

THE LAST KEEPER #Chapter 71: ALL FLARES - Read THE LAST KEEPER Chapter 71: ALL FLARES

Chapter 71: Chapter 71: ALL FLARES

Salka did not get to sleep long even after he freshened up and ate. He forced himself to rest for an hour and half before he headed out. The cadets had already gone out, watchers took their positions on the walls and ground supervising instructors had already left. Fuwuka was standing on the highest point above the wall just above the gate staring at the dark landscape beyond the gate. It seemed that no supervising instructor had fired the white flare in case of danger.

He yawned and stood beside fuwuka who was staring into the darkness as if he could see anything besides the darkness. The man was not even wearing vision goggles like all the watchers. This rested around his neck. Salka retrieved his and pulled them over his eyes. He stared into the darkness.

"What is the plan?" he asked Fuwuka.

"We sent in only senior instructors and above rank out, junior instructors are watchers. Except Lotaga. He said he was put on watcher duty and I sent him on to the other side of the wall. The supervisors are spread out in pairs, but we are stretched thin." Fuwuka explained. Senraki briefed him about the situation and fuwuka was best at taking quick measures. The man did not know what taking it easy was. Another reason why Salka trusted him to take charge.

"Any eliminations yet?" Salka stared into the darkness watching cadets without flasks running back towards the gate.

"Seems they are being more careful today. Only fifty six eliminations so far." Fuwuka said with pride. It seemed the boys had learnt unlike the previous night that sometimes hiding was better than attacking an opponent with the same weakness as you. The filthy six were seated in the assembling space inside the gate in a meditative position where they could sit until the game was over. The entire reason for the exercise was to teach them how to fight when you had a weakness. The flask was a representation of a weakness. You have to hide yours but when it is exposed and could take you down any moment then another strategy is required. Like stealth, laying low, patience. Patience most of all was the main goal of the game. The two men stared into the darkness for another few minutes and it was silent for a while.

Then a flare went off. Not orange or purple but yellow. Neither captain moved. Yellow is just a distress signal but it wasn't a fatal signal. Perhaps someone had finally encountered a scorpion. It was on the far centre but not even halfway to the heart of the terrain but it was still far off.

"Looks like someone is scared of the scorpions. Can't be from Konate." Salka added. "are there supervisors in that region?" he continued to ask.

"Yes. There must be two around that region." Fuwuka answered, not worried at all. "Gravescale's don't like the sand so I'm sure it's nothing to worry about." Fuwuka added. He had already debriefed all the instructors. From watchers to supervisors about the situation. It was already rare that a gravescale attacked so far from their nest. Moments went by and the two men assumed the problem had been solved but another yellow distress flare went off and Salka's eyes narrowed.

"I am sure I situated supervisors 10 vaara apart. There should have been two or one in that area." Fuwuka said, narrowing his eyes. Torena stepped out behind the two with senraki. The two had arrived with the blast but caught fuwuka's statement. Salka's team was on the ground as supervisors but he did not know what positions.

"That is the second flare just a few feet apart. Do you think it's two teams or just one team on the run?" Salka asked more to himself and there was silence as the men waited to see if a third could follow or a supervisor had intervened. Not long after another yellow distress flare went off and salka's brows knitted together.

"That is plenty of time for a supervisor to get there. What is taking so long?" Fuwuka gritted. just as he was talking a watcher came by and bowed to salka.

"Captain Salka, watcher Lotaga said he was going down the wall to release himself but it has been two hours." An instructor on watcher duty came just then and saluted before reporting. Salka hissed with irritation. He had known that Lotaga could not listen to him but he hoped he could. He must have got bored staying put like the child he was and gone to chase some fun.

"Go back to your post and don't move." Salka said with a serious tone. "I'm going to kill him this time." He muttered under his breath turning his eyes around to watch the darkness below. It had gone silent for a while with no more distress flares and Salka's shoulders lowered. He however did not like that three distress flares were shot at the same time. He was about to scale down the wall and go check out the area himself when two red flares went off at the same time. Red flares were much more prominent, used even in battle and two had been shot just around the same area the yellow had been shot.

"What on earth is going down there!" Senraki said, coming to stand at the edge.

"I'll go down and check." Salka said, already unraveling his hooked ropes.

"I will go with you. Fuwuka, get ready to use the white and green flares. Torena gathers healers on standby. We might need one." Senraki gave the order. The red flare could only mean a life and death situation and senraki never wanted cadets to lose their life before they even graduated.

"What the hell is going on down there?!" Fuwuka cursed.

Senraki and Salka scaled the wall quickly before they disappeared in the direction of the red distress flare. Salka could only hope that whatever it was, they were not too late. The white combat suit Senraki always wore shone even in the darkness providing no camouflage. He did not need any either. It seemed that he hadn't been able to get what Salka had said out of his mind. He was carrying his two swords both sheathed to his sides.

"Try not to slow me down, Salka of the Bami." Senraki mocked, charging into the rocky terrain amidst a blur. Salka groaned at his childish tantrum and moved fast. Senraki was able to keep up, of course they seemed like two blurs disappearing by.

"I just hope no one dares to die without my order." Senraki said after a while of them moving. They could cover the distance in a quarter the time the students used to get there because of how fast they were. A student's speed was nothing compared to that of a captain or a marshal. Salka just snickered. They soon covered more than half the distance.

They all felt the two rushed footsteps before they saw two cadets running at top speed. Their flasks were intact but they looked like they were running for dear life.

"Stop!" Salka commanded startling the two who almost tripped on their own feet at how fast they turned. They looked terrified as if they had seen a ghost and they were conveniently running from the direction the red flare had just gone off. They did not seem to even recognize his voice. They got into a defensive position, backs tight joined together and drew their daggers. They panted more from fear than tiredness and Salka wondered what they had seen.

He jumped from the high rock followed by Senraki.

"Salsal you are scaring them." Senraki said in a low voice and it scared the boys even more. He probably sounded like a pervert acting half his age calling unprofessionally in front of the cadets. Even with the moon it was still dark and the boys could not see them properly.

"Are you planning to stab your captain Zazarie, Bukata. What form is that even?" Salka said, stepping closer and the boys almost fell over in relief. They looked like they were just about to collapse in relief and they hanged over to breathe.

"You are on Sagiri's team like I remember. Where are the others?" Senraki asked, jumping down too.

"He is dead." Bukata said after a moment of silence. "They killed him!" he said, tears of terror forming in his eyes. Most of the cadets had not gone to the field or killed before or seen someone die. That could start after three months. They could spend half the year

before finals on small missions yet cadets breaking down was not a trait they had been taught. It was as if all the training went out the door at that moment. Salka could understand but he did not have time to calm down the boys.

"Cadet, calm down and give a record of the encounter!" He said in a strict tone and the boy looked like he was physically trying to pull himself together.

"Someone stabbed Sagiri. It-it has to be the twins or the intruders. He is b-bleeding so much." Zazarie was the one who answered, looking like his panic was forcing him not to feel because if he felt then he could not handle it.

"What else?" Salka asked.

"There were intruders disguised as Konate students and they wanted Sagiri." Zazarie answered before he collapsed. It seemed that the only reason the boy had not collapsed from watching his comrade die was because his mind was pushing itself to deliver the news before he let the shock hit him. He was actually much worse than Bukata in a sense.

"Why do they want him?" sagiri tried to get all the angles as he retrieved the white distress flare. It seems he was right about the intruder.

"Sagiri was acting not himself today. He-he asked us to leave before he got stabbed. Those intruders said he wanted to bury them and sagiri did not deny it." Bukata explained. Salka could not understand what the boy was saying. He probably was in shock and saying nonsense. Salka shot the white flare in the air before turning to leave.

"Carry your friend to the gate. The exercise is over." Salka said before him and senraki continued on their journey. He had brought the boy himself from the exam council and he did not want to imagine the worst. He pushed himself even faster now. even senraki was silent.

"Could a cadet really stab another? I wanted to corner them but I didn't imagine they could go this far." Senraki cursed. He had played a game to catch them and with Kaka in the team and the other eight he had not expected for things to go this way. If the boy died then it would be completely his fault.

"Its not the time to blame yourself. We need to get the boy a healer." Senraki said, reading the man's thoughts. He could not afford to think of anything other than saving the boy just yet. After a few minutes of pushing themselves they finally broke into the clearing. The smell of blood had welcomed them long before. Even without the smell the scene was all telling. Six cadets were sprawled in different positions and the other missing. Salka's heart stopped for a moment.

They are dead

I was late again

His thoughts chanted in his head. Senraki pulled forward to check the pulse of the closest boy. He breathed sharply.

"They are alive." He said and Salka breathed a sigh he had been holding. He was not phased by death but he was phased by seeing children die without cause. "They are just sleeping." His second statement was even more shocking. To add to the weirdness Sagiri and two other boys were missing. They could not have all just fallen unconscious from the shock. Even so he knew Kiuga and the boy was far more advanced for his age. He must have been the one who made the call to send the two to seek help.

"Hypnosis." Senraki gritted. "There are intruders." Senraki tapped the boys one by one in the acupoints, jolting them out of the hypnosis sleep. They all looked disoriented for a moment before they shot up and wheeled around. Hypnosis just paused time for them and they probably were now getting back to the scene only to find Sagiri missing.

"Sagiri? Sagiri!" N'varu was the first to go nuts followed by the others. It took them a while to realize that Senraki and Salka were standing beside them.

"Captain?" Kiuga said being the one who was least freaked out. The others saluted with the exception of N'varu who had gone completely mad. He was holding the sand full of Sagiri's blood close to his chest as if he could suddenly materialize from the ground.

"Keeper noo!" he screamed, not caring and Salka was convinced everyone had gone mad.

"Kiuga, where is Sagiri?" Senraki asked and Kiuga did not hesitate to give a proper account of what had happened even about Maita and Kaka going after those who stabbed Sagiri. From what Kiuga said the intruders did not look like they wanted to kill Sagiri. They wanted him alive. It solidified their speculation that the ones who stabbed him were the tamelku twins. Senraki retrieved the green flare and shot two in the air simultaneously.

"All of you head in the closest direction you see a white flare." He instructed and as if on command. White flares went off all over the terrain lighting up the sky. "Join the supervising instructors and head for the gate," he continued. N'varu had not moved and he was now sitting defeated staring into the darkness. Only for a long moment however before he got up and charged in a random direction.

"I think I should come with you too." Kiuga said and Salka paused to think for a long moment before giving in. The boy was young but he could be of help for what came next.

"Good. The rest go back." He instructed and the other boys did not need to be told twice before they were running back.

"So you are saying the intruders wanted Sagiri because they believe he is someone of importance." Salka asked as he bent down to look at the trail of blood. Sagiri must have been bleeding pretty bad from the trail of blood left behind.

"Yes. And he looked sick and in pain like that day at the dining wing, before..." Kiuga stopped. It seemed he did not want to think about what had happened.

Chapter 72: Chapter 72: PURE EVIL

Sagiri felt his conscious return to him long before he stirred.

"do you think he is dead?" a voice asked.

"We were asked to bring him out alive." another groaned.

"I wasn't told any of that. I was only told to kill." another voice answered in an empty tone.

"And you will not kill anyone until we are out. We can't move him looking like that thanks to you two's incompetence.

"How was I to know, the boy is hated by his comrades so much so they want him dead." another answered. This one is more familiar. The manboy's voice. He seemed slightly irritated. It sounded like it was not the first time he had been accused.

"Well we sent you in with 'wide eyes' over there so as to make it clean. We could have been halfway out by now.

"I wonder what is special about him if he was so easily stabbed." another snickered.

"If he dies we just get another boy and take it to him." Another voice said and they all kept chatting about the many ways to complete their mission. The power inside of sagiri was stirring more calmly than usual. It felt like a calm sea. His body was not warm and cold anymore and even as he stood at death's door he had never felt so alive before. He was in physical pain but he felt like he was floating as if his body was finally himself. He had never felt such a strong sense of self before as if he was finally fully a human and more. It was a feeling he could not explain.

The group continued chatting and passing blame for a while. Sagiri was swallowed into darkness again. His consciousness stirred awake again and he felt even more of the feeling from earlier. He tried to open his eyes or move any part of his body but it was as if he was stuck under a pile of rocks. It was silent now and he could feel no presence around him. He was just as soon pulled under again. He kept slipping in and out of consciousness for a long time again and again. When he came to once someone was pouring liquid down his throat that was bitter. He was pulled under again and when he came to again, an eighth presence had joined the group.

"We should move now. We have no time to wait. If we wait till day break we are all dead. They let all the dogs loose." It was the eighth presence he had heard. He must have been the scout whose job was to watch if they were being pursued.

'So it hasn't been days?' he had been in and out of consciousness so much he thought it had been days but it had only been ours. Even so he could not open his eyes yet.

"Damn it. I'm not dying for a half dead boy. Carry him, let's move." The voice that sounded like the leader spoke again and the room felt tense before hell broke loose. Someone hauled him onto his shoulders and pain shot through every melancholic cell. The pain was so hot and searing and he slipped back to unconsciousness. When he came to again he was being popped up and down. The morning air hit his face. He was able to open his eyes and he could see it was still dark. It must have been past four. The eight were moving at top speed. It was like they were retired warriors themselves only now they worked for a different team. They kept running for a while and sagiri gritted his teeth to keep from screaming. He wished he could blackout again but he didn't.

"Stop!" A the bone leading the squad finally said. He was dressed in a green rusty combat suit, they all were wearing some of clothes that could camouflage to the woods. They had finally left the rocky terrain and had entered the woods.

"What is it?" they all stood and one asked. sagiri couldn't see their faces yet because he was hanging upside down in an awkward position.

"I thought I heard something. Let's keep moving." he said after freezing for a while

"No you won't." A familiar voice said and sagiri froze. Kaka Asakana? Did that mean the others were with him? he wondered but he could only perceive a presence of two. The eight paused and the man carrying sagiri threw him down like a sack making pain shoot in from his wound to every cell. He groaned in pain and panted.

"Sagiri?" the two boys snapped. They had not been there when the others were hypnotized and they might have been chasing the twins and ended up here. "What the hell are you doing here?" Kaka asked as if sagiri had come willingly.

"What are you doing with him?" Maita asked and the eight snickered.

"Hey kids, we are trying to leave, be good and go back to your cage." The leader said. he was carrying a type of axes crisscrossed to his back and a line of tribal markings running down his arm. The man beside him had a tribal mark in the shape of a star behind his head. They were not the same group that had come to get him when he was twelve.

"Or what?" Kaka sneered unsheathing his daggers. one in each hand. He looked even more irritable now. "Did you stab him?" he seethed and the leader sighed in irritation.

"I thought they teach you to analyze situations in your big cage? now move from out path." the leader said impatiently but he did not seem phased at all by kaka's display of hostility.

"Kill them." he said and two guys standing beside him moved to get the two obstacles out of the way.

The first intruder moved without warning.

Kaka reacted on instinct. His dagger slid into his palm as he stepped inside the man's reach, steel flashing once. The knife missed his ribs by inches. Kaka's blade caught the wrist instead. Before the man could move back. He drove his shoulder forward, breaking balance, then cut again short, controlling and forcing the man back. He was fast and the intruder must have underestimated him. the intruder cursed and the two moved with fast exchanging attacks. Sagiri had never seen Kaka move like that. He was fierce even during sparing but right now it was clear he wanted to kill. The man must have been a seasoned warrior too however because they went toe to toe with their moves fast and precise. kaka got slashed once but he did not even flinch and pushed the man back with a kick the man did not even fall just slid a few tards before he was back kaka in seconds.

Maita was already engaged.

His opponent came in low, slashing wide. He retreated half a step, let the strike pass, then closed the distance sharply. His dagger struck twice in quick succession not deep, but precisely forcing the intruder to guard instead of attack. He circled, feet light, eyes fixed on his shoulders, reading the next move before it came. The second intruder recovered fast. The fight was pulling longer than the leader had expected.

"Damned Bami tribe." he cursed his mistake. The Bami tribe were already genetically gifted and he was realizing his mistake of underestimating them. "Help them." he said looking at the other two who were now standing beside him.

With two more additions the fight soon grew dirty. Kaka was fast but he was still a student and he did not have time to even catch his breath. He had gotten slashed a couple of times but he had slowed down one bit. The first attack's hand that had been slashed was a plus because it had slowed him back a bit. Metal met with metal so fast and it was really amazing to see Kaka holding his own against two veterans. He deserved to be the galka academy number one.

Maita was having trouble. He was not as fast or as strong as Kaka but he was still strong. A kick from one of the duo going for his neck sent him into a tree making him lose breath but for only a second before he was back. Even so, sagiri knew that the two could get tired soon. They were outnumbered and it wouldn't take long before the leader snapped and killed them. sagiri could tell that he was much much stronger.

"how long does it take to kill two boys?" a voice said and it was not from the five still standing by. sagiri had not felt his presence but he was there now. he reeked of death just like the gravescale. Even from his position on the ground he knew he was the guy that had killed the Vorrash. He had neither a presence nor a feeling. He was no better than ghost and something about him made the power inside sagiri stir. the man was dressed in black like rugs with a wide blade resting on his back. His hair was braided into a long braid resting way past his back. He looked like something had disfigured the left side of his face. So much so his left eye was permanently pulled into a slit. A permanent smile was edged on his face. Only it was worse than the one the Tamelku twins always wore. He made the Tamelku twins look like harmless toddlers.

"Where have you been, Rat?" The leader asked, snapping his eyes to look at the source of the voice. He was perched on a branch looking like he had just crawled out of the stomach of a dead beast and sagiri froze. Did he really hide inside the snake? the dead gravescale? Sagiri thought and for the first time in his life he felt the taste of pure evil in the air.

"Why do you ask? want me to show you?" he asked in a singsong voice before sticking his tongue out and licking his lips as if he had just eaten something delicious. sagiri had a feeling it was not food.

"What have you done?" the leader asked.

"I made it rain," he answered, shrugging his shoulders. Even in his weakened state sagiri did not miss the blood reeking off of him. And it did not belong to the Vorrash. It was human blood. He was not only bathed in human blood but human blood. sagiri froze. He could not help but wonder if some of the blood belonged to nvaru or any member of team 25. he had never felt such a strong urge to punish. The man the leader just called rat changed his position from perching to a sitting position. He did not look more than twenty in age yet he was soulless. He kicked his feet as he watched Kaka and Maita fight.

"I think the bastard has killed someone. That was not in the plan. We are not going to make it out of here if he killed someone." the man with the star tattoo said. "This has gone on long enough. Let me kill the two and we can move. He moved towards Kaka and Maita's direction and Sagiri was sure they were dead this time. He looked to be at a bar in strength with the leader. He pulled his weapon out, which was an oversized axe before and moved fast.

an arrow tore through the air suddenly and one of the intruders fighting maita was pinned to a tree. He had been hit right in the heart and pinned to the tree so deep. Before the star tattooed man could react an arrow was shot at him. He was first however and he barely missed but it launched into the shoulder of his right hand making him stagger back. He fell on one knee with a pained groan. One hand went to his injured shoulder before his eyes shot up to look at his assailant. He did not have

another chance before another arrow was shot at him then another. He dived to the side and rolled quickly. The movement made the arrow go deeper and blood squatted.

"What now?" the leader groaned, drawing his twin axes quickly. The rest followed suit and drew their weapons and got into a defensive position.

The arrows were coming from different directions and fast it seemed that it was a couple of attackers. An arrow was fired at Kaka's directions who was now pinned down with attacks. It was aimed so accurately at the assailants and they both jumped back. Kaka used the opening. It was small but it was all he needed. He launched one dagger at one of the assailants and hit him square in the stomach. Not a vital organ but he was slowed down. He moved fast and slit his throat. Before he pulled it back and launched it in his heart. It was as if he wanted to kill the man twice.

another arrow was shot out at the leader's head. It didn't make it to his heart however before he cut it aside with ease slowing its momentum and cutting it in half.

Just then Lotaga tumbled out of the trees dramatically and landed on one knee, his bow drawn with two arrows.

"Hey Sagiri, missed me?" he smiles widely and Sagiri felt oddly relieved and worried at the same time. He might have been good but the gut named Rat's smile had grown even wider watching the current scene.

Chapter 73: Chapter 73: HIS AWAKENING I

"Hey Sagiri, missed me?" He smiled widely and Sagiri felt oddly relieved and worried at the same time. He might have been good but the gut named Rat's smile had grown even wider watching the current scene. "Don't you dare die. That is a command from your senior." he said, still drawing his bow to the fullest. He however did not release them in the direction of the leader again just like Sagiri thought because that was the direction he was facing. He pulled the arrows back to the limit. In the split second before he released however, he turned around. and aimed at the two still engaged in battle with Kaka and Maita.

The arrows hit the ground where the two men had been standing. They barely saw it coming and they dodged just in time but that was a mistake because just at the same time he reached in his quiver and retrieved two and let them fly in the same direction. They did not have to miss this time and they hit. The one Kaka was fighting was hit in the thigh and without his thigh he was no match for Kaka. Kaka took the opening created by Lotaga yet again and he went for the man's throat. The man blocked, however with all his might Kaka fell to his hands and kicked the arrow deeper into his leg. He was did not look tired yet but Sagiri could tell the two wore him out with cuts. The man groaned and fell back. Kaka jumped on him and slashed his arms. Without one limp he was no match for the beast of a boy. Even so he struggled a bit until Kaka slit his throat ear to ear before stabbing him through the heart.

So much for killing with honour. Sagiri thought. His head was slightly held up by a fallen branch but he still could not move. just watch. the intruder fighting with maita had been struck in the chest with his chest. It was not close to his heart and he was struggling to breath or die. Maita stood on top of him with his dagger. Kaka finished and when he turned around his strides didn't falter till he fell on one knee and drove his dagger into Maita's assailant but he did not slit his throat this time.

"Coward." Kaka said, rising to his feet. Maita was still frozen. seems unlike kaka who did not bat an eye before killing maita had actually never killed one. Kaka was truly deserving of his title as a king of Bami. He was efficient in all areas. Sagiri was starting to realize Kaka's scorn towards him wasn't personal. The boy just hated any show of weakness and incompetence and he was both. Even in the moment he was the one who needed saving yet again. Even with three dead and one injured. sagiri could not shake off the feeling that they were outnumbered.

"I see the salka brat has grown." The leader said, looking at lotaga. salka brat? sagiri wondered. lotaga is Captain Salka's child.

"Indeed have grown but you have remained ugly Tonga." Lotaga's smile widened and he bowed dramatically.

"I see salka did not teach you manners and how to respect your elders." Tonga the leader snickered. It seemed as if he had a personal grudge against Salka.

"He did teach how to kill rogue captains though." Lotaga said and sagiri froze. If Tonga was on the same level as Salka in battle then the only thing the three could do was run. He tried to open his mouth and tell them to leave. The intruders wanted him alive so there was no need for them to die for him. Tonga laughed a small condescending laugh as if that was the funniest thing he had ever heard till he keeled over and clutched his stomach.

"I'm going to teach you something salka failed," he started in a deadly tone that was void of any humor. "how to shut up for good." he said in a low tone and sagiri had never felt so helpless. All he could do was watch and he did not need to predict the future to know that if lotaga came alone he was going to lose to Tonga. He was good with the bow and arrow but if Tonga was half as good as Captain Salka then lotaga did not have many chances.

"Leave," he tried to whisper something but nothing came out of his mouth.

lotaga turned to kaka and maita and whispered something. a second later maita disappeared into the tree line faster than wind but kaka did not move. lotaga must have told him to go and call for help. kaka on the other hand must have disobeyed. That was expectable since the guy would rather die than run from a fight or show weakness. Soon after a red flare went off in the direction maita had disappeared to but Tonga did not seem phased.

"So predictable like your captain. But before they react to your childish signal you will already be taking your last breath." he threatened and his words barely left his mouth before he charged. sagiri almost missed his move. The next thing he saw was lotaga barely able to block with his bow and it shattered in half. The man was moving way too fast and his twin axes aims were lethal and precise. He did not hesitate in his intent to finish lotaga. lotaga was barely able to retrieve his daggers to block the next attack which could have claimed his left arm. Tonga, being a rogue captain, was a dangerous opponent. Even sagiri could not imagine going against salka. He could be dead before the fight even began.

Kaka tried to jump in to help but he a kick to his middle body that even sagiri had not seen coming sent him into a smaller tree shattering it in half and it still could not stop the impact. kaka did not move for a long moment and if sagiri had not pushed himself to listen to his heart beat then he could have been convinced the boy was dead. lotaga was barely holding his own and he was spending more time on the defense. Tonga had broken two daggers already and lotaga could not dodge his attacks fast enough or attack back. The fight was too fast even for sagiri to keep up and he was surprised Lotaga had not died yet. Two attacks landed at the same time. One deep cut on Lotaga's hip and another to his upper back both in close concessions. He staggered back in pain but tonga did not hesitate before attacking again, seconds later two more attacks landed and lotaga fell to his knees.

Lotaga bled from the four deep cuts. He was trying to hold his own but Tonga was just too much for him.

"Seems that you are going to die faster than I thought, Afterall." He said, sharpening his twin axes against each other. He stood on top of lotaga who was bleeding profusely. He lifted one to attack but before he could he turned around. Kaka had managed to get up at some point and he tried to attack from behind but with another kick he was sent flying again into the back of a tree where he remained still for a second before he retched a mouthful of blood. Tonga was good even in perceiving his presence. He had not needed to turn to know kaka was sneaking up on him.

"Childish!" He cursed, turning around to give his attention to Lotaga. Lotaga on the other hand used Kaka's opening to attack Tonga with a dagger aimed for his heart from his position on the ground but Tonga seemed to have predicted this too. The guy didn't seem to have an opening at all. He was truly at captain level. He swatted the attack away with the back of his axe and drove the butt of his other axe to Lotaga's head with so much force it sent him to the ground.

"Now in your next life, kid, try to be less mouthy." Tonga said in a bored tone. He sharpened his axes together dramatically preparing for the final blow. to finish lotaga. The boy sitting on a branch had not moved an inch and he seemed even more entertained than ever. His hands periodically went to the hilt of the blade on his back and caressed softly as if seeing someone die brought fond memories to him. as if he

wished it could have been him the whole time. Sagiri had never tasted such evil and it made the power within him stir in response.

as Lotaga stood seconds from death and Kaka barely holding on to life something stirred inside Sagiri. He himself was standing at the jaws of death yet in his weakness he was about to cause the death of two people. He had never hated his weakness in that moment and a rot of self-loath started deep within him. It disgusted him and nauseated him to a point he wanted to throw up. He watched in slow motion as Tonga approached Lotaga to render the final blow. He watched as he pulled back one axe and released it towards Lotaga's skull. As the axe landed, Sagiri felt his own heart stop. Lotaga barely moved away to avoid the attack and the axe sank so deep to the ground. He was trying his best to hang on to life but part of the axe's head sank into the base of the neck making blood spatter.

Sagiri shut his eyes. Not in prayer but in disgust. Disgust at himself. At the weakness. At the familiar truth that he was always watching, always being protected and he hated it. He wanted it to stop. *I want it to stop.* He screamed within himself so loud something within him broke. Something answered.

It did not rise like rage. It did not flare like heat. It *unlatched*. It felt like something inside of him had been waiting for him to open the door and let it free and he had. Deep inside him, past muscle and bone, past pain and fear, something old and patient broke its seal. Sagiri felt it before he understood it. His wounds knitting together without warmth, flesh closing as if it had never been torn. The ache vanished. The exhaustion peeled away and in its place something else replaced it. Darkness.

The darkness moved. It did not pour out of him. It replaced him. Sagiri's body went still as the world dimmed, sound collapsing inward. The ground no longer felt solid beneath him. His shadow stretched, then detached, spreading across stone like spilled ink. Where his presence had been, there was now absence weightless, lightless, wrong.

He opened his eyes. and his pupils had disappeared. His eyes matched his inside. Just then he realized he had always spent his life trying to keep a darkness he did not understand at bay and now that he was not fighting anymore it was actually the most alive he had felt. He was beginning to understand why he felt so alive even at the jaws of death. It's because he did not have the strength to fight his darkness all along, the darkness was peaceful,

his eyes fell on the axe going for Lotaga's skull and this time it was slow. Everyone around him barely had time to react when he finally moved. Sagiri crossed the distance without motion. No step. No wind. One moment he was far then he was *there*. The axe barely scratched Lotaga and Tonga was sent flying into a few yards. Tonga was able to stop himself midway however before he could hit a tree trunk and he slid a few yards and came to a stop on one knee and both his hands. Sagiri had barely touched him even so. He looked down at himself and the markings on his body that had been silent for a while were now glowing illuminating the morning light.

Everyone gasped and even the boy that reeked of evil smiled. Sagiri's urge to punish was even bigger now and as his eyes stared down at lotaga's battered face the urge burned violently. The darkness he had always tried to hold back burned with so much hatred. lotaga looked at him with swollen eyes, totally at a loss for words.

"What the hell?!" Tonga cursed getting to his feet.

"How is he able to move, his guts are out." The star tattoo said. He had managed to break the arrow but he was still clutching it. Sagiri looked down and truly his wounds had not been completely sealed yet he did not feel any pain. On the contrary he felt like something far much better than blood was pumping his heart and life into him.

"Guess this is what being alive feels like." sagiri said to himself before popping his neck vertebrae. He turned around slowly and everyone froze.

"What the hell is he?" one intruder asked.

"Kill him!" Tonga said and the four with no injuries hesitated before they charged.

Chapter 74: Chapter 74: MONSTER

"Kill him!" Tonga said and the two with no injuries hesitated before they charged. except the creepy duo. The girl remained seated and the man boy stood protectively behind her. She was looking straight at sagiri as if she was trying to hypnotize him. sagiri could feel her attempts now as if they were a caress on his mind. So she was only good at hypnotizing people but without it she is as good as powerless.

Sagiri was not phased even as they unsheathed their knives and came for his throat. Their attacks were fast but somehow he could keep up. The fire in his veins cackled with life and it kept getting stronger by the second.

he dodged the first two attacks as if they were in slow motion. he did not have any weapon on him so all he could do was dodge. His back felt like it was made of springs and he bent so far back his head touched the earth. He jumped back until he was where the two dead men lay and pulled the two knives from Maita's opponent. He barely picked them before the two men were on him, their attacks more relentless than the last. They were not holding back one bit. It was as if he had taken a backseat in his own body however because he saw the attacks coming and the power firing his veins cackled.

Sagiri remembered all the defences and attacks as if he had trained them a thousand times. He kicked them back as if they weighed less than a sheet of paper. sagiri was tired of the girl trying to hypnotize him so he gave chase towards her. He wanted to punish her and tear her eyes out of her pockets. Even with the power cackling in sagiri's veins and the markings on his body crawling on his skin and glowing faintly, he did not see the manboy move. He only saw him when he was in front of him and his blade

pushed into his stomach. They then kicked him with so much force he went flying a few yards. sagiri did not land however, just twisted through the air and landed softly before he jumped back.

Kaka had not stirred yet and Lotaga was hanging onto life by a thread. He needed to end this before it was too late. that though made the power in his veins expand to new levels. Just as he turned he saw the two who first attacked him run towards lotaga and kaka and he just acted.

"Stay back!" The voice tore through his throat and sent the two flying with so much force they smashed into the trees. He did not understand what he just did but the power inside of him had moved according to his will. His will to protect. They did not stand up again and just lay where they landed in fatal positions. In that moment he had merged his will with the one inside firing his veins. He could not hear any sound of a heartbeat. they were dead? he did not have time to dwell on it however nor did he care at the moment.

"kill him!" Tonga yelled but manboy was already on him. This time he was faster but manboy was surprisingly matching his attacks. sagiri could feel the wounds on his body knitting themselves together faster this time but still slowly. the boy reeking of evil cheered at the scene as if he had seen something interesting. He had at some point pulled his blade out and he was looking eager to join the fight. sagiri could almost taste the excitement on his lips.

"He is a monster. I love monsters!" He cheered, kicking his feet more violently as if waiting for the perfect time to join the fight.

"How can he even move in that state!" star shaped marking yelled drawing his weapon towards him. "Hey, you said we were coming to pick a student. What is this?!" he was totally confused and sagiri could sense fear from him.

"Just kill him!" The captain said, and star shaped marking joined the fight to help manboy. Their attacks were lethal and sagiri could barely dodge even with his new found strength. He was being cut as rapidly as he was healing and even he did not know how long he was going to last. Their combined attacks were fast and lethal and even with his upgraded body he was pushed on the defense. The knives he retrieved from the dead body. A combined kick from the two to his chest sent him flying into the woods. He hit into a tree with a thud breaking the tree in half but the power in his veins must have broken some of the impact.

"Sagiri!" A familiar voice reached his ears. He turned around to see nvaru, kiuga, in the company of senraki and captain salka. sagiri barely spared them a glance before he was back on his feet. He used the trees to propel him forward. He did not need to move normally with power pulsing in his bones. There was surprise on everyone's face before they followed after him. sagiri was cut everywhere but he was still moving faster than anyone in the group had ever seen him.

sagiri used the agent of surprise and landed a good one on the man. The sent him flying a few yards. Star mark came at him with all he got but alone he was no match for his current self. Sagiri slid low dodging the attack right as the group broke into the clearing and watched what was happening. Sagiri spun his body around with the sudden acquired agility and landed a kick to the back of the knee of star mark. The bigger man landed on one knee. sagiri did not waste a moment before he jumped on his neck with both his knees. He spun around in a move only the archive inside of him recognized. The force applied by his knees twisted the man's neck violently, breaking it with a cracking disturbing sound. He pulled the now dented knives from defending for so long and drove them into the man's heart. He pulled them out and jumped to his hand and rolled to his knee before the man could even move and fall to the ground void of any life.

his black eyes lifted and met with that of the four acquaintances who had a mix of feelings. nvaru held that of relief and fear, salka that of surprise, kiuga bewilderment and senraki a cold unreadable expression. The cat was out of the box. sagiri did not have time to sit and chat however. He still had people to punish. He turned around to go after the manboy but the vermin was nowhere in sight and the wide eyed girl had disappeared with him.

An irritable voice left sagiri's throat that shook the very ground and the trees. The man boy was the one he wished to punish most.

"What on earth!" Salka exclaimed as everyone braced themselves from the impact.

"Sagiri stop!" N'varu said, trying to go over but Sagiri turned around quickly, his stare freezing him in place.

"Stay back! They are mine to punish!" his voice was a command. The statement barely left his mouth before he jumped into action and went after Tonga.

"Kaka!" kiuga yelled seeing the state kaka was in. Kaka had stirred and he must have seen sagiri's last display but he was in no state to move. kiuga ran to him.

"lotaga!" Salka just then realized the sorry state of lotaga who was lucky to still be alive even after the amount of blood he had lost. One thing was sure however if he did not get any treatment he was going to succumb from excess blood loss. That must have been the first time sagiri perceived so much fear from the captain. He was on him in a flash in a second and pulled him into his arms. Lotaga's eyes fluttered barely as he looked up at Salka and a weak smile pulled to his lips.

"T-Took you long enough Captain." lotaga struggled to let the words out. "I knew you could come." he said, his ragged breaths coming in gasps.

"I told you to stay on the wall you stupid child, why do you never listen to me." Kaka said, pressing his coat which he had shrugged to Lotaga's wound on the side of his neck.

"I held them out till you came." Lotaga coughed and Salka's fear grew deeper.

"If you die now I will let the pets eat you." Salka threatened and Sagiri had stopped midway in his steps to listen to the exchange. Lotaga's eyes rolled back and he went silent and Salka's heart stopped beating for a second in horror.

"He is not dead. yet." Sagiri said changing trajectory to the two but before he even moved a blade he had not seen coming was edged into chest stopping him mid movement. The evil reeking boy had moved and Sagiri, being distracted, had missed him. He did not want Lotaga to die and he felt the urge to help. He did not know how but his feet had just moved to Salka's and Lotaga's direction.

"I love killing monsters." The boy said before pulling the blade out. the power in his veins cackled to. The boy pulled the blade back and looked into Sagiri's eyes. There was a moment of silence before Sagiri moved. He pushed his palm into the boy with all his might and sent him flying a few yards and landed with a thud. He was not dead however even though he remained immobile. Sagiri fell to his knees, completely spent. The boy had struck his heart. His eyes returned back to their normal colours and he fell forward.

"Sagiri no!" Nvaru cried running to catch Sagiri but he was late.

Sagiri, barely recognized as Senraki, retrieved a long sword from its sheath by his waist and charged. He made contact with Tonga with so much force the ground trembled. It was the first time Sagiri had seen Senraki in action and he had never felt such intent. He was cold. His movements were precise and accurate with no wasted move. Even Tonga was not ever to hold on and he was pushed on the defense.

"Senraki, you want to kill me because of that monster?" Tonga said, barely escaping an attack. Senraki with a weapon however was a different person. He still seemed like he was not going to his full power yet Tonga could not even keep up.

"A monster is one who kills his own comrades, Tonga and right now you are the monster," Senraki said in a flat tone sending Tonga to his knee in defense with the amount of force he attacked with. "I am the only one with the right to decide what becomes of any student dressed in the Galka war academy uniform." Senraki said landing three consecutive attacks.

"I get to kill him." Suddenly, Salka's voice cut through the fight. Senraki did not even turn or debate. He just stepped back letting Salka have his way. He barely stepped back however before Salka was on Tonga. Tonga did not even have time to defend before he was torn skin from bone. Salka was just as lethal as Senraki. Tonga was not even in the

same league with him even if he had claimed to be a captain. Salka finished his attack by driving two small blades into his heart.

"Get everyone out of here, I'll teach the kid a lesson." Senraki said and salka remained standing for a long time before he finally turned around.

The evil boy had finally stirred and his smile was even more crazed now. senraki did not even seem to care as he drew his other blade. a twin to the other. He must have recognized that the boy was the one who killed the gravescale and even more so from the decomposing filth on him. he must have understood that his opponent was even more crazy to hide in a corpse he had just killed to avoid being caught.

"I love that blade. I want it in my collection." Senraki said a smile of his own, taking over his features.

"Hung in there." nvaru said close to sagiri's ear in a plea but that was impossible. He was not able to hold on and he could feel his life slipping from him quickly. sagiri turned one last time and looked at lotaga who was now airborne in Salka's arms, his heartbeat barely audible. his own shut without warning and he was swallowed into darkness.

He had failed to protect and failed to even punish those he wanted.

Chapter 75: END OF BOOK ONE

BOOK ONE OF THIS SERIES HAD COME TO AN END.

I want to thank anyone who has stuck with this book till the end. As I move to book two I want y'all to know I appreciate your support.

I think this was the best way to end book one and start book two.

SEE YOU BETWEEN THE PAGES

BOOK TWO:

PROLOGUE: UP NORTH

"They just keep coming no matter how many of them we kill. It has been two years since I came back here. We are clearly missing something." Togo said lying back on the raised stone platform.

"It's not like you have a wife Togo, and this is only your field mission." Lemba said, groaning. They had all been on duty as watchers for the entire day and night but there was no movement.

"Perhaps we finally scared them off. What do you think?" Togo pushed the leg of the man who was lying on his belly between the rocks watching the landscape before them.

"you two shut up before i throw you down the cliff and feed you to the Lanka dogs." the man said, keeping his attention far ahead. He had not moved an inch since they started their watch.

"Hey Salka, are you not tired of watching? There is no one out there." Togo snickered, not making a point to move or shut up.

"You should become a captain, Salka, you are too competent to be a junior warrior like us." Lemba added. The two laughed mockingly. They had all graduated from the war college two years earlier and they stuck together on this

"You two should shut up, I see movements." Salka said and the two men scrambled to his side looking ahead and focused on a spot Salka was looking at.

"I think I see it too. In that tree. It's like someone is hiding between the leaves damn it." Lemba said. "It's good that you were watching, young man." He continued as if he wasn't the shortest man in the group and only a month older than Salka and Togo.

"Should I send a signal?" Togo asked, squinting again. The leaves were moving violently. It was almost as if the person in the tree suddenly wanted to be found.

"Are you stupid? We have been waiting here for days and now you want to ruin all the progress." Salka ground his teeth. He had always wondered how the two beside him managed to graduate from war college let alone war academy. They said they did it to get status and marry two wives and he was starting to believe them. How can one go so far for marriage, Salka did not understand. Couldn't one just court a woman without status?

"I think the captain to be is right, Togo. Use your head." Lemba said in a mocking tone and it took Salka all he could not to throw him down the rocks.

They were at the edge of Tagayia, where it touched Lanka's feet. Lanka was a warring state and Tagayia was too prideful to submit. They had been fighting for ages for ages and sometimes salka could not understand why they could not stop. Even so the villages at the edge of Tagayia and Lanka suffered the most. When two bulls fight it's the grass that gets hurt.

The reason that Salka and his team were on watch however was not because there was war between tagayia and Lanka at this time but because intel had been sent to the capital city of the north war headquarters that people in the far north villages of tagayia so close to Lanka were disappearing without a trace. The only explanation was that Lanka was taking them but the reason was not yet.

The team of a hundred men sent north had been situated on watcher duties across all outlets of Tagayia to Lanka. They had been watching for days and none of the watching squads had reported any movement. It was as if the Lankanians had known of their arrivals and stopped their actions which was totally impossible. Lankanians thrived on warfare and they were the only state who still dared to challenge in war so many times a year. Could there be a person working for Lanka inside the Tagayia war headquarters? Salka could not believe so. What could Lanka possibly offer a general or commander of Tagayia that Tagayia could not offer.

"I'll go down and check. If I don't come back in less than an hour get help." Salka suggested. Lemba and Togo looked at him as if he had grown another head.

"That is a stupid move kid. We were told to watch and not engage," Lemba whispered in urgency as if lowering his voice could help tame his friend.

"If you call me a kid again you will be the first I engage with. Now stop acting clingy. If we wait till we report for backup the lead will be gone by then." Salka said, standing to his full height. Before any of the two could protest he jumped down the rock. He jumped from rock to rock as he went down before disappearing into the woods. The sun was high up in the sky and he did not even care to hide his movements. All he cared about was to reach the sport before the lead disappeared. He had not graduated the best top in his class in combat just to lie around and wait when he could take action.

He moved through the woods quickly. The northern terrain right before Lanka was so mountainous with tall woods. It was perfect for hiding and easy to die if you did not know the terrain well. Salka however did not believe in dying unless a whole squad of veterans was put on him. Even before he graduated war college he was already better than most junior instructors and ahead of many senior instructors. Now that he had been in the field for two years as a junior, not even a seasoned senior instructor was a match against him.

He was only still a junior because one had to serve as a junior for a minimum of two years and a senior for a minimum of five years. Even so, Salka planned to change that order. He was a beast of war and no one could debate that. Having been born in a clan where everyone was genetically gifted, being good was not good enough because everyone was already good. He only wished to be excellent and for that even being genetically strong he still worked twice as hard.

He broke through to the sport where he had seen the leaves move and it was silent as if it had been the wind. Salka knew there had not been wind because of how hot it had been. They had been cooking up on the rocks with no sign of wind. His instincts had never been wrong and it seemed like the shaking was a signal for someone. For who exactly he did not know. He just needed a trail to follow. He looked around to see if he had missed anything but he sure it was the place.

The person had chosen the strongest tree to shake and it might have been nothing but it was the only lead they had for days.

He circled the area for a while before he finally heard movement. He barely missed him. a small boy looking to be between eight to eleven. The kid was first and just when salka saw him he took off.

"Stop there!" he said, pulling an arrow from his quiver but decided against it. Kids could sometimes be used to spy during war, but killing a child in cold blood without asking a question was just murder not justice. He cursed and moved quickly to follow the kid. The kid was small but he was first. it was like he was melting through the woods then he finally disappeared.

"Hey kid, wait up I'm just trying to talk!" he yelled, chasing after him. He almost caught up with the child but he suddenly disappeared. Salka cursed his fate and looked around for a bit but the child was gone as if he melted into the very ground itself. After minutes of searching and sweeping the area around him, Salka finally gave up. Just when he was about to turn around and leave he had two pairs of footsteps. He wheeled around quickly. His teammates just then tumbled out of the woods looking out of breath.

"Finally we caught up." Togo said, hunched forward taking heavy breaths. How could a junior warrior be out of breath after running for such a short period of time?

"What are you two doing here?" Salka exclaimed. "I thought I told you to report back to camp and ask for backup.

"Well, leaving a comrade for death is punishable by losing a limb and I'm not trying to lose my chance to marry two beautiful wives." Lemba debated and salka shut his eyes to keep himself from the greatest sin of a warrior creed. Killing a comrade was punishable by death or else he could have killed Togo and Lemba long ago.

"Now that we are a team again, let's go and report together. Did you find anything?" Lemba ignored Salka's clear burning wrath.

"A kid." salka groaned before leading the way. It must have been his wishful thinking that the two incompetents could act on his instructions.

'I found a kid and then lost him. How shameful.' Was however all salka could think about. *'I should have killed it'* he seethed on the inside

Chapter 76: PROLOGUE: UP NORTH II

"A child? Where is he then?" captain Felunka asked.

"He ran away and disappeared in the woods." even salka's answer sounded totally irritating to himself.

"A boy just can't disappear, Salka, you are too smart to know that." Felunka sighed, knitting his brows. It had been a week since he dispatched teams to watch and it had been silent on all fronts and finally when there was movement, it was a kid that his most competent junior couldn't catch.

"You should go rest for a few hours before starting out on your shift at night." Felunka said. The juniors saluted and headed to their sleeping areas.

Salka couldn't sleep even so. He couldn't shake an odd feeling about the kid. It's like the kid had wanted to be caught. He couldn't help but think he had missed something important. Why could a single child be so deep in the woods alone anyway? he could not even get to close his eyes even after a twenty four hour watch because of the thoughts gnawing at him. With a groan he decided to follow his gut.

Dark would soon blanket the horizon and he had to be back before then. He was disobeying a direct command from the captain anyway and he could only hope what he was doing was the right thing. He threw his quiver on his shoulders, carried as many daggers as he could and grabbed his bow before finally moving.

It was even quieter now in the woods as he moved in the direction he had last seen the boy. Perhaps if they waited longer the trail could go cold. He reached the spot in time at top speed. He circled the area carefully several times but just like during the day there was no one. He was about to turn around and widen his search when a rock hit him square in the face. He shifted around his daggers drawn out and he just managed to stop himself before he could commit an even bigger sin again. The boy was perched on a low branch perfectly hidden with the leaves of a tree. He was looking directly at salka and salka had never felt like such a fool.

"Why is it you again?" He huffed in frustration and the boy just looked at him with empty eyes but full of mischief.

"You are the one who came looking for me." The boy answered unphased and salka had to remind himself he was just a child.

"What are you doing out here alone?" He asked in the most friendly way possible, putting his blades away and approached slowly.

"I'm not alone." the boy answered in a matter of fact tone and salka almost felt like he was talking to a grown adult.

"Where are the others?" salka asked trying to hide his weary tone not to trigger the boy. He even crossed his hands on his chest to appear as relaxed as possible.

"What do I get in return?" The boy asked and salka had never met such a character. A smile took over his feature. The kid was amusing, that was for sure.

"How can I bargain when I don't even know what I am bargaining for?" Salka said with a genuine smile breaking through his face. The kid might have been small in age but he was too canning and smart.

"I know you have been watching the border and the village. You won't catch them." the boy said and salka's interest was piqued. He felt tense an urge to draw his blades was thick but he maintained his composure.

"And why would you think that?" Salka asked, moving closer.

"What do I get in return?" The boy asked again, his eyes growing even more mischievous. A thought crossed Salka's mind to grab the little delinquent and beat the information out of him but he decided against it. Diplomacy had never been his way of handling things but beating a kid could be too low even for him.

"And what do you want in return?" Salka asked and the mischievous look in the boy's eyes grew. The boy looked like he was thinking about the many things he wanted to ask for and Salka breathed, willing himself to be patient.

"I want to join a galka war academy next year." The boy said and salka looked him over again from head to toe.

"That is not something I can grant. How old are you anyway? Have you ever even held a weapon in your life?" salka said and the boy frowned.

"All you adults do is lie. I won't tell you then and you will all die." The boy said and salka could only think how those were some heavy words for a little boy. The empty look in the boy's eyes however begged to differ. Salka could tell that he was dead serious. The little brat had a backbone of steel.

"You brat. Fine. I might not be able to help you join but i know someone who can and if you tell me where the Lankanians are." Salka said against his better judgement. He was not however one to make empty promises and he knew he had to follow it through.

"How do I know you are not lying?" The boy asked wearily and salka almost groaned but he knew the question was valid. even he couldn't trust a stranger's word.

"I'll give you my honour blade with my name on it." Salka said and the boy's eyes widened. An honour blade is a dagger given to those who graduate from war college. Everyone had one engraved with their name on it and they could hold it with honour until the day they died. It is a badge of honour.

"Why are you acting surprised? I thought you were striking a fair deal." Salka said feeling great about living the little brat speechless.

"Isn't an honour blade one you get when you graduate from a war college?" the boy said his eyes filled with hearts and salka's chest swelled with honour.

"Yes. and you are getting the golden one only given to the top one." salka said and the boy gasped.

"Will you really give me your honour blade?" the brat asked and salka had long forgotten about teaching him manners. He unsheathed the blade from his side pocket and unsheathed it. the boy jumped down from the branch and floated over in a second.

"You are the number one of war college?" The boy gasped. "I thought you were just big and stupid." the brat added not at all afraid of the man standing in front of him. such disrespect from a brat who could not even reach his knees was diabolical and salka laughed.

"No one has ever reached my record or beaten it yet. so make sure you keep his blade safe and give it back to me when you beat my record." Salka said, resting his hand on the brat's head. The little brat looked speechless for the first time his hands stretched out to receive the blade with tears in his eyes. salka could tell the little kid rarely cried and making him cry made his chest swell even more with pride. He nodded vigorously looking at the blade with salka's name embedded in it. Salka of course felt a bit nostalgic giving the blade away but it could only be a few years before he got it back. what good was a blade anyway if it wasn't used in exchange for greater good.

Salka sheathed the sword and the boy finally snapped out of his trance.

"promise to train with it as hard as possible so you don't embarrass me at the entry exam?" salka said and the boy nodded eager to receive the blade. salka did not want to keep the brat waiting any longer so he handed the blade to him. he couldn't believe he was twelve. he received the blade with trembling hands and salka was almost convinced the boy had been stunned to muteness.

"Now tell me where the Lankanians are." Salka said squatting to be almost at eye level with the boy. He was still taller even on his knees and he wondered if the boy even ate. He reminded him so much of someone.

"I don't know." The boy said, still absentminded, staring at the blade and salka almost fell on his butt. he was about to beat the little brat for real this time for wasting his time but the brat continued to speak.

"I know they come in from underground. Me and the kids were all hidden deep in the caves. they come at night to take the men " Salka sighed in relief. No wonder they hadn't been able to catch them. The brat knew quite a lot for his age.

"Can you show me the tunnels?" Salka asked and genuine fear edged in the boy's face.

"I was not supposed to see but my father taught me how to track so when they took him months ago." The boy said and Salka's interest piqued at the new information.

so the disappearance had started months ago? damn it.

"I will protect you," salka said and he meant it. Before he could finish talking however there was movement and he grabbed the boy and hid quickly. He could feel almost half a dozen footsteps moving and they were too stealth to be from his team. The boy clutched onto him and remained still as if he had done it a thousand times. He was a survivor. No wonder he had such a complex character.

"Ran to the camp. I know you know where it is," he instructed and the boy froze.

"Don't tell me you are scared I'll get killed. I'm Tagayia's number one. Show this blade to the man in charge. Captain Felunka. You are my second in command now. I'll be waiting for your backup. Tell Felunka everything you told me." Salka said. The boy looked at him again with fear but beneath it determination burnt brightly. The boy broke into a rum moments later. He somehow knew the little lad could make it to the camp.

Now, time to kill some vermin!

Chapter 77: 77. CONSEQUENCES

It had been two weeks since the attack on the Galka War Academy had happened. The evil boy had been killed by Senraki or something. Sagiri could not know that because he had been kept away from everyone except Captain Fuwuka, who oversaw his progress in the medical wing, where he was also isolated from everyone else. He had not been able to ask about how everyone was faring and how Lotaga was faring. Part of the reason was that he was kept in isolation, which was not far from being in prison. After all, every move he made was monitored.

The other reason was Fuwuka. The man would rather die than entertain mere talk to a student. Sagiri had tried to talk to him when he woke up to ask what had happened and about the others' situation, but he had just given him a cold look and ignored him. Sagiri and Fuwuka had never exchanged words outside the first-year cadets' combat arena, and he did not want to push his luck.

After the incident, after he had been stabbed, he had blacked out for a whole week, and when he came to, his wounds were halfway through healing themselves. Not even the healers had been allowed to witness his recovery, even after he woke up, and only an old healer guy with bad eyesight had been allowed to treat him. As things stood now, he had no way of explaining why most of the wounds on his body had completely healed. The wound close to his heart that almost ended his life was taking some time to heal, but even if it could be as good as new in a few days.

The worst feeling was not knowing what had happened after he passed out or how everyone was doing. It was also not knowing what awaited him when he woke up. He remembered killing not one but three men in his rampage. The star-shaped marking intruder, especially, because he had killed him right in front of Captain Salka, Principal and Marshal Senraki, Kiuga, Kaka, and N'varu. There was no denying that he had been able to move while he was injured pretty badly. He needed to come up with an excuse for his actions because lying to get out of it was not an option this time around.

That also did not sum up his problems. Ever since he woke up, something had happened to him. It might have been the injuries or the odd feeling he felt after turning sixteen, but he had become a beast of food. He did not have anything to do in the pristine and empty room apart from asking for food to eat. Yes, ever since Sagiri woke up, he had not been able to stop eating one bit. He got hungry as soon as he finished eating, and he was lucky the healer kept allowing food to be brought to him whenever he asked, saying it was good for recovery. He could feel his bones enlarging physically as if he was experiencing a fastened puberty.

His other problem was himself. He was his own enemy now. After turning sixteen, his body had finally broken something blocking his growth so far, and he was growing faster than a plant. There was no physical result yet, but he knew it couldn't be long before everyone noticed something was changing with him. Growing an inch taller in a week was not frowned upon, but growing a couple of inches overnight was not going to help his case at all. It was as if his body was working against him, and he did not know what to do.

Just as he finished his seventh meal of the day, and it was barely midday, Fuwuka suddenly entered looking grim.

"The marshal will be back tomorrow from the hearing of the attack. You are to get ready to meet him early in the morning." That is all he said before leaving. Sagiri had also been sleeping a lot between meals, so he passed out and ate passed out again till it was deep at night. When Fuwuka showed up again sagiri felt like it had been days instead of mere hours.

"It is time. Carry him and help him clean." Fuwuka said, signaling to the two favorite juniors beside him who had tortured him in the endless pool when he first arrived. They did not look as shaken as on the first day, and the only explanation was that Fuwuka had rubbed off on them. He was molding them to be like him.

"I can do it myself," Sagiri said, already having heard enough of people prodding and poking him. He had also become more confident after what had transpired. He did not feel bad for killing those men either. He had tried to search for the person inside of him, before he turned sixteen, who was skeptical about hurting others, but he seemed like a distant memory. His days in isolation had not helped him at all, and he felt on edge and ready to defend himself if need arose.

"No, you will not," Fuwuka said, stepping more into the room. It seemed that Senraki had left the duties of watching him to the Captain and gone south with the other Captain, or who knows where Salka could be, especially if Lotaga was...

He stopped his line of thought and turned to face Fuwuka. He might not have noticed it, but he had grown an inch taller. It was probably not much against one of the Chimera clan of the Bami tribe, who were genetically giants, but it gave him a little confidence.

"And why is that?" He asked, his voice coming off colder than he expected. He had stopped feeling hot and cold after he turned sixteen that night, and also after he was stabbed by the Tamelku twins. The cold and hot had moved to his personality, and it had been doing that a lot since he woke up. Only now it was cold.

"Do I need to spell it out, recruit? You killed three men above your skill set. Either you lied about your qualifications, or you are a threat to Tagayia." Fuwuka said, and Sagiri's eyes narrowed. He did not have a way of explaining what had happened, and hearing Fuwuka out, he could understand his logic.

"Yet if I were pretending, could I have let myself be bitten half to death by the Tamelku vermin?" Sagiri snapped the urge to punish the two boys coming back hard and making the cold in his heart turn to ice. He refused to allow himself to be prodded again. He was wearing a white combat suit which belonged to the healers' unit, and he could only understand that his own combat had been torn to shreds, and before his suspicion was cleared out, he could not dress as a recruit of the Galka War Academy. He did, however, hate being accused. He did not intend to be kidnapped and forced to defend himself by killing in self-defense.

"It is my duty to take you to the questioning chamber. Your innocence will be proved when the marshal arrives," Fuwuka said, standing his ground, not patting an eyelash, and Sagiri could tell even with his sudden surge of strength that day and rapid growth ever since he still did not stand a chance against Fuwuka.

"I will change myself, you can watch. I need my mask. I hate showing people my skin condition." Sagiri stood his ground. He had not done any wrong, and if the Galka War Academy wanted to brand him a liar and send him out of Galka, then he could leave with honour and find other ways to find his benefactor. He had already been isolated and treated like a criminal, and that made the cold in his heart grow so much that it almost overwhelmed the warmth.

The warmth that he was starting to feel for his comrades, Lotaga and Salka. more so N'varu. If they hurt N'varu then he was not going to forgive them.

"Your full combat has been delivered to the preparation room," Fuwuka answered. Sagiri closed his eyes for a moment before he moved. The two junior instructors walked beside him while Fuwuka walked at the back. Since they were already deep inside the central pentagon, they did not have to take many twists and turns before they came to

the preparation room. It was basically underground, but not so far down like the endless pool. The central pentagon had so many nooks and turns that Sagiri was convinced it was a fortress for warriors before it became an academy, and then all the other pentagons were added on the outside.

Just like they had been instructed, the two juniors stood outside the preparation room and waited for Sagiri to take a bath. It was not lit so brightly, but it still felt invasive that they just stood outside. The markings all over his body were dormant now, and they appeared like a very intricate tribal tattoo. He washed quickly and put on his combat suit. It had always been a size bigger, but now it felt two sizes bigger in weight and one size shorter in height. It was as if he was growing taller, and all the nutrition went to the enlargement of his bones.

He did not know how long the transformation in his body was going to take, but the continuous hunger was torturous. He probably needed to get bigger uniforms, too.

It was in the middle of the night when he was escorted yet again to an interrogation room. This one is different from the last one. It was unnerving how he had been in galka war academy for a little over two months, yet he had visited two interrogation rooms. This one had a high table with four seats behind it. If he only had to guess, it could be Senraki, Salka, Fuwuka, and Torena to fill those tables. Torena was in charge of discipline, yet this seemed above his specialty. Senraki, the absent one, must have been one to chair the discipline council. The interrogation room did not end there, however, because behind where he would be sitting in a meditative position lay at least a dozen seats, which he guessed could belong to witnesses.

"You will assume your meditative position and wait for the meeting to begin at three. The classes must not be delayed any longer for the others." Fuwuka said before turning around to leave.

"I'm going to be kicked out of the Galka War Academy?" The question tumbled out of Sagiri's mouth before he could stop it. That was the one question he had wanted to know most. If they were going to kick him out anyway, then he did not need to defend himself.

"That depends on the marshal. He had to answer for the attack together with Konate's Marshal and captains. I am waiting for the verdict as well." Fuwuka said, his back still turned. Sagiri did not have to ask for any other answer.

The case had spiraled out of hand, and Marshals of both academies had been called to the ten schools council. No one could for sure know who would take the fall. him or the marshals.

He sat low in a meditative position and tried to distract himself from the hunger already biting at him.

"Word of advice, don't lie to Senraki." Fuwuka's voice came again before the trio exited the room, shutting the door tightly behind them.

Not lying? That was suicide

"So this is where you ran off to?" N'varu's voice cut through the arena above the fourth pentagon arena. Sagiri did not even turn around from his spot, where he was waiting for the terrain far below and far beyond the inner nonagon.

"You should not be here," is all he said, not breaking eye contact with the world below.

"I know, but..." N'varu started, but Sagiri was not going to have it this time.

"Stay away from me," Sagiri snapped with so much emotion the arena trembled slightly. He had come to the only place he could be alone, and after the verdict, he needed N'varu especially to stay away from him.

Hours earlier, after Fuwuka left him in the interrogation room, more like a verdict room. Sagiri had naturally forced himself into conscious slumber, which was less peaceful than usual. His mind kept going back to the men he had killed, but he remembered them like fragments. He can remember the kill clearly. Only the Pressure to act, the Stillness when he finally gave in to the fire, and the Control.

The minutes ticked into an hour and then into hours till he finally registered movement around the area. Apart from the junior instructors Fuwuka had left to guard the door, he had not felt another presence for hours. It seemed like half a dozen people were moving towards the interrogation time. He should have felt relieved that he could know what could become of him, but some part of him deep down did not want to leave Galka War Academy just yet. Before he joined, he did not have a friend apart from his parents, and even though Team 25 was temporary, he had enjoyed all the combat exercises they carried out together.

He retained his position on the ground, head low, and did not dare to open his eyes. He could not have missed Senraki's foreboding presence, which he carried ever since he saw him kill, and Salka's dominating one. Even Fuwuka's cold one. The three entered through the door in line with Senraki in the lead. There was a small pose, and he could feel their eyes watching him before they sank into the designated chairs.

Another movement joined in the rare, and he could not have missed the three boys who were giving off all kinds of thick emotion. From N'varu, it was fear and relief. Kiuga, it was curiosity, and Kaka, it was irritation. Typical of the three. He did not need anyone to define the situation at hand. Only the witnesses of what had happened were in the room, except for one. Lotaga. Sagiri wondered if the worst had befallen the guy. He was young, curious and did not always act his age or according to an instructor's code, yet he could not stop himself from the burning need to punish those who could cut his life short.

Sagiri's combat suit was not brought in with his sash. Perhaps it had been torn to shreds, too, or perhaps it had been on purpose to strip him even of the lowest rank.

"Recruit Sagiri, face the council!" Fuwuka's voice announced. Sagiri remained still for a moment before he finally looked up. The three men were sitting stiff, their sashes tight, but Sagiri could see the tiredness aged into their brows, especially Senraki and Salka. Salka looked more stoic than Sagiri had ever seen, and after seeing how he carried Lotaga and how Tonga called Lotaga Salka's brat, he understood that their relationship must have been deep. Of course Salka did not look old enough to be Lotaga's father, but they were tied with something more than blood.

"List your three names to the council. Your clan, tribe, country, and rank." Fuwuka proceeded to read a sheet in his paper. It was clear that the sheet was protocol.

"I am Sagiri, no clan, no tribe, a recruit at Galka War Academy," He answered honestly, still maintaining his position on the ground.

"The council will begin now. Do you swear on your life and honour to tell the truth?" Fuwuka opened the disciplinary meeting.

"I swear to uphold honesty!" Sagiri answered, followed by the three in the rare, in chorus, whom he dared not turn around to even glance at.

"Two weeks ago, during a combat exercise between Konate Wild Academy and Galka War Academy..." Sagiri did not care to listen. His mind kept thinking about the man absent in the room, and he could not concentrate on listening to the activities that had conspired on that night. He was there, and he witnessed his life get stolen from him two times. No one in the room understood more about that night than him.

"How is senior instructor Lotaga?" His voice cut through the background noise Fuwuka was reading, and there was a pause as the room fell into Pindrop silence. Salka's eyes burned holes into him, and an emotion flickered through his eyes so fast Sagiri could have missed it before he looked away, avoiding Sagiri's gaze completely.

"It's not any of your business, recruit!" Fuwuka snapped, and Sagiri's eyes turned to him.

"He was among the first people to come to my rescue. I think it is my business captain." Sagiri said, his tone cold. All the warmth he felt when he was remembering Lotaga getting overpowered by the ice in his heart.

"Lotaga has not woken up yet. His life depends on his will to wake up." Senraki spoke for the first time, and another pause of silence followed.

"Then he will wake up." Sagiri's mouth spoke before he could stop himself, and Salka's eyes snapped to him again, another new emotion flickering in them. more like hope.

Sagiri could only imagine what Salka was going through, waiting for Lotaga to wake up. It must have been torture. Even so, his statement was true. If there was a man who was careless enough to engage stronger than him and almost die, it was Lotaga. He was so stubborn that Sagiri could not imagine him giving in to death that easily. He sighed with relief at the thought, and he faced the council this time with a newfound resolve.

"Am I going to be kicked out of Galka War Academy?" he asked the same question he had asked Fuwuka. There was no need for all the protocol and questions if he was going to be kicked out anyway.

"You will only answer when asked a question," Fuwuka said, and Sagiri held his tongue. only for a moment before he asked the next one. He had not done anything wrong.

"To answer your question, your answers depend on the outcome. If you are a threat, you won't be making it out of the academy. The school is mandated to render punishment to some level." Fuwuka answered, and Sagiri's skin prickled with that statement.

"I was the one who was almost killed. I wonder what my fault could be," Sagiri said, the coldness in his heart becoming more profound. Unlike before he turned sixteen, he now hated being accused.

"The statements from your other team members are that you had made contact with the intruders when you were twelve," Fuwuka said, ignoring his outburst. Senraki was painfully silent, and Salka was no better. It is like they were letting Fuwuka take charge because he was the neutral party in the situation. After all, he was the only one in the room not there when the fight took place, and the only one with a higher rank to be let in on what had happened.

"And as I told them, they came to seek me first, to which I almost buried them alive. I'm sure team 25 was kind enough to tell you that too," Sagiri said, hating being questioned as if he was on the wrong. He did not seem to have a seal over his fluctuating feelings, and he did not know how to stop them either.

"I trained you myself, recruit. You even fainted when I pushed you too hard. There is no way you could have killed two men, one with a rank equivalent to a junior instructor and one equivalent to a senior instructor. How do you explain that then?" Fuwuka asked, and Sagiri was silent to that. It was the first time he had killed a person, and he could not even properly remember how he executed the three. He knew he had done it, but he could not remember exactly how he did it. It was as if his mind was filtering the incident.

"I don't know," he answered honestly, looking into the eyes of the three men. That was half the truth because in that moment, he had felt another heart beat inside of him, powering his veins with not blood but searing power. It was, however, the truth because

he could not explain what he was and why he was capable of moving life threatening wounds and healing faster than everyone.

"You can not know, you killed that man as if you knew the moves from practicing for ages," Senraki said, his voice slightly accusing, and Sagiri felt irritation rising in his bones.

"My adoptive parents never taught me to fight. I can not explain something I don't know. I had never killed a man until that day. That is true. " Sagiri snapped, losing his cool, and got to his feet. He could just go home and help his mother make portions. He would find another way to explain who he was and why he was of interest to some people.

"Sagiri, calm down." N'varu's voice cut through the situation.

"I was forced from home and asked to join a school. I can't explain why, I'm not less human because I lack a tribe or a clan or joined late. It was not my fault for being attacked and stabbed by my comrades." The last statement made filled his chest with the need to punish, and his eyes changed. "I will kill them first if they try to kill me again." He completely lost it, and everyone in the room stood. All in the room already knew he was different, and he did not need to hide it anymore.

"Sagiri, please stop!" he could hear N'varu beg, but he was tired of not being accepted because he was a little different.

"Sagiri?" An additional voice called his name suddenly. He must have missed his approach. He could, however, not have mistaken the voice for anyone else's.

Sagiri turned around, and Lotaga was standing there. He was wrapped in gauze all over, but he looked just as carefully as always.

"Lotaga!" Salka said, almost standing from his seat, but barely managed to contain himself at the last second. "Why are you here?" Salka asked, trying to act like he had not been worried sick for days.

"Well, nobody invited me, and when I woke up, I immediately thought of thanking my savior," he said the words slowly and with meaning before he saluted sagiri.

"I could have surely died if you had not intervened. I do not care how you did it, but I owe you." Lotaga continued, and warmth spread inside Lotaga's chest.

"You came to save me first. No debts between us,"Sagiri said, and he meant every word. Lotaga might have been careless, but he was there to save him even if he was outnumbered. sagiri saluted him deeply with a knee to the earth and a hand across his heart.

"You are not planning to send away a boy who saved an instructor's life, are you, Marshal?" Lotaga pretended to be surprised.

"The boy lied about his skills, and he had neither clan nor tribe," Senraki said. Sagiri could understand the man was skeptical because Galka War Academy was the backbone of the upcoming warriors of Tagayia, yet he still could not stomach being accused.

"You think I am a spy?" Sagiri asked, not willing to back down.

"I will find that out for myself. For now, you are to be under surveillance, and you are not to mix with the others until this is sorted out." Senraki said, yawning. It seemed he had another plan behind his plan, and the false interrogation was just for show. Perhaps he believed there was a spy inside the wall of the Galka War Academy. That was the only explanation Sagiri could come up with. No one, after all, understood what went on inside the mind of Senraki.

"What happened that day and today is not to leave this room. Kiuga, Kaka, and N'varu, you do not mention a word of that day, and you, especially, are to stay away from Sagiri until I allow it," he said, leaving no room for questions. Something was telling Sagiri that this was not the end yet.

"Everyone is dismissed!" he announced, standing to his feet.

After the meeting had adjourned and Sagiri had calmed down, he couldn't help but think that there had been something odd about it all. Senraki and Salka had barely spoken, and it was as if Fuwuka was egging him on to lose his cool. He had fallen into the trap headfirst.

Torena had come soon after to tell him to clear out of room 246. He would be staying in the central pentagon close to the instructors' quarters. The meeting had ended sooner than expected. He did not have much to carry anyway. Perhaps his trunk, which he was not required to take with him. He just needed to take his little essentials, which were not much, because a recruit or cadet of Galka War Academy owned only a sash and a combat suit.

The central pentagon was a whole city in itself, and if he could guess that the other cadets, apart from the three, were not aware of his situation. Perhaps they knew that he had been stabbed by the Tamelku twins. Just remembering that made him clutch to the raised platform at the end of the arena so hard his nails turned white.

He had come up there to get some air. Perhaps he had grown attached to being a recruit in the fourth year Pentagon. Yet it seemed that N'varu could not take even the least of the instructions.

"I thought I asked you to leave," Sagiri seethed. He had tried to keep away from trouble, but he just ended up at the top of it.

"Don't you wanna know what happened to the Tamelku twins?" N'varu said, and sagiri wheeled around.

"They died?" sagiri asked, hating the fact that something could have done it before he did.

"They escaped that night," N'varu said, and Sagiri snapped his gaze to N'varu's to see if he was lying, but there was only sincerity in his eyes. He was telling the truth.

"Damn it!" he cursed, his fists tightening.

"Two senior instructors were killed, and Lotaga and another one were fatally injured," N'varu continued.

"Why are you telling me that?" Sagiri said, but deep down, he was shocked to hear that two senior instructors were killed.

"Because you have been acting like a child," N'varu started. "Did you know that instructors' dying calls for the warriors guild to intervene. They were killed because someone wanted to come get you. Nine people were sent and broke into the Galka War Academy just to get you, and an instructor was killed. It was only a coincidence that the Tamelku twins stabbed you. The abductors had to slow down because of that, or perhaps they could have managed to take you away. If you were in Senraki's shoes, what would you do?" N'varu said his voice level, but sagiri could hear reproach beneath it. N'varu did not easily lose his temper, but sagiri could tell he was close to losing his temper.

Now that N'varu had spelled it out like that, Sagiri could not help but think he had been acting childish, too. In his defense, he had not known the severity of the matter. He did not know that someone had died because of him, and that made him feel some way. Two senior instructors had been killed.

"Was it the one who killed the gravescale?" he asked, and N'varu did not answer. Of course, it was not as if Senraki could parade the dead bodies of dead senior instructors and worthy warriors of Tagayia for students to look at.

"If I were Senraki, I would think the kid they wanted to kidnap at the cost of the lives of senior instructors is either a threat or something special." Even Sagiri could deduct that at least. After saying those words, he finally understood how his behavior could put him on the former list.

"And what do you think will happen to you if you keep acting like a child? If Senraki, as the marshal, thinks you are a threat to the Galka War Academy, he has the mandate to

eliminate you without being accountable. Now do you understand what I'm saying, Sagiri?" N'varu articulated the last sentence, looking at Sagiri with brows pulled together as if he were a father reprimanding his son. Or more like an elder reprimanding a teenager. That might have been true, however, because sagiri felt like he was experiencing late puberty, and he could control his outbursts.

It seems sagiri had been in his head, thinking about only himself, that he failed to see the bigger picture. He was more than just a victim in the situation, and in fact, he was at the centre of it all. He might have just put a nail in the coffin in the interrogation room, that he was an uncontrollable threat.

Sagiri now understood why Senraki was taking measures. He was, after all, the Marshal of the number one school, and he was probably lucky a student had not been killed because the situation could have been worse. His being taken away from the common dormitory was for the best. It was also true that his being put in quarters near those of instructors was a way to keep watch on him. If they determined he was an asset, then he might have chances of being of use to senraki but if he ended up being a threat, then Senraki could have no choice but to eliminate him.

"You might have lost control and killed the intruders, but you are not strong enough to go against Galka War Academy's elites. You need to stop acting like you are an immovable force and think of those waiting on you," N'varu said, the last statement letting his emotions spill over. They were those of deep longing and sadness yet again. He had refused to explain anything to sagiri claiming that he would only tell him when he acted his age.

"I see," Sagiri said after a long pause of silence. Of course nvaru had never acted as if he was different or a monster, and he always regarded him with some kind of feeling that he could yet touch. "I will try to stay out of trouble," Sagiri said, breathing a sigh of defeat. He had not seen the bigger picture before, but now that nvaru had broken it down for him, he knew that had to act with absolute care and earn Senraki's trust. he was the martial of an elite institution such as galka war academy and if he could have such a man in his corner then he could stand more chances when his kidnapers came again. He also needed to get stronger to be able to defend himself next time and not let anyone die for him.

"Good," N'varu said, turning around.

"I'm sorry," sagiri said. He knew how much N'varu wanted him to live since they first met, yet he had just let the tamelku twins stab him. lost his control in the interrogation room with no regard for those who cared for him and proceeded to act like a little spoiled brat. There was stretched silence between them as N'varu paused in his steps, his back going rigid.

He did not even see nvaru but the next moment a heavy punch landed in the middle of his stomach, followed by a strong kick to his midsection. Breath rushed out of his lungs, and he was sent flying before he landed on his back, gasping for breath.

"That is for letting yourself be stabbed," said, coming to stand on top of him. Of course nvaru knew. He understood more about his ability to perceive more than anyone else. There was no way he could have missed the two who reeked of hate best him. The two stared at each other for a moment, and Sagiri let him have it. That had been a pretty ass move from him, and he deserved more than a few punches and kicks. "If you take your life for granted again, next time I'll beat you to death," N'varu snickered before he turned around to leave. He did not even try to help sagiri get up. He must have been really angry.

"Thank you," he said as he watched N'varu's back walk away across the arena.

Thank you for punching sense into me.

Sagiri did not stand up from his position for a long time. Even if he was going through some changes in his body, he did not need to lose control at every chance he got. No one wanted a liability in their corner. Especially now that someone had died because of him, he needed to prove that he could be an asset and something someone like Senraki depended on. To do that, he needed to push himself now even more than ever to be stronger in mind and body.

If he proved to be useless, Senraki killing him could be a mercy. He might not have known much about the warriors' guild, but they had been the ones to form the first society for warriors and protectors of Tagayia. They did not tolerate the unnecessary killing of warriors, especially outside of war. He did not know yet what Senraki had said to the guild that had kept him from being sent there, but just like N'varu said. He now more than ever needed to keep a cool head.

It was a known fact that once the warrior's guild got on your case or took you to the guild headquarters in Alika City, you never made it out. He did not want to taste the theory, and for now, Senraki was his best chance. He probably needed to find an excuse for his behavior, too.

He jumped to his feet eventually and headed for the central pentagon. Perhaps this was not a bad thing. Living close to senior instructors and using their training pits and libraries could also prove useful. Perhaps even being stabbed by the tamelku twins had been a good thing. He needed to start seeing the good side of bad situations.

It had been two days since the interrogation meeting, and Sagiri had been kept in the secluded medical room for checkups, they said. He had been eating and sleeping, and the old healer could not let him leave. It was as if Senraki and his minions planned to drive him mad with boredom.

Torena was the one who came to pick him up on the night of the second day. He had gone back to wearing white combat, and he almost felt like Senraki in the combat. He did not know how long he would go without being allowed to wear his combat and sash, but that did not matter now. He had stopped himself from going on a rampage in the days he was in seclusion, and now that he was out, he planned to make the most of it. N'varu was not around to tame his stupidity, and he needed to grow up.

He walked behind Torena in silence through the twists and turns of the central pentagon, which was massive compared to the other four.

"You will be sleeping here," is all he said before opening a door to a room. It was massive compared to his room 246, and he wondered why they could go so far to make him comfortable. It was as if they were fattening a cow for slaughter, and he did not like it. Even so, he just saluted Torena before entering his new furnished prison. The bed was three times the excuse of a bed in the dormitory wing. There was even a study chair and table, and the window held a nice view of the fourth year pentagon and even the outer nonagon district. It was indeed a nice view, which was way above his rank.

His combat suit was laid out for him on the bed, together with a new one and a brand new ash grey sash. At first, he had thought he was not going to be allowed to wear one, but it seems he had underestimated Senraki's ability to play mind games. Torena had long left, and he did not give him any further instructions about what he was to do next.

sagiri had slept enough in confinement and eaten enough to feed a small village, so he did not feel sleepy at all. In fact, he had never felt more energetic in his life. On the other hand, however, his hunger had not ceased for a moment, and his stomach grumbled. He could still feel his bones lengthening and widening, and he did not want to imagine the consequence of his rapid growth.

He took a bath that was much more improved than he had ever seen before he changed into his new combat suit. It had been made a size bigger as if the one who ordered it to be made also realized his growth or intended him to be fattened for slaughter in the foreseeable future. he did not have time to dwell on his fate however, he had a lot to catch up on and two weeks were a long time in galka war academy and it could get others way ahead of him.

it was almost dark outside as sagiri could see from the high-rise window. The other four pentagons lacked windows, and it was a pleasing sight to see night falling over the horizon, without having to listen to the gong or look at the time counting innovation on every hallway and arena.

Speaking of hallways. When Sagiri stepped out of his designated room, there was no one in sight. It was deadly quiet. The archive had memorized the path they took with Torena from the healing wing, but of course, he did not wish to go back there. He took another hallway and just hoped it did not lead to Senraki's quarters. As much as he wanted to get on his good side, walking into his quarters was not the right road there.

He had only taken the first turn when he felt it. Their presence was faint, but he was sure someone was following him. They must have been following him ever since he left his new room. They kept their distance, however, to not be obvious, but that was futile unless they were Salka or Senraki. He could always know someone was following him. He turned around swiftly, but there was noon in sight. It was only natural that there was someone following him because he was still under watch.

As much as he wanted to call them out, he breathed deeply to calm himself. just like N'varu had instructed. He needed to keep a cool head if he wanted to get on Senraki's good side and not get sent to the warrior's guild headquarters, where no one could ever hear of him again.

He tried to follow the fourth pentagon's structure to get to the dining wing or classes, but he must have deeply underestimated the architects who made the complex fortress, because he ended up in the library. barely because he almost missed it. Its entrance was hidden, and he only managed to see a junior instructor walk out of it with a book pushed to his waist. He was out of breath from just the walk. Two weeks of just lying around and eating had reduced all his hard work to get fit to ashes.

His life felt like he was always striving to get ahead, but every time he somehow ended up in the healing quarters, either retching blood or half dead. Something needed to change, and quickly. He took a step into the library, and only then did the presence following him disappear. sagiri could only guess that that meant it was all right for him to access the library. Perhaps Senraki was allowing all devices to him so he could watch him properly and find out whatever he wanted. sagiri pulled his mask up on instinct and stepped further into the massive place.

Sagiri understood its scale only after stepping inside.

The doors alone rose three stories, forged from layered ironwood and dark metal, their surfaces inlaid with faded runes and catalog markings instead of decoration.

Shelves climbed endlessly upward, tier upon tier arranged in a perfect pentagonal spiral. Walkways connected them at varying heights, suspended by steel supports and thick chains anchored into the walls. Ladders were fixed at intervals, narrow and steep. Some levels were accessible only by narrow stairwells tucked into the angles of the pentagon, others by lifts operated through manual counterweights.

The air was cool and dry, carrying the scent of old paper, binding resin, and dust so fine it never settled. Light filtered down from above through narrow skylights cut into the high ceiling, angled to prevent direct sun. Between them hung artificial lighting innovations, casting long shadows across the floor. It was a knowledge heaven, if sagiri could describe. It made all the other libraries in the Galka War Academy seem like a joke.

The floor itself was stone, etched with concentric rings and directional lines. Catalog routes. Study zones. Restricted paths. Sagiri paused instinctively, aware that stepping across certain markings would place him where he did not belong.

Instructors of different ranks were present, but few. They moved quietly, their footsteps soft, their voices kept low. Senior instructors mostly occupied the inner desks and elevated stations. Sagiri walked forward, the sound of his boots echoing farther than he liked. He could stop himself as he moved to the first shelf as if he were in a trance. If there was anywhere he could find what he had been searching it could only be in here.

As he moved deeper, the shelves changed. General doctrine gave way to combat theory. Combat theory gave way to historical campaigns. Further still, the bindings darkened, older texts, sealed volumes, works cataloged by era rather than subject. Some sections were enclosed behind iron latticework, accessed only through keyed gates.

It was as if his eyes had fallen under a spell, and he could not decide what to read. He thought he could maybe read theoretical fourth-year topics since he had already finished the lower-year topics. But now standing in the biggest knowledge den he had ever seen, he did not care about catching up.

He told himself he would only look to orient himself, understand the paths, the sections, the rules of the place. One shelf became two. One title led to another. He pulled a book at random, then another beside it, then one further down when a phrase caught his eye.

He did not read deeply. He just drifted through the covers, soaking in the feel of the hard covers on his fingers

Treatises on siege psychology. Old navigation logs from desert campaigns. A thin volume on bone-setting techniques written in a cramped hand. A ledger cataloging extinct beasts, some as big as the gravescale, and their weaknesses.

Only silence snapped him to reality. There was no one else in the library. It seemed instructors did not have a gong to signify the start and end of periods. Footsteps had faded, and the quiet thickened. Sagiri only noticed the ache in his legs when he leaned back against a shelf and felt the cold of the wood through his uniform.

Sagiri exhaled slowly. His chest felt tight, as if he did not wish to leave his newfound haven. He pushed himself to leave, however, and saluted the middle-aged librarian in a purple combat suit.

He followed the etched memory in the archive of their earlier journey back toward the instructors' wing. Here, the architecture felt intentional in a different way, as if the designer wanted to create a maze. It must have indeed been a war fortress long before it became an academy

It was quieter here than he expected.

Sagiri sat on the edge of the bed and removed his boots. Only then did the fatigue reach him. His body sagged, the delayed weight of healing and strain pulling him down. His mind, however, refused to settle. Images from the library surfaced uninvited. Diagrams, lists, fragments of sentences he hadn't finished reading. It was as if his archive was growing together with his body, and he did not even feel mentally exhausted.

He lay back and stared at the ceiling. He somehow felt lonely for the first time. He did not realize how far he had gotten used to the hullabaloo in the fourth-year pentagon till in that moment, and he would do anything to go back there.

He must have fallen asleep at some point, but his sleep was not peaceful at all. He woke up from a nightmare he could not remember in cold sweat. It was still dark outside, but he could tell the central pentagon had woken up. No one was giving him instructions, and being left free to do whatever he wanted right after living a life filled with order for the past two months was not odd.

He needed to create his own order, or he could go crazy and kill himself before Senraki did.