the one who blocked the attack as if Lotaga was just an extension of Limp.

The sparring went on and on, and the movements, attacks, and defenses were so fast that Sagiri almost missed them. It looked like they were actually trying to kill each other rather than just mere training. sagiri was sure that if one broke the formation, a person could easily die. The training was so vicious that it made all the squad 25's team work and formations look like children's play. They had a long way to go, or even a few years, to even dream of reaching the level of Salka's squad.

They finally stopped after a while, and they did not even look breathless apart from the sweat that was dripping down their chest. All of them had their combat overalls with their top half unworn and the arms of the suit tied around their waist. They must have been training for more than two hours for them to be dripping that much water.

They all finally turned to sagiri as if they had known he was there all along alone.

"sagiri, did you miss me and come to thank your role model?" It was Lotaga. It seemed even after all the punishment from salka the man had not changed one bit. somethings never change, and perhaps Lotaga was one of those people who could not. Even so lotaga had been the one to teach sagiri in archery, and they had forgotten the past, and sagiri had grown a little respect for the guy. No matter how undignified he always acted, he was very competent.

"Shut up," Salka said, jumping out of the pit, his team right behind him.

"What is a recruit doing here?" It was kolu. Most of Team Salka still called him a recruit even after he moved up two sashes. He was days away from receiving his midnight blue sash made for third years, and perhaps he would receive the red sash after the field exercise. That would depend on his performance, however, in the field.

Team Salka seemed not to care that he was a cadet now, but it did not bother him much, except Lotaga.

"he is a cadet now kolu, how could you feel if I called you a senior instructor?" Lotaga asked.

"I'll break you in half and teach you to obey your elders," Kolu said on a serious note, his shoulders rising and falling steadily.

"Captain, can I have my weapon back?" sagiri said after saluting.

"No," is all Salka said before turning to leave, but sagiri was in front of him on instinct, blocking his path.

"I have to have my weapon," sagiri said, and Lotaga whistled.

"The boy has gotten bolder," Matasi added, and sagiri realized his mistake. No matter how much he felt about Nokai, Salka was still captain, and he must have had a reason to keep it, and he'd be wise not to be on his bad side.

"I'm sorry captain but why cant i have it?" he asked, feeling frantic.

"Because, recruit, you went crazy with it. The dance you performed might have been beautiful, but you went crazy on the instructors before that, just like you did with the muddy water scorpion. I might not know what secret art of your clan you use that the weapon only responds to you, but I know when a person doesn't have control over their weapon," Salka said with all seriousness, and sagiri could not help but agree. It was true that he did not know how to use the weapon well till earlier, when the echo images gave him a taste of the past, yet now he knew how to use it.

"I told you that I protect cadets and recruits of Galka War Academy from internal and external danger," Salka said, and when Sagiri could not find the words to explain that he had suddenly connected with shadow blades.

"I know how to use Nokai now," sagiri said, but of course salka did not care to hear.

"It's still a no. You have breakfast and patrol. leave before I put you on pet tending duty with Lotaga." Salka said with finality before he turned to leave, and this time sagiri did not know what to say to get Salka back. The whole Salka squad followed after him, not paying him anymore attention.

"Why do I have to go to pet tending duty?" Lotaga whined, walking behind Salka as their voices faded away.

Chapter 108. DISTRESS

Chapter 108: 108. DISTRESS

"Because, recruit, you went crazy with it. The dance you performed might have been beautiful, but you went crazy on the instructors before that, just like you did with the muddy water scorpion. I might not know what secret art of your clan you use that the weapon only responds to you, but I know when a person doesn't have control over their weapon."

Sagiri could not stop thinking about Salka's words even as he walked back to the fourth-year pentagon. Everyone was already up, and he should have gone to team training, but losing and parting with Nokai felt as if she lost a limb. He had never undergone or felt heartbroken, but he was sure what he was feeling at that moment was what heartbreak was. Sagiri did not care if he could get punished for missing morning meditation and morning squad patrol before breakfast. He did not even feel hungry, and he did not even want to eat.

Nokai was the last piece his clan and family left him. It felt as if someone had ripped out his heart and stabbed it with a knife. He had never experienced such a feeling, so much so that he wanted to throw up. He felt defeated and did not know how to prove to Salka that he could not hurt anyone with the weapon. Was he sure that he could not hurt anyone at any point in the future by accident anyway? He believed that Salka would return his weapon one day, but the problem was that he did not want to part with Nokai at all. Not even for a minute.

He sat at the very edge of the top of the pentagon behind the arena and looked at the terrain below. The landscape looked so peaceful in the darkness of the morning, a sharp contrast to the storm raging in his heart. Silence stretched far and wide, and his mind wandered. He could still feel the sand of the forest under his feet and remember the feeling of dancing with the sand as if he had actually been there. As if he was born to be there.

"Are you going to kill yourself or something? I can tell you that that is the worst way to die," a voice jolted him out of his thoughts, and he jumped and almost went tumbling. It was Lotaga. Sagiri did not always bother to salute Lotaga because the man never cared for that, and every time he saluted him, he could tell him to loosen up.

"You know Salka isn't going to give you that weapon unless you prove to him no one would be in unnecessary danger when you use it." sagiri did not answer to that and instead got even more depressed.

"self pity wont help you get it back. Salka is not doing it to punish you, he cares about all cadets' safety." Lotaga continued, but at the moment sagiri only felt empty from losing the one thing that held history to his past.

"How can I show him I can handle it when I don't have it anymore? besides we are leaving soon for field work," sagiri said, and Lotaga looked to be in thought before he finally spoke.

"Being outside the academy might increase your chances of getting it. Don't you think?" Lotaga said, and sagiri could not get what he was saying. How would it increase his chances when they were about to leave the academy for a month?

"What do you mean?" sagiri asked, his curiosity piqued. Maybe Kiuga could have understood, but he was not good at the game of guessing.

"I have to go before I'm put in those dens again by that monster Salka because I'm not supposed to be her," Lotaga said, shuddering and shuddering at the mention of kennels. "think cadet, think," Lotaga said, literally hoping it away, and his words left sagiri more confused than he had been at the start.

How do I get Nokai back? was all sagiri could think about as he watched morning finally break. he was still not in the mood to eat, so he stayed above the pentagon till it was time for assembly. Only then did he make a move to leave.

Soon, it was assembly time, and sagiri finally left the arena on top of the fourth-year pentagon. He had still not found the answer to how to convince Salka to give him back Nokai. They were about to be assigned field work placements where they would be for a month or more, but one thing was for sure. When they came back, the final high school exams were to be held. He needed to get back nokai before then or sooner. He knew something would happen during the final exam. There was no doubt about it. His benefactor must have sent him to galka war academy for a reason, and he was the reason that could be accomplished on the final exam.

Sagiri could not hear what was being said by the instructors until it was time to leave. Of course, the fourth-year cadets were asked to remain behind since they had to prepare to leave. Each team is still accompanied by a senior instructor or above rank. They had always been accompanied by senior instructor Bekuro during their patrols for the best three months on days they had patrol exercises. Would he be the one accompanying them again? sagiri did not care for that. He just wanted Nokai to accompany him.

He had not spoken to his teammates as he stood at the far end, but after the three lower years filtered out, he could feel all eyes on him. Every cadet was looking at him hard, and they were not even trying to hide it. He dared to turn around, and indeed, all eyes were on him. They all now looked at him the way Banga did. They could not understand how he did some of the things he did. It was as if they looked at him hard enough, they would suddenly figure out the formula.

In the commotion as the lower years' footsteps faded, he could hear the whispers.

"What was that dance? I have never seen anything like it."

"I have never seen such a dance. it was beautiful but foreign," another said.

"he doesn't have a clan or tribe i hear, because he was abandoned at birth. He must be from a lost clan," another speculated.

"Perhaps that was a secret dance of his clan. It must have taken him years to learn it," another said, referring to the difficulty of the dance and how the sand made it look like the dancer was floating. years? He had learned it in minutes if not seconds. It was as if he was born with the dance, and he did not need to learn it. The dance completely belonged to him, and its rhythm lay in his veins just like his blood.

"Gather around," a voice suddenly cut through the commotion. It was Senraki, and he had walked to the stage looking a bit more deshelled than usual. Even his purple sash was slightly crooked. Everyone fell into a respectful stance and saluted him. The grand marshal had not even cared to let anyone announce his arrival.

"Grand marshal!" the cadets saluted him in unison.

"I might have some slightly good news and slightly bad news, boys." Senraki started, and everyone shifted uneasily. His eyes regarded everyone for a long moment before he spoke again." You all were supposed to leave for your field work tomorrow, but there had been a change of plans, and you all have to live today with the senior instructor in charge of you." Senraki started, and instead of the boys looking distressed, there was cheering. The boys had stayed within the walls of the academy, and being told to leave sooner was extremely good news.

"All the 25 squads have been allocated a new instructor to go with you, and all cadets should gather with the senior instructor with their squad tag. They will be the ones to show you where you have been allocated, and they will drop you there as well. You have been allocated to the north, and you have trained hard for this moment. Some of you will get to your stations in a week or in just a few days, depending on your speed. You are to listen to the senior instructor in charge of your individual squads. cadets re not allowed to take on dangerous adventures by themselves," he said, the blast statement looking at Sagiri and Kaka.

"Cadets are not allowed to die on this mission. you of course, are not being assigned to a battle front, but no situation is to be underestimated, and even small situations sometimes can escalate into bigger ones. Anyone who disobeys their instructors in charge more than two times will be pulled out of the field and return to the academy to wait for others. Anyone who behaves inappropriately out in the wild and disgraces the grand marshal and the academy will also be pulled out and brought back. You might be under a bone instructor, but you will be watched by my secret teams at all times. The senior instructors assigned to you will tell you all the rules and regulations too, till you know them by heart," Senraki said before signaling for the cadets to move to where their tags were being held up.

Chapter 109. FISHY

"Lotaga," was all sagiri said when he followed his tag number held in the air, only to find the holder was Lotaga.

"It's senior instructor Lotaga. show some respect, cadet." Lotaga said, pushing his chest out, and sagiri just stared at him. soon the other nine arrived, and lotaga who had his combat overall zipped to the top for the first time, cleared his throat and faced the others.

"Good to see my squad 25," Lotaga started, and everyone saluted him. "I will be taking you to your post, and you will be wise to follow the lead of a war-seasoned warrior like me," he said in all seriousness.

"What are the rules and regulations we are required to follow?" Kiuga asked.

"Rules and regulations?" Lotaga asked as if that was foreign to him, and he could not, for his sake, understand what they were talking about. He must have realized he was supposed to take them through the rules and regulations at some point because an awkward laughter left his throat. "Of course of course, the rules and regulations how could I not know about the rules and regulations." He let out another awkward laugh.

Sagiri knew him well enough, since they had been stuck together on several occasions and even punished together, to know that the man was the worst at keeping rules and regulations, and he probably didn't listen to a single word when they were being briefed. He did not need to read minds to know that the man did not have one single idea about what the rules and regulations were. The word was indeed foreign to him. Why could Senraki even assign him a squad?

"Don't worry yourselves with the rules and regulations just follow what the grand marshal said and follow my lead," he threw a hand in the air as if the rules and regulations were a hindrance. The team looked at him for a while, but no one asked further.

"Now, all you need to do is go back to your pentagon, then head to the preparation wing, where you will be handed the combat-equipped bag. A combat-equipped bag is a bag with two straps that is carried on the back. It has a flask compartment for water and a place to carry the combat coat, which could withstand rain and retain cold. It was clear that the cadets were going to travel on foot to reach their posts, and so they needed to carry the combat-equipped bag. They would hunt for food or eat at military posts along the way, or Lotaga could bring them food when it was necessary.

The combat-equipped bag is small, almost fitting into the back, and wearing a combat coat overall over it when it is called for, it would completely cover it. Apart from that, each cadet was to carry two dozen daggers in the combat uniform and carry one more weapon they are confident in. Sagiri wished to carry Nokai together with the small blades because it was the weapon he felt more confident about, but it seemed that was not going to happen.

After a few minutes of being instructed by their individual senior instructors, they went to the preparation room and weaponry room to be equipped. They would meet again in two hours. It was better to start the journey early so they would reach civilization before sundown. That is because from the inner nonagon to the outer nonagon wall, it was quite a distance, and still even more distance before they reached the first civilization, because no one was allowed to live near the war academy.

"We meet here again in two hours," Lotaga said, yawning as if the few sentences he said had tired him to no end. They were definitely going to die under his watch or get maimed. Sagiri did not say a word to Squad 25 as he walked ahead, lost in thought and neither did they. Even Kaka seemed surprisingly silent, as if he was in deep thought for the first time.

Two hours later, they had each been handed a combat-equipped bag with their names on it and a combat coat with their names on it, too. Sagiri's had been adjusted to his new size, now together with the current combat suit he had been issued a month ago, when the other became too small, that Toren almost wept in disgust.

They were back at the assembly grounds in the central pentagon, and Sagiri was not surprised that Lotaga was not there. Other teams were already being questioned by their senior instructors in charge and receiving instructions. So after they started pulling out one team after another. Half the teams had already pulled out in under an hour, getting a head start, and Lotaga was still nowhere in sight.

"Where is he. I swear I'll beat him to a pulp." Kaka spoke for the first time, pacing, and sagiri could smell the rage oozing off of him in waves. "Other teams have a head start on us. we should leave and let him catch up," he seethed, pacing up and down.

"Do you even know the place we have been assigned?" Kiuga asked, and only then did they realize Lotaga had not told them anything.

Five more squads pulled out, and everyone now grew more impatient. Right when two teams remain is when Lotaga finally made an appearance. He looked like he had been asleep and was woken up suddenly. He yawned and stretched with both hands above his head, and if Kaka was angry before, he was now livid.

"How come we were assigned an instructor who doesn't even know how to keep time as our squad leader?" Kaka snapped. He was so big that he was the same size as lotaga and they both stood nose to nose.

"Don't be too eager to jump into battle, cadet. Besides, I need my sleep to be able to be a good leader," she yawned again, unconcerned about Kaka's outburst. "Follow me," he said, stretching again before he turned to walk into the central pentagon. The two remaining teams were also leaving at that moment, and the last one with Kayu Asari was led by Miss Lakiya. The team looked to be in high spirits, and Team 25 reeked of envy. Miss Lakiya might have loved games and had extreme measures, but she was better than having a lazy instructor.

Lotaga led the team into Senraki's office.

"Why are we here?" Sagiri asked. He had been here several times, and he knew for sure there had to be a reason.

"We are about to find out," Lotaga said, yawning again, before he pushed the door open. The room was already packed with six other men, apart from Senraki who were already seated around the room. Four from Squad Salka, and now Lotaga making them eight in total. With the addition of Team 25, the room, though huge, was now packed.

Squad 25 saluted the men in the room before they held a relaxed position by the door.

"Squad 25," Senraki started. "You seem anxious and impatient, so I will not keep you waiting. The reason I have called you here is that I have very important news for you. Your squad will not be situated in the north," Senraki said, and the ten held their breath in uniform, but no one dared interrupt the grand marshal. Even Kaka just ground his teeth but said nothing.

"Your team has been requested to go to the heart of Zandeko'alsi's military base," Senraki said, and there was a uniform exhalation of breath. Senraki finally left his seat and walked in front of the boys, who were now beside themselves with joy.

"I'm sure you are all excited but have you wondered why your squad, a mere squad, would be personally requested by the second largest military base in Tagayia in the second largest city in Tagayia? Do you think they are short of warriors?" Senraki asked, and there was silence as the team tried to rack their minds.

"It does seem fishy," Kiuga was the first to speak, and everyone turned to him except for Sagiri. He had known it was fishy from the first time Senraki said it out loud.

"Good, you deserve the honour of the Lofekeni tribe and Tinega clan, as your teammate had said. This is extremely fishy. There had been an attempt on your teammate sagiri twice." All ten pairs of eyes snapped to him. "I did not tell you about the second one, but sagiri was taken all the way to the outer gate while he was in the central pentagon. I had suspected that something was wrong, so I placed him in the central pentagon to watch him, and sure enough, a little rat had sneaked in.

"To the central pentagon?" Ulekai's mouth gaped. The central pentagon was the heart of galka war academy, and to think someone was able to infiltrate it was alarming.

"yes. ulekai, it seems someone is hellbent on having sagiri on his side. As you saw yesterday in the arena, your teammate must be someone special even though he doesn't realize it yet." Senraki continued, and there were unformed nods even from Kaka.

"You think it is a trap to capture him again?" kiuga said. It was not a question but a statement.

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"You think it is a trap to capture him again?" kiuga said. It was not a question but a statement. He now held his pointing finger crooked and under his chin as if he was thinking hard.

"It's not a perhaps question. Someone wants your teammate there, and he is going to have him for whatever reason," Salka said without a doubt, and kiuga was now pacing.

"So we could be walking into a trap, and since they only want him, that puts squad 25 in a compromising position. We are basically walking with a target on our backs, and we are in danger of being collateral depending on how the orchestrator of all this wants," kiuga said, and the other men nodded. He was truly a genius and well past his ears in analyzing situations.

"Yes. I expect nothing less from a Tinega." Senraki praised again, and kiuga was truly worthy of all the praises he was getting.

"To add to this, we do not know the perpetrator, but he knows us, and we can assume he is watching all our moves, and even before we move, we are already at a disadvantage." kiuga continued pacing up and down, and everyone could hear the wheels in his head turning as he went through every possible situation.

"salka you should vet this one to be on our team instead of Lotaga," Matasi whispered enough for Lotaga to here and he glared at him.

"If you don't stop talking ill take you out of the squad, and he can take both your places," Salka whispered back, and the room fell silent again.

"Let me guess, they put you in a compromising position by overstretching squad sagiri during the attack, and this is supposed to sound like an honour for us, so you can't refuse because then you will be labelled as the grand marshal who is standing on the way of a

the success of a promising team?" kiuga said again and senraki sighed going back to his sit at the edge of his desk just beside the piles of papers he always sat behind.

"Seems I don't have to explain further, as your squad member has said that is the situation. I did not want to send you out there blind sided when your life depends on this. If anyone wishes to pull out of the squad i will allow it, and it will not affect their final score or their reputation. I will personally put you in another squad temporarily till the exercise is over. So if anyone wants to pull its completely fine." Senraki went silent, waiting for someone to step back. There was silence as senraki waited for movement, but even with their hearts beating in their ears, no one stepped forward. sagiri could perceive their nervousness and hear their hearts racing, and clearly, except for kaka who was now excited. He really loved to jump into danger.

"I will remain on the team and go with sagiri to ko'alsi" N'varu said, taking a knee. His left knee hit the floor, echoing in the silent room. His right hand rested on his heart, and his left hand lay on the floor. It was the stance of taking an oath. "he is in my squad, and I will fight with him and for him till my last breath," he swore the oath, and sagiri could perceive the sincerity and devotion leaking from him. Even so sagiri was not prepared for such loyalty. He had known that N'varu was loyal to him, but to swear to die for him was too much to hear. sagiri's eyes widened at such loyalty, and he staggered back. He had seen such a display from kiuga for Kaka when he collapsed in the dining wing on his second day in Galka War Academy, and he had admired it and wished to have such. Yet now he had someone that loyal to him, and he did not know how to respond.

"I admire your courage, but that is a heavy oath to take for a squad mate," Torena said, furrowing his eyebrows.

"He is not just a squadmate to me. He is like family to me," N'varu said, lowering his head further, and half the room gasped. Or maybe it was just sagiri. family? N'varu saw him as family. He had always had his adoptive family, but hearing someone say that made his heart contract for the first time with a feeling he had never experienced, and though he had never cried in that moment, he could feel something inside him shed a tear of joy, perhaps his soul. sagiri was rendered speechless. He had never been one to talk too much, but for the first time in his life, he was speechless.

"Well, he is not like a brother to me, but I have my honour to uphold, even if running away won't affect my score. I have my honour to uphold." Kaka was the second to speak, and like always, he did not know how to sugarcoat his intentions. He could freeze over if he ever said something as stupid as taking Sagiri as family. Sagiri could not imagine those words leaving Kaka's mouth.

"Well, I will go with Sagiri too because he always has my back," Ulekai said, taking the same position as Nvaru even though whatever he had just said was not an oath.

"Sagiri the blind had piqued my interest, and the perpetrator seems like a worthy rival to pull such a scheme, so I guess I'm going too," Kiuga said.

"The Chimera clan will not be outdone in honour by the Asakana clan, so I'm going," Maita said, and he and Kaka glared at each other. Fuwuka even held a ghost of a smile.

"Of course, we Asakana are honorable, and Chimera take after us. Isn't it Fuwuka?" Salka said with a wide smile, and Fuwuka's ghost of a smile disappeared, and he pretended not to have heard Salka. The two clans were rivals through and through.

"I will go wherever Squad 25 goes," Bukata said.

"Same," Zazarie said. He and Bukata were the ones to take the news that he had been stabbed, and since that time, they had grown closer as if they did not want to see him get stabbed again. The two had been traumatized for a while, especially since the

responsibility of getting help had been given to them, and if he had died, perhaps If he had died they could have blamed themselves for not getting help sooner.

"I will go too," Zoliath said, and Banga just bowed and signaled in agreement. He did not speak at all unless it was completely necessary, like when he had to distribute how the oru seals were made.

"You boys are brave," Yavaga said, nodding in approval.

"This might cost you your life, or you might encounter an opponent stronger than you, and you will have to work smart or be in danger. This is not a game. Are you all sure you want to do this?" Fuwuka asked, and N'varu and Ulekai finally rose, and the nine answered in unison, backs stiff.

"Yes, captain, no comrade shall be left behind," they recited one of the squad mottos. They all answered in unison.

"The person was the one who pushed my admission to Galka War Academy," sagiri admitted. After hearing how his team was ready to put their lives in danger for him in different versions, he owed them at least to know who they were facing.

Everyone turned to him, and he sighed.

"What do you mean they pushed your admission to this academy?" It was Torena who asked.

"my step parents never wanted me to join a school. They came for me when I was twelve, but retreated. They came again, a few weeks before they personally brought me to the examination council, and then you brought me here. Even entering the suffocation chamber was his choice," sagiri said, feeling lighter than he had in months, keeping the information to himself. If the boys were willing to die for him, then they at least deserved to know the opponent they were facing was ruthless.

"Why did you not tell me that?" Senraki said, standing to full height. It seemed the news was news to his ears, and he did not like it.

"No wonder you were so unfit," Kaka said as if finally getting an answer to a question he had been keeping him awake at night.

"I did not know who to trust, nor do I now. I don't want any squad 25 to die because of me. I will go alone since he wants me. we are prone to meet someday," sagiri said, taking a step forward. He did not want any more people to die before his benefactor got to him. Naga's brother and another had died because of him. it was enough deaths. At least meeting the person could tell him who he was, since the benefactor seemed to know.

"I love how you want to self-sacrifice, but this is not your decision to make, recruit," Matasi said.

"It's cadet," Lotaga whispered, but Matasi ignored him.

"And what do you plan to do when you meet him?" Fuwuka asked, and sagiri did not have to think about that.

"Kill him," sagiri said, his voice dangerously low, and everyone felt the intent behind it.

"I admit you have grown strong, and you might be unstoppable with this weapon, but you of all people should not underestimate a man who put you in the suffocation chamber," Salka said calmly, pulling sagiri shadow blades handle from one of his weapon straps.

"Give back nokai. That is the last thing I have from my clan and family," sagiri said lavitating towards Salka on instinct at the sight of Nokai. He could already feel the weapon's pull towards him now.

"The weapon has a name? what is your clan?" it was Kolu asking with curiosity oozing off pf him. "I know all the powerful weapons and their names. I have never heard one with that name. Who gave it this name?"

"Nokai is not just a weapon. It's the legacy of my clan. it belongs to me," sagiri said, getting agitated being close to the weapon. The air sizzled, and everyone in the room could see he was agitated as he moved towards Salka.

"sagiri calm down," nvaru warned, moving to follow him, but Salka signaled for him to stay put.

"Are you going to fight your captain for it?" Salka asked, not at all fazed by Sagiri. The truth was that sagiri was ready to fight for it. Tension rose in the room.

"Come on salsal dont tease the boy. just give him the blades," Senraki said, and Salka cocked his head to the side to look at Senraki as if they were exchanging a silent message before. Salka sighed and threw the weapon to sagiri.

The archive hummed with calmness the moment Nokai touched his arms.

"Nokai," sagiri called the blade by its name, and right in front of everyone, the blades snapped out, reflecting the light in the room as if responding to its name. sagiri looked at it with admiration before, and he felt his heart race with joy. he caressed the handle with adoration for a moment, and no one interrupted.

Just then, he remembered what Lotaga had told him. If he wanted Salka to let him have the weapon. He had never known how Nokai retracted its blades, but he needed to show everyone in that moment that he could control it. He suddenly knew the word to make Nokai retract as if he had said it a thousand times.

"Sleep!" sagiri commanded.

The command echoed in the room, and right as everyone watched, the two blades that were somehow always longer than the handle disappeared into the handle.

sagiri himself could not believe what he had done, and so he did it again.

"Nokai?" he called, and the blades snapped out again, this time with even more force, and the air around where they touched sizzled.

"Sleep!" he commanded after a moment, and the blades snapped back and disappeared.

"What the hell?!" Kolu cursed, standing to his feet.