

# THE LAST KEEPER

## #Chapter 11: INK KEEPER - Read THE LAST KEEPER Chapter 11: INK KEEPER

### Chapter 11: Chapter 11: INK KEEPER

When he comes to, he is lying on a soft surface and his body feels heavy. It felt like he was stuck under a rock and his body lacked mobility. He tried to move but it was futile. "Don't try to move, the sleeping liquid you took is used to keep patients unconscious during surgery. You have been unconscious for two hours it will pass soon"

"It was not poison?" He asked, feeling stupid. Of course they were not going to kill students. The man standing over him laughed. He was wearing a white garment that covered his torso with a single drawing of a quill on his chest. He could only be an ink keeper.

"Of course not," he laughed. Before continuing to move around the foreign room filled with scrolls.

"Is she alright?" he asked.

"Of course, she is from the Aruke clan and an examiner of course she is alright. Sagiri felt stupid again. Living in a small village must have made him dumb.

"What is she?" he asked, finally starting to gain his mobility.

The ink keeper asked "Who? Kiana?"

Sagiri replied "Yes"

"She is an examiner" he feigned ignorance.

"Why couldn't I feel her presence?" he asked and the man paused in his movements. He clearly wondered how a mere boy could perceive people's presence. The drugs must have made him slow because he had revealed something about himself he wanted to keep secret. "I mean she appears and disappears." He added and the ink keeper let out a breath he was holding.

"It is her clan's secret art, you will learn more about those in school soon." he said sitting in the chair in the middle of the room in front of a desk.

"I passed?" Sagiri asked, not at all understanding the nature of the exam.

"But of course, you aced the practical exam and you were average on the theory exam. You are among the seven to ever pass this sort of exam since it ever started. It is usually not used to test students who are to join a high school but it seems someone had confidence you'd pass and recommended we use it. It didn't sound like that to him however and he knew his benefactor wanted something else. He must also have so much power to manipulate the exam council for a mere student. He was in much more trouble than he had imagined. He was dealing with a powerful adversary.

"Do I get to choose the school I go to?" he asked, standing to his feet, his eyes focusing on the ancient scrolls. If it was his choice to make then he could choose Yalami forest school in the west. He had grown to love the calmness of rain and since it was situated deep in a rain forest where it rains all year round. It focused mainly on teaching camouflage to hunters and stealth the two things he had learned to do as a child hunting squirrels. In war stealth and cornering the enemy or prey only the west came close to the north in tactics. He won't stand out too much and he would learn about himself in an environment he loved.

"Yes but you will not get to choose because your school has already been chosen out for you by your benefactor. It seems he knows you well enough to know that you would pass the suffocation chamber.

"It is a true suffocation chamber?!" Sagiri gasped.

"Yes of course, if you had failed to choose you could have both died. The chamber was used in ancient times to give conflicts ten minutes to confess to their crimes or die. The chamber only opens when the two glasses leave the table. They were created together with the room. So technically the room is not opened from the outside but from the inside." A visible chill went down Sagiri's back. His adversary truly planned to kill. He was dealing with a far lethal opponent and for the first time he felt a little fearful. "Even longer before that when kings ruled these lands, they were used when a young king was choosing a life and death confidant, the man he could entrust his life with. Young man, I have to say that if you lived in the ancient times you could have made a good life and death confidant for a king. The others before you might have passed by just choosing one but you chose to die for a stranger. Such nobility is enviable." The ink keeper continued clearly not noticing his discomfort.

"Kiana could have died too, this is not a game." He seethed the ink keeper, totally shocked at the new set of information.

"It was her choice, it seems she took a liking to you. Most of the time we put criminals convicted of terrible crimes punishable by death, if the student passed the conflicts could be granted a second chance at life. It is a gamble between death and death. Those candidates who pass however, get to have their names written in the book of honor. Technically your name will now be known in all the high schools. You are the second high schooler to try. The two of you are legends" The ink keeper continued with pride as if the piece of information was good but to Sagiri who wanted to keep a low

profile his plan had been ruined. It seemed the person hunting him wanted to counter his plan to stay incognito. He was as wicked as he was conniving.

"What about the students who don't make a choice before time runs out?"

"Well entering the chamber is a personal choice and students going to high school are not allowed to partake. Only students taking college entry exams are allowed to try and even so few have ever been daring enough to enter it. Like I said, your benefactor had faith in you and did you well. Sagiri couldn't believe he had had a brush with death without his knowledge. He was even more mad that someone had gambled his life without his knowledge. The ancient power inside of him stirred with a promise of revenge. When he uncovered the perpetrator he was going to make him feel how it felt to have your life hang on a thread.

"You just said I am the second high schooler and high school candidates were not allowed!" Sagiri snapped.

"Oh he is one of a kind too and he is from the ruling clan of the north. You'll get to meet him soon." the ink keeper said in the same proud tone he had been using before. "Since he will take after his father as the Grand Zorath of the north, he wanted to prove his worth by entering the suffocation chamber. The northern tribes are pretty vicious. They only respect the strongest and allow the truly strong to become tribal chiefs. And even the much stronger to hold the title of Grand Zorath."

"What?!" Sagiri gasped. He couldn't believe what he just heard.

"I forgot to tell you but I was getting there. You will be joining The Galka War Academy in the north." the ink keeper continued and truly Sagiri was at the end of his rope with shock.

"I don't even speak the Korun tongue?" he shook his head feeling a rage he did not know he had built up in him. He could speak it but they didn't know that and that is what mattered. It seems his adversary's mission was to frustrate him and if that was his goal he was succeeding. Up to now all decisions had been made for him and although he had promised himself to go with the flow, he had had enough of it and he was going to push back sooner or later.

"You benefactor..."

"Enough!" he snapped heading for the door. "When do I leave?" he was tired of hearing his benefactor this his benefactor that. And if he heard it one more time someone could pay. The person had played with his life as if it did not matter and that did not sit right with him.

"The Galka War Academy envoy will be arriving in an hour, they will be talking you north, The Great Chief of the Eastern tribes (The Grand Zorath) has already approved your entry. You just have to sit tight and wait for them."

"No. I'd rather walk around." He answered coolly before plugging the door open and shutting it behind him with a slam without waiting for the ink keeper to say another word. He was sick and tired of being confined to small spaces and he had had enough of it. The wide corridor awaited him, their ceilings 30 feet high. The building was ancient and it must have been built ages ago. Each corridor and carving told of a history. Sagiri felt the urge to touch and everyone to know their history but he was still feeling weak from the sleeping liquid he took and he had already pushed his body enough for the day.

His feet echoed as he walked slowly down the long corridors. He only brushed paths occasionally with ink keepers and he knew he was on the ink keeper wing.

## **Chapter 12: Chapter 12: SOULLESS**

The outside of the archive was much bigger than the inside. It's too was 30 feet off the ground support by stone pillars. Now that Sagiri had successfully made it outside he could admire the archive run exclusively by the ink keepers. Its outside was built with crafted stones. Each one a different shape than the next yet they fit together so perfectly. It showed the talent of the architectures and builders and the ancient power inside of him burned with familiarity. It begged him to move closer to get a glance of the past. He moved closer, his hand stretched out forward but before he could lay his hand on the cold stone, he withdrew it quickly. On his periphery he saw someone peeking at him from the other side. It was a subtle peek but it did not seem like spying. More like curiosity.

He turned around swiftly only to see Kiana's shaved head disappearing behind the corner. She had pulled her hood over her head but he knew it was her because had totally missed her presence. She disappeared quickly and Sagiri gave chase. He was already on edge and her mannerism throughout the day. The whispers of the echo inside of him however did not scream any warning of danger danger. It stayed silent so he knew she was not a danger to him. She was still soundless and her presence undetectable and that gave Sagiri an uneasy feeling. He was so used to knowing almost everything and feeling everyone feelings when they were around him, yet he could not feel hers.

By the time he got to the spot where she was. There was no one there and her presence was no longer nearby. Damn it! He stood on the spot looking around. He had missed her again. Just then the movement of carriages pulled by. He was wearing his Oru-shells but his senses were still intact. They were printed with the logo of Yalami forest school. Its logo is an image of a palmate leaf with a hole in the middle where a beast like a wolf's head sat it's mane joining to become one with the leaf. The three peaks of the leaf went up the middle one pointing up like an arrow while the other two curved in giving the image an almost circular look. It was simple yet magnificent. It told

of the story its roots and what the forest harboured. Those from Yalami Forest School mostly referred to themselves as , 'The beasts of the forest.

Two female officials dressed in green combat from head to toe went into another building and came out soon after with a girl. Sagiri couldn't see her face from where he stood but just subtly she turned her head and looked in his direction. Her her mist silver eyes locking with his. It was subtle before her dark grey hair covered her face. She was being escorted into one of the carriage envoys. She was an aged candidate too, just like Sagiri. One of the three that Jalume had talked about. She was petite and did not have any striking features apart from her eyes but that was not why Sagiri stood on edge. Something was very odd with her. The moment they locked eyes the whispers inside of him had come alive whispering a warning.

They said one word "soulless". He staggered a little at the warning but when he looked up she was already securely in the carriage. The envoys sure moved first and Sagiri wondered why. It's not like someone was going to steal a student. Right?

There was another weird thing going on because just like Kiana, Sagiri could not feel her emotions, he could slightly feel her presence but not even one emotion oozed from her. It was like she was empty. Either she was empty or she was from a clan whose secret art was hiding their feelings. How odd. The archive inside of him had never encountered that before. It seemed he had a lot to learn. He was lost in his thoughts and completely forgotten about Kiana, however soon he felt a tingling sensation by his covered neck a few seconds. He turned around swiftly only to send Kiana jumping swiftly a few steps back, her dust rose eyes blinking rapidly.

"Where are you just sniffing me?" Sagiri opened his mouth in disbelief. How long has she been standing behind me? Sagiri felt even more unsettled. He did not like having no control over his surroundings. Now that he was really looking at her he couldn't help but realize many strange things about her. She might have the body and looks of a young woman but she was behaving like a child or a cat. Her mannerism was off. She looked like she wanted to sniff him again but he moved away quickly. He did not like having people in his personal space or more like he was not used to it.

"Dont you dare!" Sagiri put his hand out in warning. She stayed put a few feet away but she kept moving weirdly as if she wanted to jump him. He felt the urge to touch her head and see what was really going on in her head but he was still exhausted and he did not want the person watching him to have any idea. He wished he could look into a person's memory just by being close to them.

"Is that girl from your clan?" he asked, looking at the departing envoy. She shook her head moving a step closer.

"Is concealing your presence a secret art of your clan?" she looked at him like she did not understand his question before she shook her head no. She took another step

closer still intended on sniffing him and he did not understand why. Had the ink keeper lied to him about her background? And if so, why?

"If you tell me how you do it, I'll let you sniff me." He added a shudder going down his spine at those uncomfortable words. Being stuck in the dark was however more uncomfortable to him. As a person who thought he knew everything up to now, not knowing was absolutely unnerving. Her eyes filled with light and she took another step closer timidly. She was about to say something when two things happened simultaneously.

"Kiana! Come here." Another ink keeper appeared and she froze visibly. Sagiri did not like it. Something was definitely going on. The feeble ink keeper's eyes darkened as he looked at Sagiri. They stared at each other for a minute before another ink keeper appeared. He was the one who had gives Sagiri his results. Sagiri snapped his eyes to him but when he looked back Kiana had disappeared again.

"Galka War Academy's envoy is here." he announced and sagiri finally broke his staring contest with the other ink keeper. He knew going to a school was the only way to get answers. For now, I'll it go, he thought and as much as he felt rage just staring at the older ink keeper he let it slide. It was not in his best interest to pry at the moment. He followed after the ink keeper from earlier down another pathway and into another building. They did not go into any room and kept walking straight through the corridor cutting across the building until they stepped outside. He only had but a second to take in what was in front of him before a huge shadow blocked his path.

One angular black carriage that looked more like a war vehicle was stationed up in front of the door. The Galka War Academy logo was embedded into the sides. The logo, an angular shield with the head of a lion engraved in the middle. A crown sat at the top of it as if to announce their position as the 'king of the north'. Two swords cut across behind the shield their hilts firm and on the edge of each hilt where the hilt has two curved handles sticking out a rather delicate string is suspended and at its edge sits a razor looking flower. Two men standing beside the carriage are dressed in black military combat, knives strapped at the thigh, military hoods complement the uniform making them look even more intimidating while two sat in the roofless carriage facing each other. There was nothing soft about their appearance. The men are built with pure muscle and all of them stand easily a foot taller than sagiri. They looked like the definition of beast of battle.

"I am captain Salka Asakana, we are to escort you to Galka." The man who had just blocked his path announced. He was a foot taller than the other men. What could they be possibly feeding them in the north? Sagiri wondered, breaking a step back to look at his face. His swirling grey eyes were sharp and his long hair was pulled into two bulky braids that ran down his back where they were tamed by two red shells.

"Get in." he commanded but Sagiri did not make a move. His face was the definition of stoic. He clearly did not like leaving his position as the head of the galka elite unit just to

babysit. He did not know what was so important about the little wimp in front of him to be forced to leave his position but now that he stood in front of Sagiri was even more disappointed. He looked mysterious yes but he was too skinny and tiny. How was he going to survive a day in Galka War Academy?

"Do they not feed their kids in the east?" He grumbled loudly at the ink keeper who laughed politely but Sagiri was seething inwardly. The more he met new people in the city the more naive and small he felt and he did not like it. The man in front of him was built like a beast. Even his small finger was made of pure muscles. He was finally starting to understand why the northerners were known as beasts of battle. His entire physique was built to kill. Why could his 'benefactor' choose a school in the north for him. He was not that tiny but standing close to the northerner he felt like an ant. He oozed of power and Sagiri could only smell confidence from him. He did not in the slightest smell fear like Jalume and his puny companions. Compared to him, Jalume and his lurkies seemed like a bunch of kids.

Was his benefactor trying to kill him with intimidation, suffering or he was just a wicked person who enjoyed torturing others. Salka had just called him a kid who was unfed and to be honest standing next to him he looked malnourished.

Sagiri slithered into one of the carriages after a moment of hesitation, feeling small for the first time in his life. He had been successfully diminished in a span of a day. He had been outsmarted, outwitted and outsized. The two men did not make a move considering they were sitted at the door. He pushed himself awkward between them and say at the far back. His promise of revenging his 'benefactor' had changed. Just making him feel how he felt in the saffocation chamber was not enough. He was going to make him feel actual pain and tear him limb from limb.

### **Chapter 13: Chapter 13: DEATH I**

The journey north was not nearly as awful as Sagiri had thought it could be. He had ended up sitting face to face with Captain Salka who was huge and kept looking at him with pity. He could not understand the reason behind his pity and so he closed his eyes and pushed himself into meditative silence.

"You are going to die in that school. Why did you pick it?" He finally voiced his reason for pity and for a man so confident to feel pity it did not sound good.

"Are you like twelve or thirteen?" He asked, making Sagiri snap his eyes open.

"I'll be sixteen next month." He answered wondering how big sixteen year olds looked like in the north.

"You are definitely going to die unless you magically add a hundred pounds and grow a bit taller before we arrive in Galka" he tsked shaking his head again. Sagiri could only feel honesty in his voice and feelings and that scared him even more. With every word

Salka said Sagiri's hate for his benefactor grew. This was the first time he had experienced total dislike of someone. The other four nodded in agreement with their captain and that put a little fear in Sagiri's heart.

The landscape was neither dry nor wet. They passed arid areas and green ones and even thick forests. One thing however was glaringly obvious. Everyone in the North wielded some kind of weapon as they walked. He had passed the Zonuvaki warriors of the Zonuvaki tribe of the north bearing the death tattoos, they tattooed the number of kills on their backs and made sure to leave their backs bare as a form of pride wielding the double axes on their backs and The Nave clan who wielded double edged spears. They thrived on war and it was obvious.

The captain and his men got some stink eyes from passersby now and then and Sagiri even picked emotions full of hostility. Captain Salka and his men however did not cower or elude any feelings of fear in fact with every hostile look thrown at them their pride swelled and he could only feel their excitement grow. Their blood thirst filled the air and Sagiri could not understand their reaction. It was as if they were waiting for someone to threaten them directly so they could use it as an excuse to tear him to shreds.

He was truly going to die in the north.

Night fall soon fell on the horizon and the group pulled up in the clearing in the middle of northwest. "Lotaga , you stay with the kid, we will get the hunt" Captain Salka said in Korun and Lotaga showed visible distaste. He loved the hunt and Salka knew that.

"Why can't Yavaga do it, he is clearly the slowest" Lotaga whined. The one called Yavaga did not like the insult and he launched himself at Lotaga at full strength, both of them making thundering contact. They rolled on the rocky terrain as if it was on soft grass. Sagiri was shocked at how fast they fought but when he saw the captain and the other two's shoulders shake with laughter he knew it was a normal occurrence. The friendly brawl however did not look friendly to Sagiri. The two men moved with incredible speed and pummeled each other like it was a real fight.

"Who did you say was slow? Repeat it in your mother's honour?" Yavaga bellowed.

"If you don't stop, you are going to scare the child." Salka said with a serious tone but they did not care. "I'm going to make you both babysit." he added and they jumped apart so fast acting like good boys.

"I can sit by myself you all don't have to worry about me." Sagiri said in broken Korun intentionally. He was tired of being treated as a child. He also wanted a moment of silence alone.

"Good man" Lotaga was beside him in a minute. He tapped his shoulder as in a friendly gesture but it felt like a brick had been slapped on his shoulder and he lost his footing sitting on the rocky terrain with a thud. They all laughed at his weakness before

disappearing into the night. They were surprisingly silent as they blended into the darkness. He put back his Oru-shells and shut his eyes. He welcomed the silence of the night breathing in deeply. He must have been naive to think they would take long because a few minutes later they were back and the smell of blood snapped him back to reality. He had never felt the smell of blood that strong even when he accompanied his mom rusha for house patients. The smell of death was so strong it made him nauseous. It felt familial and he stood up putting as much distance as possible between him and the approaching men who were now carrying a dead wild beast.

"You are scared of blood?" Yavaga exclaimed and they all looked at him as if he was an alien. It wasn't the smell of blood that threw him off but the smell of death. He had killed small animals before but this was the first time he had reacted that way.

"Death." He said and they all laughed even harder.

"He is definitely going to die in the north." Lotaga added as they got to work. They tore the beast open with accurate precision before making a fire. The smell of burned meat soon filled the air driving away the smell of death and sagiri joined the men to eat. He did not eat much but to his surprise the men devoured the whole beast in one sitting and they still acted as if they were hungry. They scattered around the fire sleeping on the rocky ground with no care. They did not even care to leave one awake to watch. Sagiri lay close to the fire and closed his eyes. He was indeed tired because he passed out. But he was soon awakened. The ground under him had grown uneasy and the power inside him stirred violently, making him snap awake. The other five men were still deep asleep. That however was not why he had awoken. He felt them long before they approached. A dozen feet were approaching and shadows were lurking in the distance. He did not have time to think before he tapped both captain salka and Lotaga who were close to him.

The two men shot awake at the mere touch their hands curved into a murderous stance relaxing only when they saw him. No wonder they slept carelessly. Their senses were sharp when the enemy was close but his were sharper. He could feel the enemy a distance away and they were approaching quickly. He needed to inform the men.

"What is it? Don't tell me you are afraid of the dark." Lotaga mocked rubbing his eyes to rid them of sleep while salka gave him a death glare. The other men must have been disturbed by the belittle commotion and whispers because they started to wake up.

"Someone is approaching and fast," he started and the two men closer to him looked at him as if he had grown another head. "Thirteen sets of feet." he added after touching his hand to the ground to feel the movement. He made sure to put his hand close to the fire so they could not see his glowing marks on one hand as he counted the intruders. The two men looked at him as if he had grown another head and Yavaga went to get back to sleep but only for a second before he shot up. "A twig just snapped in the forest. I think we are in danger," he said in the most dramatic voice and all the others laughed lowly. Did they think this was a joke?

"They are two vaara away." He said in all seriousness getting up. From his position facing the night. If push came to shove he would have to unleash whatever was inside him to protect himself. After all his life came before his secrets. The men were still cackling when a twig snapped for real and they all jumped up alert and tense before taking protective stances protecting each other's back.

"Shh..." Captain Salka said, giving hand sign instructions. The men nodded before Lotaga and the other two disappeared into the night in different directions so fast that Sagiri's eyes missed them. They were a blur.

"You and Yavaga pretend to sleep." He turned to Sagiri who was now tense as the approaching steps drew even closer, just half a vaara away. He went to protest but sat Yavaga already sleeping in the most convincing 'I'm dead asleep' position drool rolling down his face. If sagiri could not hear his steady beating alert heart he also could have been convinced. He looked at captain Salka who was now oozing danger so much so he could taste it on his tongue. He was tense and deadly.

"Move. Now." He snapped before disappearing so fast into the darkness that Sagiri missed him. For a man that size to move that fast and silent was the real danger. He lay down on his back, his senses sharp and pretended to be asleep.

The night went deadly silent for a few heartbeats but the ground under him still stirred silently as if moving to the beating of his heart. He felt seven pairs of feet move slowly towards the fire. They smelled of the desire to kill and revenge that Sagiri wondered what the captain and his men had done to deserve such hatred. It was slightly more deep and intense than what he felt for his benefactor. They moved even closer and he could feel every muscle in his body tense. Pretending to be asleep while a killer moved closer to you was harder than he thought except in that moment he heard Yavaga snore and matter nonsense as if he was dead asleep.

"You said they were five, I only see two," one voice whispered right above Sagiri's head. He was so close sagiri could smell his feet. "You said that the Asakana eyesore was here. It is just a kid and a stupid looking moron."

"He is still wearing the Galka elite uniform. Just kill him and the kid. We can find that Asakana leech and kill him later." Another voice answered before Sagiri could hear knives getting unsheathed and he couldn't take it any longer. What if this was a plan by his 'benefactor' to eliminate him. He had been naive far enough but not any longer. The white in his eyes disappeared and he snapped them open ready to defend himself but instead a warm liquid spattered all over his face and he froze as he watched a head fall and roll beside him.

A severed head.

**Chapter 14: Chapter 14: DEATH II**

Sagiri was still frozen at the amount of blood covering him when a blur passed over him, the man whose head had been severed was still standing. His head though separated from him still had its eyes open in disbelief. Two of the attackers closest to sagiri were still yet to process the death of their friend when a hand was wrapped around their necks and they were driven to the ground with too much force, their necks breaking in unison. Captain Salka had just killed three men in a span of three seconds before they could even move. He was like a beast and his agility and strength made him unstoppable. The other four were just realizing what had happened and pulled out their curved knives and charged.

The one closest to Yavaga wasn't lucky enough because a sharp double edged knife was pushed onto his jugular before he could react. Yavaga had propelled himself on one hand spinning a whole 360 degrees, landing on one knee in front of the assailant before stubbing him front to back. all in a span of a heartbeat. His companion jumped in and they were engaged in a fight that did not last long before he was pulled into a headlock, his head twisting unnaturally with a loud snap. His eyes went lifeless and Yavaga tossed him aside like a rag doll.

Salka was taking his time with the remaining two as if it was a game. He first landed a scorpion kick to one sending him flying a few yards. His ribs broke loudly and he spit a mouthful of blood before getting up slowly and getting in a fighting stance. He dodged a knife to his side from the other aimed at his torso. He fell to his arms purposefully with one leg sticking out which he used to sweep him off of his feet. The assailant was quick too and he jumped up to escape but that might have been a mistake because Salka lifted his other leg, his weight totally supported by his hands before he landed a horse king on his torso with both feet which sent him flying. He collided with his friend who was charging and they both slammed into a tree creating a visible dent in it's bark.

The companion's head crashed harder onto tree taking almost all the assault before he went still life slipping from his eyes. his broken ribs and a bust head were enough to kill him. His friend whose fall had been broken faced forward with rage and a feeling of hopelessness. It was the look of a man who knew he couldn't win yet was too proud to show weakness.

"The others won't stop, until we wipe out you Bami scum." He cursed before slitting his own throat with his knife from ear to ear. He fell forward and his blood soaked into the sand. Sagiri had never been in a real battle and he had not seen people die right in front of him yet he didn't flinch. He was completely frozen. He could still feel the fight in the shadows. It went on for a minute longer before everything went quiet. He could not feel the intruders' presence anymore and he knew that they were dead. Moments tickled by before Lotaga and the two Galka elite soldiers appeared all smeared in blood. Sagiri then snapped out of his daze and stared at the blood smearing his clothes, the smell was so thick and the power inside of him stirred. Images of blood flashed his mind so fast and powerful that he sat up clutching his head.

They were images of a place he had never been to. Blood was covering the desert sand and it flowed like a river. He had never been to the place yet he felt so much familiarity and sorrow and pain that was too much to bear. He clutched his head and fell forward on his hands and knees groaning and panting. He could not understand why he felt so much pain in his heart. He knew the memory was not his yet it felt like his. An killing intent that was not his was also mixed in the memory and he felt burning rage that was not his too.

"Hey, is the kid injured or something?" Lotaga asked his companions who were busy swimming in the pride of their kill. "Salka, were you late?" He mocked his captain who stopped all the gloating and turned around swiftly. He was anything but slow and he did not like the insinuation.

"Hey kid, that assassin didn't touch..." Salka started moving closer to Sagiri.

"Stay back!" Sagiri snarled, still in all fours. The ground under him shook slightly but all the men felt it. The killing intent from the memory demanded blood. And he feared if Salka moved any closer he did not know what could happen. He had only experienced its bloodthirsty once when he was twelve. He had almost killed five people if Rusha hadn't stepped in on time. At the moment it did not seem to differentiate between friend and foe and he groaned fighting to stay in control. Until he understood what resided inside of him and why he had sworn not to lose control.

"Hey kid, calm down," Salka said, feeling an odd feeling he had never felt before. Sagiri shut his eyes for a long minute fighting within himself until the feeling finally passed. He finally fell forward panting. The markings on his skin stirred under his skin before they finally steadied.

"Is there a place with water nearby?" He asked, finally looking up. His voice was surprisingly calm. It was the first time he had seen death happen. He was oddly not scared but the reaction from the power inside him to the sight of blood was what shook him. He feared if he stayed soaked in blood he might lose control again. His different amber eyes one fake one true, that he always hid behind his hood were now burning with intensity as he stared at salka.

"There is a waterfall seven to eight hundred vaara that way." Kolu, one of the men answered finally speaking. He was the most silent among them but it seemed Sagiri had finally piqued his interest. He tapped his hand to the ground and listened and now that he was concentrating he could hear a faint sound of rushing water. He stood up back facing the men and headed into the darkness.

"Did you feel it?" Lotaga asked the others as soon as he thought he was out of hearing range. He had taken his Oru-shells off since the intruders arrived and he could hear them whisper clearly as if he was standing close to them. He mostly wore them when he slept, meditated or was in large crowds. He needed to get to the waterfall quickly, that was the only thought in his mind however.

"Mh" the others replied immediately. They were battle experienced veterans and they did not miss much when it came to observations. The ground trembling from his voice had caught him off guard too since it had never happened before.

"He must be special then since the council wants him this bad if they sent us to pick him" Yavaga made an observation and Sagiri's ears piqued. So there was a council who wanted him. It was not just a simple person but a group. Things were starting to look more interesting than he thought.

"Let's follow him so he doesn't get eaten by wild beasts. He is our responsibility for now" Salka said and he could feel movement as they followed him. They followed him at a distance and stayed hidden when he got to the waterfall. He could feel their eyes on him. They were not scared of him, rather they now found him interesting. That was the most interesting reaction he had ever received. It seemed it was true what people said. Northerners only acknowledge the strong. Up till now they had just looked at him as an inferior being who won't last a day in Galka War Academy for a day, yet now he could feel some hope for his survival coming from them. He jumped into the waterfall and let himself sink to the bottom with all his clothes. The east was full of rivers and Sagiri had learned to swim since he was old enough to walk. Back then he and his little friends had always had fun by the river before he had started growing weird senses and the gap between them had grown.

He let the water carry away all the blood from his body as he sank deeper. He sat at the very bottom watching the water turn red till it turned clear. He still held his breath a little longer to make sure not a single spot remained before he let himself move. He kicked his feet after a few minutes and emerged to the surface only to find Salka standing right in front of him.

"I was starting to think you were trying to kill yourself." he breathed a sigh of relieve. "You know we northerners are everything but good swimmers." He said with all seriousness and Sagiri was starting to appreciate the fact that the man had a weakness when he smiled a sly smile and jumped into the waterfall followed by all the other men. He had just lied to him and he had been too exhausted by the power overreaction minutes ago that he did not notice. Either that or the northerners were good liars. Or maybe it was sarcasm and Sagiri could not yet understand sarcasm.

The sun barely peeked through the horizon before they were moving north. They were all still wet from the swim but they did not seem to mind. the sun could soon rise anyway to dry them.

"Hey kid?" Kolu called him after they had travelled a few thousand vaara. "How did you know intruders were coming and their accurate number?" He was sitting in front of him beside Salka. His eyes were weary and full of curiosity. Suddenly all the eyes shifted to him filled with curiosity.

## **Chapter 15: Chapter 15: THE GALKA WAR ACADEMY I**

It took two and a half more days to arrive at Galka city and three more hours to arrive at the Galka war academy. Galka city is the most unique city sagiri had ever seen. Every building was built according to each tribe's style and every tribe stayed at different sides of the city. Ever since he arrived in the north he could feel the strained relationship between the tribes. They thrived on war and bloodshed. It was survival for the fittest yet they somehow coexisted together. They shared a warring relationship. Even after the uniting of tribes their way of life went on, more than occasionally war still broke out between them to decide their strength. The weaker tribes got the least resources and the strongest thrived. It was a relationship built on the strongest deserved respect and the weak needed to be eliminated yet they thrived in their own way.

Salka and his squad had not been attacked again since the incident yet sagiri did not allow himself to sleep one bit. The hostility from bystanders did not recede one bit however and they seemed to get angrier every time they looked at Captain Salka who didn't seem to care one bit. They seemed to hate his clan so much and his tribe even more. Looking at the guy's build and agility, power and prowess in battle he could understand why. He was like a whole battalion by himself. Sagiri was convinced that if all the twelve intruders had come at him all at once the result could still not have changed.

Sagiri saw the Academy's huge structures long before they arrived. Galka War Academy is like a whole district in itself. A self-contained district, a fortified city dedicated to producing soldiers, tacticians, and elite fighters. Everything inside its borders exists for the purpose of creating the strongest generation the kingdom.

The entire academy is enclosed by colossal reinforced stone walls, 30feet tall. The walls form two rough nonagons around the district, the outer nonagon wall has one guarded gate. They nodded in acknowledgement when they saw captain Salka tapping a salute in a form of a closed fist to their chest in salute not bothering to even cast a glance at him. They were dressed in the same tactical uniforms as the captain and his squad. The only difference was the sash colour. The sash ribbons tied on their upper arms was obsidian black while captain Salka's was white with gold threads. Yavaga and Lotaga's sashes are gold edged with black while Kolu and Matasi the final members sashes are solid gold in colour. It seemed that the sashes showed the designated rank.

"Welcome to the outer district of galka war." Salka said to no one in particular.

After the first wall it was still a few thousand vaara to get to the inner wall. The land in between was packed with different landscapes both manmade and natural. It was a whole city and sagiri could finally understand why it was called the outer district. The place could have passed for a whole city in itself. The entire outer district is a massive training landscape surrounding the nonagon campus inside. It forms a complete ring around the school core. Sagiri could see forest patches and sand pits from the carriage and he instinctively craned his neck sideways to get a better look.

"This is the outer district and it is used to train students, there are 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 there are archery lines, spear throwing courts, obstacle arenas, beast combat grounds, and secret arts zones which are divided according to each bribe, for patrol training it also has circular patrol roads which follow the entire perimeter, guarded day and night. This is where students prove their physical and mental endurance." Captain Salka explained with hearts in his eyes. "I miss the days when I was a student."

To sagiri they looked like torture chambers and the wall seemed even more intimidating.

"Why is the wall so high? Do students get attacked?" he asked captain Salka and all the men laughed until tears flowed down their eyes.

"No one breaks into the Galka War Academy unless they want to die." Salka said in a cold tone as if he was imagining a person daring enough to step into his turf uninvited. A killing intent leaked off of his body so strong that Sagiri felt it sit like an actual weight on his chest. "These walls are used to keep students in. Those little mice who want to escape when the training gets intense." he finished with a sadistic smile that unsettled Sagiri. Just how hard was the training in Galka War Academy. His 'benefactor' must really want him dead if he signed him up. Some determination however built in his chest.

'I can't die until I get to the bottom of who I am and kill the person who is toying with my life. I will endure till the end'

"I love the determination in your eyes kid." Lotaga said from beside him. "But you better eat more from now on if you want to survive more than a day in the Galka War Academy."

They were still weary of him and he could feel it. None of them had believed the lie he had told them after all. When Kolu had asked him how he heard the intruder approaching, he had pushed his hood back and showed them the Oru-shells.

"My father made me this to help me with hearing because I have bad hearing." He told them without missing a beat.

"Can I try them on?" Yavaga had stretched his hand out.

"No!" sagiri had snapped too quickly. If he gave them to him then his lie could be caught and it was too early. "They are not good for those without hearing." He lied again when they reeked of suspicion at his reaction. Salka did not say a word however, he had seen many lies and that was the fattest he had ever heard, yet he knew not to pry. Whatever the boy used to hear the enemy wasn't his problem because they made his hunt more fun. Besides if it was a secret, the boy had used it to save them even if they did not need it. He tapped a hand on his shoulder with a serious expression.

"Whatever you used, I don't care, if it wins the war, I respect." He said and the others men nodded. "We will keep it a secret for you." He added before he shut his eyes and he could only feel honest oozing from him and loyalty to him from the other four men. That was not the only secret sagiri carried and he swore to be more careful going forward, not to reveal more. His eyes were another secret. One eye was amber and the other red. He wore his fathers artificially made pupil veil which made them all amber and his father had made him swear never to show anyone his other eye. His body was another secret with ancient markings that moved and slithered under his skin and glowed when the power inside him got triggered or stirred. He was lucky that the men in front of him cared for nothing other than delivering him to Galka school and nothing more. Until he understood the power inside of him, how to control it and its capability he would be more careful.

Another single gate lead into the inner nonagon and the guards saluted Captain Salka with respect. Inside the outer district lied the core campus, a smaller nonagon that perfectly aligns with the outer one. It was smaller but in no way small. It was still huge like a small city. The inner nonagon holds five pentagons, tightly packed in a star-like arrangement. They all vary in size and the middle pentagon is the tallest standing a hundred feet above the others. The pentagon shaped structures are perfectly symmetrical and they scream of order.

"The academy is built as a double-layered nonagon, two nine-sided structures nested inside one another," Salka started explaining again much to Sagiri's delight. "The inner nonagon is the core of learning and is divided into five interconnected pentagons. As you can see from here the five pentagons are of different sizes. The first one to our left and the smallest is the first year pentagon it is called the Ashiri, the house of initiates, the one behind it and partly disappearing behind the central one is the second year pentagon called the Merena, the house of walkers the one to your right is the third year pentagon called the Vailu, the house of runners and the tallest of the four behind the Vailu is the fourth year pentagon called the Drazin, the house of fliers. The middle one and tallest is the central administration pentagon.

"Each of the four student pentagons is a full self sufficient learning district with training halls, dormitories, small gardens, classrooms, and communal paths. The central pentagon is the one all paths lead toward. It is the school's mind and heartbeat. The central pentagon is the only pentagon that has an entrance leading to the two academy entrances and four secondary gates that connect to each year's pentagon, making a total of five gates. The four other pentagons have only two entrances, one leading to the central pentagon and the other to the outer district which can only be opened on special training occasions by an instructor's permission."

Sagiri nodded, taking in the instructions.

The carriage stopped at the front of the administrative building and the men jumped down. They all saluted captain Salka before leaving for their posts or whatever they did in the Galka War Academy. Salka led Sagiri to the principal's office which was at the

highest floor of the administration Pentagon. Sagiri had expected to see a man bigger than Salka but to his surprise he stood a full head and a half shorter than the captain.

"Salka, good to see you, took you long enough." He stood from his desk where he was buried behind paperwork when they entered. A smile was plastered over his face and his white teeth shone whiter than the white tactical overall he was wearing under a white flowing over coat that dragged behind him. He looked like he was gliding as he approached.

"Don't ever put me on babysitting duty again or I swear I'll kill you myself Zazami." Salka snapped but the man smiled even wider. He did not look a day older than twenty five which was more surprising.

"You are so mean Salsal." The principal pouted like a child, approaching Sagiri, his smile never faltering. Sagiri wasn't however deceived by his carefree nature. The man oozed so much power that he could almost touch it. After all you don't get to be the principal of The Galka War Academy if you were just a wimp. Since he left home this was the first time he had actually felt utterly intimidated.

"You must be my aged student, Sagiri the suffocation chamber protegee, I am principal Zazami Senraki.

Senraki?!

## **Chapter 16: Chapter 16: GALKA WAR ACADEMY II**

"You must be my aged student Sagiri the suffocation chamber protegee, I am principal Zazami Senraki.

Senraki?!

The archive inside of him did not have information about the senraki clan or it was locked away by the barrier in his mind. He could visibly feel it sometimes. It was as if someone had locked the power inside him and just let him only scratch the surface. Even so he had heard many rumours about the senraki tribe of the north. They were the second most powerful tribe in the north right after the bami tribe. He knew that much at least. It was whispered that their tribe's secret art was so secret that no one outside the clan knew about it. It was so secret that one only encountered it and died. No one saw it unless they were at the end of their life. Sagiri itched to push past the barrier in his mind to know what the senraki were capable of. He had tried to push the barrier in his mind once and he had ended up in so much pain that he collapsed

"I am sagiri" sagiri introduced his hands stretched forward in a formal greeting.

"Im leaving Zazami," Salka said after the principal ignored him. The principal did not reply, turning all his attention to sagiri.

"You are our only aged student this year and it shows you must have great talent because Galka doesn't take aged students. We drill both theoretical studies in all fields and combat and weaponry since the day the first years arrive. You are seriously late and since we are only nine months before the college exam I will spare no effort to drill the three years you missed into you and the final year which they started not long ago. Since you survived the suffocation chamber and got recommended here by two great chiefs I believe you must be a protegee," the principal started and sagiri got nervous, he might have been good with theory because the archive inside of him made everything it touched its own but in combat and weaponry he was as good as an amature, he might have hunted and run through the woods when he was young but after seeing the men of the north he knew his childhood play did not count as anything. Even when it came to absorbing knowledge the archive inside of him had limits. It used his strength and it could take a toll on him each time. If only he could activate the power inside of him all at once perhaps he could absorb whole libraries of information all at once.

"Even so you can't just join the others or just join the first years, you'll have to do it all at once, you will have a personal curriculum which can occasionally collide with the other students, remember as an aged student you only got in because of outstanding talent, so if you fail to show any catching results in the first three months, i will be forced to reconsider your admission, if you fail to stand top at least on half the subjects in six months then I'd have to eliminate you." principal senraki continued, the smile on his face never faltering. "I'm just kidding, but seriously don't disappoint me." he laughed ushering Sagiri out the door before entering another where men dressed in tactical uniforms were seated behind piles of papers.

"Junior instructor naga, can you help me turn this boy into a student, go to the uniforms department and then show him around." he said to a young man who jumped to his feet immediately and saluted him.

"Principal Zazami, i wish to keep some things i wear" sagiri said quickly wondering if they'd make him live without his weapon which he could not yet use and his Oru-shell.

"Why?"

"I have a skin condition that I don't want others to see." He lied but it was half truthful, the markings on his body were actually like a skin disease he wasn't allowed to show anyone because they could raise questions. "And I use this for hearing because I have bad hearing." he pulled his cape back slightly to not expose his neck. The oru-shells were hanging loosely not attached to his ear to allow him to hear the principal.

"You are an unlucky bone aren't you?" the principal breathed in sharply wondering why the council could recommend a sickly boy to his school. It would not be the first time a student died in training.

"The two conditions don't affect my efficiency, I just think my skin is ugly to look at." he said not wanting to give the principal any more room to despise his weakness.

"Well then Naga, make sure the boys uniform is adjusted." The principal said and nodded to instructor Naga to take him away. First they went to the uniforms department where sagiri was measured and prodded. The uniforms could take two days to make and so for the first two days he could walk around in his clothes. He did not like the idea of standing out like a sore thumb yet it could not be helped. It was too late to keep a low profile anyway after passing the suffocation chamber.

The instructor led him through a narrow stone corridor that opened into a massive, circular chamber, the fourth year library. Bookshelves rose five stories high, spiraling upward like a tower of knowledge. Dim lanterns cast warm gold light on old scrolls and leather-bound volumes.

"Our knowledge vault," the instructor said. "Everything from war ethics to ancient formations. This is the fourth year library but every lever pentagon looks exactly the same on the inside, every structure the same, the only difference is the size, if you get to understand your way in this pentagon then you can know your way through all pentagons. It is not allowed for students of different years to go to a pentagon they don't belong in but since you are a special case I believe you will be able to move between all pentagons."

Students moved quietly between aisles, scribbling notes, their faces tight with focus. They were all dressed in a tactical jumpsuit combat, with pockets for knives on the chest and thighs. The galka academy's uniform was a black baggy combat overall with a hood which most students let lie on their back, at the back of the hood a sash extended downwards. Unlike that of captain Salka and his team which were short and tied to the upper hand. Theirs were long and starting from the ends of the hood where it was attached and it flowed all the way below the knee. Naga had entered with sagiri through a raised platform and they watched the students down below.

"You'll live here when you aren't training. If you fail in your theory weakly tests you'll be assigned silence duty."

"What's silence duty?" sagiri asked.

"You don't want to know." The instructor gave him a look that made him regret asking.

They stepped outside after sagiri had memorized everything with the help of the archive inside him. They walked through vast corridors and went to one side of the lowest level, the vast pentagon courtyard with obstacle walls, spear ranges, sand pits, moving target machines, and an entire field designed to simulate battlefield chaos.

"This is the tactical training ground where you'll be training under an instructor. You'll be here every late evening till after midnight," the instructor said bluntly. They were standing from yet another elevated place hidden behind a couple climbing obstacles. "There are no students here since it will soon be dinner time. You will understand more

after reading through your curriculum tonight. We still have many places to visit, let's hurry along or you won't have any actual time to sleep." Naga said, back already turned.

"I don't think I'll be asleep much," he said, voice low.

"You won't," the instructor agreed. "Students across all years starting from the second year to the fourth sleep for a maximum of four hours each day if they are lucky, only the first years get to sleep for four and a half hours on a good day.

Sagiri had spent his days either sleeping or in meditative slumber when he wasn't helping Rusha or Bakuru and he could already feel the pressure.

"Next it will be the classroom area, try not to be intimidated, and stay close to me" instructor Naga turned to tell him, his voice strict as they walked into yet another wing. He was acting as if they were about to enter a war zone and Sagiri did not like it. He did not want the power inside him stirred on the first day.

## **Chapter 17: Chapter 17: THE TOUR**

The stone corridor of the Fourth-Year Pentagon stretched long and silent, lit by narrow windows that cut blades of light across the floor. His guide, Instructor Naga, squared his shoulder when they neared the classroom wing. He walked three steps ahead, hands clasped behind his back.

"Classrooms run in a ring," Naga said without looking at him. "Combat theory, advanced tactics, command logic, formation reading. Galka academy only teaches the ten compulsory subjects for all high schools in year one and two. Some subjects like weaponry and fitness are still taught in the fourth year together with combat. You will get to do all the subjects all together however due to your delayed entry. You'll rotate through all of them. Quickly. The school will not show favourism," Sagiri nodded, clutching the heavy curriculum folder to his chest. It felt like the weight of three years of work compressed into paper.

They turned the corner and the corridor suddenly wasn't empty. A cluster of fourth-years lounged near Classroom 4-E, boots hooked on benches, shoulders pressed to the walls. As Sagiri and Naga approached, voices dipped, eyes sharpened.

"There he is," someone muttered.

"So that's the late one? The aged student"

"No way he's sixteen. He looks thirteen or fourteen." another said.

"I hear he survived the suffocation chamber," another whispered. "King Bami is not going to be happy."

The students didn't move aside. They simply watched him, a wall of bodies and distrust. Sagiri's steps faltered for half a second before he forced himself forward. He was not wearing his oru-shell he could not only hear their word but feel their hostility. Naga didn't pause.

"Make way, cadets." He raised his voice and the wall of bodies moved reluctantly, the students shifted just enough to let them pass, shoulders brushing Sagiri's arms deliberately. A tall boy with a shaved stripe down his head whispered loudly. "Hope he doesn't slow the unit. We're months from the semi final and finals." another sneered. "If he is put on my team I'll lose it.

"He won't survive that long." Another sneered with more hatred than the last,

Sagiri kept walking, jaw tight. He had expected all this but not this sharp hostility. It clung to the air like static. Naga stopped at a glass-fronted door. Inside, rows of desks faced a board covered in clean lines of battle geometry.

"This will be your main theory class," Naga said. "Instructor Merena doesn't tolerate wasted time. You will sit at the back for now, until she evaluates you."

"I understand." Sagiri nodded. A group of students passed behind him, slowing deliberately to stare. One boy with a full head of braided hair gave him a long, assessing look, half challenge, half warning.

"So you're the one taking a fourth-year slot without earning it," she said quietly. "Good luck." Sagiri could understand the hate because they all worked hard to reach the apex with sweat and tears and he didn't but the power inside of him didn't understand and it stirred.

"He doesn't belong here." Another said right behind him. Naga was probably the only reason hell had not broken loose. sagiri turned to face them slowly, they didn't flinch and stared right back. They were not cowards, just as expected of galka academy fourth year students, they turned around and walked away only because Naga reminded them it was time for dinner. Their voices faded down the corridor as they went.

"Ignore them," Naga said and kept walking, his tone however agreed with them, his feelings were the same as those of the students, it's just he masked his face better, they all wished Sagiri could fail. Looking at the heavy curriculum in his hands however he did not know if he was going to make it a week in the stone cold pentagon.

They continued down the ring, passing door after door. Students peered out of classrooms, some openly curious, others flat-eyed and cold. A few didn't bother to hide their scorn. By the time they reached the next junction, Kai felt as though every pair of eyes in the building had weighed him and found him lacking.

"It seems I am not a welcomed arrival?" Sagiri finally asked.

"No," Naga replied. "Only when the Academy brings in someone who breaks the pattern. This place values order. You represent disorder."

"We'll see." Naga's voice was unreadable. "Your performance will decide whether the fourth-year accepts you. You need to prove yourself. Ninety percent who go to Galka are from northern tribes and they value strength. You need to prove that you deserve the position they worked hard to achieve. Respect is earned.."

"I see," Sagiri said, feeling even more beat down. He had not met one friendly situation since he left home.

"You also have to learn the Korun tongue, we were told you don't speak it and it's insulting to northerners to stay in the north without learning the language." Naga continued in the Tagayia national dialect. He wanted to tell him that the school wasn't his choice but that could have been too insulting.

The next wing was the Fourth-Year dorms, they were arranged like disciplined barracks. No personal clutter. No posters. Only a uniform-issue trunk at the end of each bed.

"You'll take Room 256," the instructor said, showing the empty square room with a bed, a uniform trunk, a desk and a bathroom. The room was not made for comfort just for rest and functionality. "You will be allowed to rest today and go through the whole curriculum after dinner. I will escort you to the dining wing and back but you will have to do the rest by yourself. You need to move around by yourself starting tomorrow." Naga said giving him a key to his room. The environment was not welcoming at all but he had been an outsider since he could remember and it didn't bother him much. It was the hostility and killing intent that unnerved him, most northerners were vicious and he did not want to get into a fight yet, especially after watching salka in action and feeling senrakis powerful aura. The power inside of him could come in handy but he still did not understand it and he had only gone along with his benefactor's plan to get a better understanding. He had seen it in action at twelve and he understood it could grow out of control especially if his feelings got out of control.

'I will get a better understanding of my power and my markings and unlock the barrier in my mind. But till then I will keep a low profile and try to be as invisible as possible.' Avoiding trouble or creating allies was his best options but he was not good at the second and so staying invisible was his only option.

The dining wing was already half empty when they arrived and sagiri was thankful for that. Students ate the same food for each meal. The only difference was the amount and sagiri asked only for a small portion. He was not feeling quite hungry after the exhausting day. The remaining students at the dining wing still gave him hostile looks and their hostility was so thick it caressed his skin like whispers. They were even more disappointed at the small portion he served himself.

"Thlaka!" one cursed loudly. Galka war academy was only a boy school. The north was still deep in tradition and their women did not go to war. However Thlaka is a term used to refer to a young girl. The portion he had served made him look like a woman considering even the first years served at least two if they were sick. Only a woman could eat such a small serving in the north. After seeing Salka and his mean eat a whole wild beast in one seating and how most were huge he could understand the disappointment.

"Make the servings two," Naga said, with pity. Sagiri could almost hear his thoughts, he also thought he was not going to last a week. Lotaga and Captain Salka had also asked him to eat more. It seemed he needed to up his servings to avoid gathering attention to himself. Looking at his slender form he really did not belong in the north. If his benefactor wanted him dead it was a good plan. But Sagiri was not going to roll over and take it.

## **Chapter 18: Chapter 18: KING BAM!**

By the time sagiri was finished going through the curriculum mastering it with the help of the archive inside him. It exhausted all the energy left inside of him and he felt hungry. Mastering things did take a lot of energy and he was beginning to understand why the galka lions ate as much as they did. It was already midnight and he could hear movements from all sides as the fourth year students poured in. Naga hadn't been kidding when he said the students only got to sleep after midnight. As much as he wanted to eavesdrop on what they said about him he was too tired, he pulled on his oru-shells against his ears and passed out immediately.

He had barely closed his eyes before a loud ringing sound jolted him awake. According to the curriculum he had approximately ten minutes to get out of his bed, clean himself and get dressed. If he wasn't out of his dorm in ten minutes then could be punished with one less hour of sleep. The hours of sleep were already too little and if it got reduced by an hour he could die before the third day. He drugged his still closed eyes to the bathroom and had a shower before he pulled on his clothes and carried his oru-shells in his pocket. No matter how much he hurried he was still a few seconds later and everyone was already seated on their knees backs straight, hoods pulled forward and still as a rock in their meditative positions. The dorm wing was built like a huge circular hall with rooms on the ground and top floor. The meditative instructor was standing in his black combat, his eyes scanning everyone.

"Room 246 is late, minus one hour of sleep tonight." A voice announced and Sagiri physically flinched. That was the fastest he had ever showered and dressed yet he was late. "A good soldier doesn't have time to shower before attending to an emergency." The instructor added. The other boys might have been sitting quietly in meditation but he could feel their feelings of happiness at his naivety, of course they woke up before the gong sounded to prepare. No matter how fast he showered he could still have been late.

He sank to his knees and used the time to enter his meditative sleep mode. The meditation went on for almost an hour till it was five. While the rest of the fourth years could time between 5 and 6 to practice team combat, he would be studying alone under captain Fuwuka Chimera Bami on core combat lessons equal to those for first years for the next two months. They were the most basic in the overall subject of the Art of War. To put it nicely he was worse off in combat than the first years who were only three months into their first year. He could be trained in combat footwork, grip balance, basic evasion, war history, field discipline and first form stances all in one. If he had joined early all these would be different lessons but for him they would be compressed in one. He was so lucky in a parallel universe where pain was good.

Sagiri ran to the central building fearing to get punished again if he was late. By the time he made it to the central pentagon he was sweating bullets. The soldier standing guard regarded him with pity before he led him to the first year pentagon. There was where he could be studying the basics of the art of war every morning because all the fourth years combat arenas are busy in the mornings training the fourth year combat teams. The first years didn't care much about him because they probably didn't know who he was. Yet, and he appreciated that. How he wished he could stay in the first year pentagon for the entirety of the two months he could be studying all the compressed first year subjects.

The combat arena was much smaller and the obstacles and weapons much fewer but to Sagiri they still looked intimidating. That however was not the most intimidating thing because at the middle of the arena stood a smaller version of Captain Salka but who looked meaner than the old innkeeper he met at the exam council. He turned around just when Sagiri entered, his eyes narrowed to slits. He wore the same rank sash as Kolu and Matasi, solid gold in colour. It seemed to be the rank right below Captain Salka's. His hair was pulled into three braids, two at the back and one on the left side of his face. He was wielding a spear as tall as him.

"You are late!" he snapped. "You are terribly unfit if you are sweating just by running here. Sagiri couldn't be considered a nonfit person but running across the three humongous pentagons was the same as running a couple thousand *vaara* and only a genetically wrong person couldn't feel the weight.

"Here!" he said, throwing the spear into Sagiri's hands without warning. It fell diagonally making his hands twist forward making it fall. He picked it up quickly not to anger the already angry Mr Fuwuka of the chimera clan of the Bami tribe. Him and Salka were merely separated by clans yet he looked smaller compared to Salka. Even so he was still huge. His face grew even angrier when the spear hit the ground with a thud.

"I don't know *senraki* could ask me to teach such" he looked Sagiri up and down like he was dirt, Sagiri was too sleep deprived, too tired and too hungry to care however, he just wanted to find a place to hide and sleep for just a couple minutes.

"Hold that sword on your shoulder as if you want to throw it" Sagiri obeyed and laid the cold steel on his shoulder.

"Now run around the field and don't change your hand until I tell you to." is all he said before he went to stand on a raised platform watching his every move. Sagiri was already tired from running across three pentagons and he physically did not have anything left in him. He however did not have a way out and he moved faster like captain Salka he needed to move before he angered the man further. His clothes were not helping and after one lap they felt even heavier, he could not chuck them away however because of his secrets and so he persevered. He felt hot and his knees burnt after yet another lap. The spear that was initially not heavy nor light started to feel heavier and his lifted hand started to burn.

Instructor Fuwuka had not moved an inch as he watched him drag his feet. In fact his face was more meaner. Even after she circled another couple times he didn't ask him to change his hand and his hand started to tremble violently.

"If you stop, I will take off an hour out of your sleeping time!" he yelled when sagiri fell down for the third time. His tone was cold. Sagiri couldn't sense any malicious feelings from the guy. Just disgust at his weakness. He ran for the entirety of the remaining time barely breathing until the gong sounder for breakfast and instructor Fuwuka still didn't tell him to change his hand. He just left the combat arena without saying a word and only said a few words over the shoulder when he was almost at the exit. "If you are late you miss breakfast." he said before disappearing out the door. Up to this moment sagiri had thought he was strong but all his willpower left him when Fuwuka left and he fell forward on the arena unmoving for a few minutes. It's not that he was not scared to miss breakfast but he did not have the will to move. He clenched his fist trying to move but he couldn't. It was physically impossible.

He dragged his body across the first year pentagon holding his right hand with the left as it shook violently. His feet shook with exhaustion and he staggered through the administrative pentagon, he was the only student allowed to cross to the first wing and he was happy no one could see him in that state. He was more angry at himself than anyone and self loathed in that moment. He was weaker than he thought. He had spent the last few years believing he was strong and under supervisor Fuwuka's instructions he had realized he was weak. He pushed himself to move again but by the time he got to the dining wing the tables were already cleared and students were running in the opposite direction to the administration pentagon. He had never been so hungry in his life and he wanted to cry. At this rate he was going to truly die just like captain salka had speculated. He wished to cry but crying had been an impossibility for him since he was born and he had never shed a tear.

He did not want to get punished again so he dragged his tired and hungrier body to the central pentagon. He was the last to push through the gate and he started walking to the very back. A foot was accidentally put in his way which sent him flying a few feet before he fell forward. He had been even too weak to feel the malicious intent of the boy from yesterday. He fell forward on his hands and knee and his face coincidentally smacked into big boots. He looked up slowly but he couldn't see the head of the person

standing in front of him. He oozed pride and confidence and power. He was definitely tall and could pass for captain Salka's twin yet he was only a high school student.

"Hey kaka, the new student is already recognizing you as the king of Galka," the shorter guy beside him mocked. His uniform was pulled to his waist, the arms tied around it, his chest left bare and he had a wide smile on his face like he was always amused. A clan tattoo of a dagger was branded at the middle of his chest going all the way to his navel.

"Shut up Kiuga!" the huge mountain called kaka snapped but did not make a move to leave.

"I hear he is your equal since he survived the suffocation chamber." Kiuga didn't seem to care and kept mocking the bigger guy.

"Thlaka!" Kaka snapped going to his throat but Kiuga evaded him quickly. he moved so fast jumping back a few feet away landing in a frog position gracefully and soundlessly before standing to his feet. Kaka looked down at the sagiri for a long moment but he did not say anything before he stepped over him and walking to the other side followed by Kiuga who was laughing as he jumped from side to side beside him.

"King Bami is going to kill someone today again if Kiuga doesn't stop irritating him." a student retorted beside Sagiri. Again? Sagiri wondered. He had killed a student? So he is the other survivor of the suffocation chamber. And he entered it willingly. Sagiri vowed to stay as clear and as far away from him as possible. The boy looked to be as strong as captain Salka if not stronger and he was only a high school student. Sagiri finally pulled himself to his feet before moving to the very back and tried to stay as invisible as possible but wearing his civilian clothes did not help at all as he received looks from students across the years. He was too hungry and tired and all he wanted was to eat and sleep yet he was forced to stand under the scrutiny of over a thousand eyes.

## **Chapter 19: Chapter 19: CREED**

The central pentagon the Heart of galka roared with the echo of hundreds of boots stamping into formation from the four doors leading to each pentagon. sagiri stood at the very back, his muscles still trembling from the brutal pre-dawn training he barely survived. Sweat clung to his skin beneath the uniform, and his stomach twisted with hunger. He hadn't eaten breakfast. He had never had to worry about missing food and he clutched onto his stomach.

Boys filed into perfect lines by unit and year. Fourth-years, the strongest, most seasoned of galka stood closest to the inner dais followed by the third years, then the second years and of course the first years. Kai remained behind them, unseen but not unnoticed. Dozens of eyes flicked toward him, whispering about the "late comer," the "sixteen year old jumping to fourth year."

A single blast of the horn cut the air. Had everyone standing on alert with hands behind their backs and sagiri followed being the last one to get into position. The fifth door opened and Instructors entered in a straight line. Black coats flaring. Sashes ranging from obsidian black, gold edged with black, solid gold and one white with gold thread tight. Boots sounding like thunder. They walked in two columns toward the raised platform and stood in two perfect lines. The murmurs died instantly. Another horn sounded bringing the already silent place into total silence

"FORM UP!" a senior instructor wearing a gold edge sash stepped forward and barked. Gold edged black sashes were worn with senior instructors' rank. The impact was instant. Lines snapped straighter. Shoulders squared. Every boy's chin lifted with military precision.

" WARRIORS KNEEL!" A wave of movement rippled through the hall as hundreds of young soldiers dropped to one knee, right fist pressed over the chest over the heart. A gesture of discipline, loyalty, and complete silence. Sagiri followed a beat late, falling into the wrong knee awkwardly before he changed. He felt the stares but it couldn't be helped, no one cared to tell him anything anyway, it was as if they wanted him to learn the hard way.

"WARRIOS CREED!" The instructor's voice rang again and with a thumb to the chest a chorus broke out shaking the very foundation of the assembly ground.

*"We are the sons of Galka. Forged in hardship, discipline and purpose. Our minds are sharp, our bodies unyielding, our loyalty bound to our unit and our code. We rise with honor. We train without fear. We endure without complaint.*

*"Strength is our duty. Unity is our shield. Victory is our destiny. Pride is our armor*

*"We stand as one. We kneel as one. We fight as one.*

*"Galka does not raise boys. Galka raises weapons."*

It was indeed powerful. They started it, and they finished it with another thump to the heart. The instructor stepped back, and a presence walked through the fifth door. White Boots struck the platform above to signify the arrival of the principal senraki, the Grand Marshal Zazami Taren Senraki, and principal of Galka War Academy. His white coat over his white combat made him appear more graceful than threatening. His purple sash was tied to his upper arm. He stopped at the center.

Silence tightened for a long moment as he assessed every corner of the room before he cleared his throat. Then his voice carried across the hall, deep as a war drum.

"Warriors of Galka," Taren began, hands clasped behind him, "Today marks the eighty first day of this academic cycle. You stand here stronger than you were yesterday, and weaker than you will be tomorrow. The recruits sash change is a week away and they

will officially become the first years of Galka war academy." His gaze swept across the sea of kneeling boys, lingering for a heartbeat on the First Year ranks.

"We train you not to fight battles. We train you to win them." A few boys bowed their heads at the familiar creed. He was the picture of calmness before a storm.

"But today," Taren continued, "we acknowledge a rare occurrence. A new student has joined us, a young man entering his final year as an aged student." A shock of whispers stirred and died instantly when the instructors glared. Sagiri felt the weight of hundreds of eyes, even though none dared move.

"Most of you began at thirteen," the principal said. "You have been shaped, broken, and reforged over three years. This student has nine months to catch up to you." He paused. "He will not receive special treatment. He will not be shielded. If anything his challenge will be harsher and I encourage you to show him how we do it here in Galka. Remember respect is earned." A ripple of approval moved through the boys, he knew the last statement was made for him and he had to earn their respect. Taren's voice however hardened when spoke next because could clearly hear groans of dissatisfaction from the boys. Especially the fourth year. They still held distaste for him

"Do not underestimate him. A warrior forged in pressure can break or even become stronger than all of you." Sagiri's heart thudded against his ribcage. The principal's words were meant to encourage him and he knew he had to work twice as hard if he had a chance of earning even the littlest of respect from his peers. "This academy accepts only strength, discipline, and always will." he said glaring at the fourth year cadets for a long second. He could only sense hostility from them but he was not going to allow indiscipline. He lifted his hand in a single sweeping command.

"Rise only when dismissed. Fight only when ordered. Learn always. Protect your unit. And remember Galka does not raise boys." His eyes sharpened. "Galka raises weapons." The final horn sounded just as he finished his speech

"ASSEMBLY DISMISSED." principal Senraki announced stepping off the podium. But no one moved, not until grand marshal Taren and the instructors stepped off the platform and left the hall. Only then did the boys begin to stand, in perfect synchrony boots hitting the floor in an easy stance the right hand to the heart and another by the side.

His lesson after the assembly was the compressed subjects taught in the first year. It included the theory of terrain advantage, theory of small unit maneuvers, theory of battle simulations and theory tactical reading. He would not have an instructor for theory and he would just go to the second year library to study by himself for three hours.

The second year library was cold and smaller than the fourth year one. Rows of shelves stood rigid against the walls, thick books stacked in towering columns, their worn spines hinting at years of hard study. Everything was silent except the faint rustle of pages and

the scratch of quills from students scattered across the room. Sagiri ignored all the curious eyes and slipped into a table at the far corner, the curriculum folder heavy in his hands. His stomach burned with emptiness, twisting angrily, reminding him he had missed breakfast again. He followed the written landmarks on the shelves and picked out the four books. He could have just picked one but with the archive inside of him he knew he only needed to read once to know all the theories like the back of his hands.

He laid the four books out on the table, the Terrain Advantage, Small Unit Maneuvers, Battlefield Simulations and Tactical Reading and Analysis textbooks. He needed to finish up reading all the theoretical books quickly so he could focus more on combat which he was bad at. I need to wrap up the first year theoretical study in one month instead of two or more so I can stand a chance to stand on the same footing with the others.

The first page showed a hand drawn map: hills, valleys, rivers, cliffs, forests, plains. The lesson felt simple at first until he saw the depth of it.

"Terrain is not a backdrop. It is a weapon," the text read. He tried to read through the first page so the archive inside of him could absorb it but he could not focus. His head throbbed with every heartbeat. He was too hungry to understand anything. He pushed himself to read but the archive inside of him consumed almost all of his remaining strength. The next few pages were about high ground superiority. Sagiri's vision blurred for a moment, lines doubling.. It was almost impossible to absorb what he read at a snail pace at the moment.

He rubbed his temples tiredly, His power stirred faintly inside him, the archive which used his energy to function could not run in his weakened state. He tried to read but he felt physical pain so unbearable as if something was barely holding together inside of him and it could burst open at any moment. Another bolt of pain struck behind his eyes. He gasped softly. It was like ramming into a locked door. He closed the book, breathing shakily. He needed food and energy more than he had imagined. Strength to study and strength to read.

## ***STUDENT AND SASH***

***Recruit\_ ash-gray sash***

***1st year\_ deep brown sash***

***2nd year\_ forest green sash***

***3rd year\_ midnight blue sash***

***forth year\_ crimson red sash***

***the students wear their sash on the waist tied backwards leaving it extended***

## **OFFICIALS RANK AND SASH**

*junior instructor\_ obsidian black sash*

*senior instructor\_ gold-edged black sash*

*commander/ division leader\_ solid gold sash*

*captain/academy's marshal\_ white with gold thread sash*

*principal/ grand marshal\_ purple sash*

*The instructors wear their sash around the arms. Much smaller one.*

*The principal wears a white combat with a flowing white overcoat with the Galka war school at the back the instructors wear black combats with overcoats with the galka war academy crest and the students dark grey combats with no overcoat still with a smaller crest at the back. hope this helps*

## **Chapter 20: Chapter 20: PUNISHMENT**

Sagiri didn't notice when his vision began to dim. At first it was only the words on the page drifting apart, slipping sideways. Then the desk seemed to tilt. He blinked, and blinked again, dragging his the line of sight back into focus. He had a lot to achieve in a short time however and so he couldn't stop just yet, he needed to achieve what his classmates had achieved in more than three years in only nine months. If he wanted to make it into college he needed to work hard. Senraki had joked about eliminating him if he failed but he was not willing to take any chances or repeat another year. College held his gate way to finding out who he was and who his benefactor was. He also needed to understand the power inside of him and that required him to stand at the same footing with the others. The archive inside of him already put him a step ahead of all others. He did not have to work as hard as the others, just seeing things ones and they could be recorded in the archive inside of him which is the same as his memory. He wanted to be done with theoretical subjects so he could focus all his energy on combat training.

He couldn't stop just yet. He refused to stop. He hated being in the dark and he wanted to know all the 'whys and what's' in his life as soon as possible. The archive inside him buzzed faintly, like a sealed door trembling with external impact, yet his exhaustion was suffocating it. When he pushed at it again, pain burst through his skull like a slap of lightning. He grit his teeth and swallowed down the pain. It was not the first time he had experienced the pushback. He could just ignore it and do what had to be done.

"One more page," he whispered. The second year library was now full of students scribbling and drawing in their books, he however did not need to write. The words in the book however did not cooperate with him. They physically stayed still and refused to

get absorbed by his eyes. Before he knew what was coming His head drooped forward. His hands loosened on the textbook making it crumple on the desk with a thud. A softness washed over him like a warm blanket dragging him under. His muscles did not even put up a fight, it was as if his body was controlling him and he was not in control at all. And then in the blink of an eye everything went black.

His body collapsed onto the open book, cheek pressing into the page, breath shallow. He didn't hear the bell. He didn't hear the students leaving for their next class. He didn't hear the instructor who stepped into the doorway, saw him unconscious, and shook his head before walking away with a cold, dismissive sigh. He simply slept like the dead with no knowledge of where he was. The sleep was not gentle, it was as if he had shut down and surrendered to tiredness with nothing left to give.

The second year compressed unsupervised class came to an end and the third year theoretical class started but he remained passed out in the same posture. He missed the entire 10:00 to 12:00 compressed class at the third year pentagon secluded block. The second year library emptied and refilled twice before he stirred. Yet he still remained under until the entirety of four hours had passed from 8 to 12. When he finally came to his senses, it wasn't like the normal feeling of waking up from sleep. He gasped as breath rushed into his lungs as if he had been partly dead. For a few moments he did not know who he was and where he was. A deep ache pulsed through his skull when sagiri lifted his head. He blinked, confused. His book was still open beneath him, stained slightly where his cheek had pressed into the ink. The sun reading instrument on the wall innovated from the central tribes decades ago showed him that it was already known. That and the continuous ringing of a gong. That had never happened to him before. He had never pushed his body so much so much that it switched off on him before. He had just learned something new about his body. When drained of energy, it would simply shut down, no matter his will.

Something else was weird however. He was hungry and when he passed out he was completely spent. Yet, he felt charged. Not fully restored, but noticeably different. As though sleep had fed him. As if rest itself was energy.

"What just happened?" He whispered to himself uncertainly and slightly alarmed. His body felt warm, subtly activated, like coals that had regained a faint glow. Had the Archive done this while he slept? His mistake of pushing himself on an empty stomach had made him learn two things simultaneously. Back home he had never gone hungry or tired himself so much he passed out. He didn't have time to question it further because the last slot of second year students were leaving the library, their forest green sashes tied to the back of their waist flying behind them.

Their voices drifted away as they headed to their dining wing. He could have preferred to eat at their wing but the rules were strict on entering another class restricted area without supervision or permission. His body was a little charged yet he had a bit of distance to walk from the second year wing through to the fourth year wing. He was

hating his curriculum more and more already, he wished he could already get done with it but he knew it was going to take a while.

The dining hall was at full capacity when he stepped through its doors. The line was already thinning out, he slipped silently to the back of the line. He was the last one to make it to the line. The plain looking food being served had never looked so good and he salivated. Hundreds of boys were already eating like wolves, muscles twitching, jaws working with servings as large as mountains. When it was his turn he lifted his gloved hand to signal three fingers and the server looked at him with a knowing smile before he filled his plate with a small mountain. Even at three servings his mountain of food was till less than a half of most the others mountains. His hunger had multiplied in just a day and he didn't know how much it could increase in a month or two. Sagiri slipped to the corner at the back alone, unnoticed before devouring his food. He barely tasted it as he basically inhaled it down his throat.

One serving vanished. Then a second. Shockingly, he was nowhere near full and he immediately started to dig into his third serving. Slowly this time. he was halfway when hall suddenly went silent and all eyes snapped to the front. Boots sounded hitting the floor with intensity before the instructor, the morning meditation instructor, walked in. his solid gold sash, a harsh contrast to his midnight black combat uniform and black overcoat. His presence was heavy enough to have everyone pose in what he was doing.

It seemed every time he showed up was to punish. He was a commander instructor and he was the discipline division leader. His charcoal grey deep eyes were narrowed into slits with his broad hands tightly behind his back as he came to a stop in the middle of the room.

Many students never referred to him by his name as discipline commander, Torena Mataka. They called him instructor 'Doom.' He only showed up when he wanted to punish or dish out punishment. Everyone held their breath hoping they were not the one to be at the other end of his whip of discipline which never bent and was always merciless.

"Attention," Torena's voice boomed. " Recruit Sagiri Stand up!" Every head turned. There could only be one recruit in the hall after all. It was a glaring fact since he was the only one wearing his home clothes and a sash laid on his neck since he did not yet have the uniform. The ash gray sash was the same as what the first year student wore, for three months they are just called recruits before they receive their deep brown sash. The only difference was that in two weeks they could change to the deep brown sash so they could stop being just recruits and officially become the first years of Galka War Academy. The rest of the fourth year students wore the crimson red sash making him stand out like a sore thumb.

Every sash held a special meaning and symbol. The recruits' ash gray sash meant that the new entries were still unshaped, untested and like stones in the mud. The colour is

a symbol that you may have entered but you were still unrefined. The first year deep brown sash meant that 'you are now grounded and are starting to understand the foundation of discipline.' Just like soil, the deep brown is to show the roots of growth. The second year student's forest green sash means 'you have grown and expanded your skills and awareness level just like a forest' it signifies a student's instincts have started working and they are no longer just children. The third year students midnight blue sash means, 'you are calm under pressure and have deeper understanding of strategy.' it signifies the night, instead of seeing black the warrior has sharpened their senses so they can see as good as day. The crimson red fourth year student sash means 'to have a mastery of combat fundamentals and leadership' red is the colour of battle courage and responsibility, the colour of blood to show that you will protect even at the cost of shading your blood.

Sagiri froze, tray halfway lifted. he stood to his feet quickly and turned to face instructor Toren. This man had taken an hour of sleep away from him even though they had only four. He was just ten minutes late to meditation yet he had been punished for that. How severely was he going to be punished for missing a whole lesson?

"You will lose an additional one hour of sleep for your absence from the 10–12 compressed classes for two more days." Sagiri had expected to be given the silent punishment that instructor Naga had mentioned but he seemed to have gone quite easy on him. That is all Instructor Doom said before he turned around and left. He truly was a discipline enforcer. Sagiri sat down and continued to eat. It could have been worse.

Whispers rippled across the tables like a gust of wind.

"Again?"

"That's the second punishment today..."

"He must be insane or cursed... missing a whole class?"

"He won't last the week!"

Sagiri felt every pair of eyes on him. Some mocking, Some curious and some worryingly hostile, obviously wondering why he could choose the most brutal school if he couldn't handle it. That was far from the truth however but he did not care to defend himself. That could be even more insulting to them, to know that he was forced to be in a position they worked so hard to achieve. They were speaking in Korun tongue too and he was still pretending not to speak it. They had obviously been told he couldn't speak Korun and so whatever they said they thought he would hear. Others however spoke in Tagayia national language so he could hear them. He finished eating quickly and snapped his Oru-shells back on.

He made sure to keep his eyes down. Not because he was scared but it had become a habit for him to keep his eyes hidden. Students still lingered even when they were done

eating and some just stared at him boldly. Everyone knew his name now 'the punished new aged recruit,' the sixteen-year-old anomaly who joined nine months before the final exams. The boy who had missed two classes already and earned two punishments before midday.

Sagiri stood slowly to his feet when he was done eating at the far corner of the dining hall. The place was still buzzing with muted chatter. Heads turned. He kept his eyes down and moved toward the exit. But he did not make it far before he was forced to his knees with a pained groan.