

## THE LAST KEEPER

### Chapter 81 81: 79. FRUSTRATION

After five more days in the central pentagon sagiri finally settled into a schedule. wake before the instructors, which meant it had to be before three. Be the first in their dining wing so as not to mingle with them. Instead of arenas, they had some form of training pits deep inside the Pentagon. He settled for doing laps around the pit before jumping in when he couldn't take it any longer. He settled on sparring along with the straw dummies with his fists. There was no weapon in sight in the pits, and perhaps it was because every instructor carried around their weapon of choice.

The presence tailing him had not stopped. Sometimes there could be two, and sometimes one, and he had settled on ignoring. With his fast-growing body, so did his strength grow as well. He could now do twenty laps around the arena even though he had been bedridden for two weeks. Combat sparring alone and dagger training with an imaginary blade also seemed easier, as if his body had suddenly stopped being weighed down by some weight, and he was finally himself. The only explanation he had been able to come up with was that the archive inside of him had been too big for his small body before and after hitting sixteen, his body, the archive, and the power powering it had finally had enough room to grow.

He was not allowed to join the common assembly, so he could just use the time to train. No instructor had talked to him, and he couldn't help but think that Senraki had designed a plan to drive him mad, though. he missed the fourth year pentagon beehive of activity, but he had always loved silence, and his archive was always pulsing with whatever he saw in books now more than ever. Sometimes he did not have to read anymore. Just shuffle through the pages, and the archive could remember word for word and start rewriting his memory whenever he slept or while he trained his combat skills.

He did not faint at all anymore from the mere act of the archive merging with his memory. He, in fact, always felt like he could keep going and going, and it was only time

that stopped him. That and the hunger that kept growing inside of him. He had still not reached the level of eating as much as Kaka, but his portion whenever he ate now was mountainous. He had not found a chance to talk with Senraki, Salka or Lotaga as much as he had wanted to. Perhaps that was also Senraki's plan. The man always had a backup plan for a plan, and adding to the fact that he was powerful and cunning and sometimes acted like a child, it did not help at all. He acted like a child but was colder than anyone Sagiri had ever come across.

He punched the straw harder and harder, imagining the faces of the Tamelku twins every time he landed. He had become more agile somehow after the fight with Starshaped and Man-Boy. His boy somehow remembered the moves he had done then as he pushed the elbow of his right hand to the straw, he followed it with the back elbow of his left hand to the side. He did not stop. He threw himself back in two somersaults on his hands to evade two incoming attacks. He landed on his feet and only paused for a moment before he ran at full speed to the straw man, landed on both his knees around his neck, and twisted his body. just like with start shaped, he jumped off before the head sag with death.

He landed with his back to the straw before standing to his feet.

"Though I'd never see that move again." A voice filled the empty arena, and sagiri snapped his gaze upwards. Salka was standing at the edge of the pit. He had missed him yet again. "Your awareness of your surroundings hasn't changed at all, either. guess it's good because I got to see how good you have become. Yet that move was sloppy and slow compared to how you did it last time," Salka corrected, jumping down to the pit.

"I don't know how I did it either," Sagiri said with a sigh. He knew his answer was unbelievable, but he hoped that Salka could believe him. Silence stretched between them as Salka walked even closer till he was standing right in front of sagiri.

"Seems you lack a sparing partner, and I'm free from my duty today. Come at me." Salka said, standing with his hands folded to his chest.

"What?!" sagiri asked. He did not in a million years think that Salka was going to offer himself as a sparring partner.

"A warrior shouldn't hesitate. Now kill me before I kill you," Salka said in an instructor's tone.

"Begin," he said in a serious tone. sagiri did not want to hesitate anymore. it might

Sagiri moved first.

He closed the distance hard, shoulder low, fist driving toward Salka's ribs. Salka shifted a fraction to the side to evade the attack. The strike passed through empty air. Before Sagiri could recover, a palm brushed his wrist, and his motion was redirected in an instant. He lost his balance, slid off centre, and fell to the ground.

He got back up and got into a stance. He attacked again, this time faster, but Salka evaded the same way with zero effort. sagiri however, had learned from his first attack how not to fall on his face again. He twisted, followed with a backward elbow aimed for Salka's side.

Salka wasn't there, however. The man's movements were fluid and effortless. He stepped inside the arc of the strike and tapped Sagiri's sternum with two fingers. Not hard, but just enough to break the rhythm. Sagiri staggered half a step, recovered, and drove a knee upward. Salka caught it mid-rise, turned his hips, and Sagiri was suddenly spun, his own momentum dragging him past his target.

Sagiri landed, rolled, and came up again immediately. Going against a man like Salka, there was no time to sit and think of his next attack, and Salka using no effort, no matter what he tried, was making adrenaline pump in his body, pushing him to attack even faster.

He attacked in bursts, starting with a jab, cross, and low sweep, each movement sharp and committed. None of the combinations landed anyway. Salka flowed through them, never retreating far. He was comfortable on the defense as if he could sleep and still dodge. A forearm slid along Sagiri's punch, a shoulder nudged his center, a foot appeared where Sagiri meant to step. Salka was simply too fast. He did not stand a chance

Every exchange ended the same way. With Sagiri off-balance and Salka untouched.

Sagiri growled and pressed harder. He was growing impatient, even with exhaustion kicking in. He feinted high and dropped low, driving for Salka's legs. Salka shifted his weight, and Sagiri struck nothing but air and stone. A hand caught the back of his collar and released him just as quickly, sending him stumbling forward. This was infuriating him to no end. He picked himself off the ground and got into position again. No wonder Salka had refused to train him when Senraki had asked. The man was on his only level. Perhaps he trained warriors in the war college or maybe with high-ranking instructors.

"Again," Salka instructed, and Sagiri rose to attack again.

His breathing grew louder. Sweat cut lines down his face. His strikes stayed fast but lost precision and attacking angles, widening. He tried to adapt, to read, to anticipate the way Salka moved before he moved.

Salka remained calm even as sagiri lost his mind. He corrected Sagiri constantly, without words. A knuckle to the shoulder when Sagiri overextended. A foot was placed in the exact wrong spot when Sagiri rushed. A palm pressed to the hip that turned power into emptiness.

Sagiri's muscles began to burn. He swung anyway. this time carelessly. A straight punch going for Salka's torso or where it had occupied a heartbeat earlier. Sagiri did not even land in the air this time, and Salka swept his legs clean out from under him. Sagiri hit the ground hard, breath leaving his lungs in a sharp burst.

He rolled, forced himself up. His vision tunneled. His limbs felt heavy, unresponsive, like they belonged to someone else. Still, he stepped forward and attacked again, slower now, but with everything he had left. Salka caught his wrist, twisted gently, and Sagiri dropped to one knee without understanding how. His arm shook. His shoulders sagged. Salka released him.

Sagiri tried to stand, but his legs failed. He dropped forward, palms hitting the ground, chest heaving, sweat dripping onto the stone. His lungs burned with every breath. His hands trembled uncontrollably. Salka stood in front of him, untouched, with not even one hair out of place.

"Enough," Salka said. "You are worse than a three-year-old girl in my clan," he said with a sigh. He stayed where he was, head lowered, fighting for air. He had not landed a single strike. Not one, as he watched Salka walk away, the raging fire inside of him awakened, and his pupils changed.

Sagiri pushed himself up anyway. His breathing broke rhythm. Something hot tore through his chest, not pain but uncontrollable rage. It was sharp and sudden, flaring past restraint. His hands clenched. His vision darkened at the edges.

He lunged. He drove forward like an animal, fists swinging wide, fast, reckless. A strike aimed for Salka's back and to the back of his neck. Power poured into every blow, ugly and uncontrolled.

Salka reacted instantly, just as sagiri was about to make contact. He slipped the first strike, caught Sagiri's forearm, and felt it too much force, too much intent. Sagiri tore free and attacked again, faster, teeth bared, breath snarling out of him. He didn't hear Salka's voice. He didn't see the opening.

Salka stepped in hard. A forearm smashed across Sagiri's chest, knocking the air from him. Before Sagiri could fold, Salka pivoted and drove him down, shoulder-first, into the stone. The impact rang through the arena.

Sagiri still fought. He clawed for Salka's legs, fingers scrabbling, trying to rise. Salka pinned him with a knee between the shoulder blades and twisted Sagiri's arm behind his back, locking it in place. Sand bit into Sagiri's cheek. His body shook, straining, furious.

"Enough," Salka said, low and sharp.

Sagiri growled and tried to surge again. His strength failed him. The fight drained out all at once, leaving only weight and trembling. His chest heaved. His limbs went slack. His eyes returned to their normal amber and his rage dissipated.

Salka held the lock a moment longer, then released him.

Sagiri collapsed fully this time, face to the floor, breath ragged, fingers twitching uselessly. The snap faded, leaving exhaustion and a hollow ache where control had been.

Salka stood over him, silent.

"That," Salka said after a beat, "was reckless," is all he said in a reprimanding tone, but there was something more now behind his eyes.

Sagiri didn't answer. He couldn't. His body refused to move.

## Chapter 82 82: 80. CHITCHAT

Salka sat at the edge of the top of the Central Pentagon. He flipped his blade with practiced precision and caught it before it landed each time. He was not even looking at the blade but he had wielded it a thousand times to know where it could land. He could do it with his eyes closed and still not miss it.

He had been bested for the first time since he became captain of the Galka War Academy and he did not like how it felt. He had lost two of his men and it made him tremble with

rage. Even more so he had almost lost something he cared for and that made him want to make someone feel pain.

It was his fault for not killing Tonga sooner. He should have killed the bastard when he betrayed his whole team. He was the team leader back then and he had caused the death of half the team.

Whoosh!!

A blade was launched to the back of his head and he moved his hand quickly and caught it with ease. He then turned around with a seething expression.

"Can you grow up and stop acting like a child?" He seethed but the man he was talking to just smiled widely.

"Is it wrong to cheat my bosom friend who is sitting alone acting it's a funeral?" Senraki said and Salka ignored him. He could never win with the man unless it was combat so he chose to ignore him.

"Don't disturb my peace, go away. He said and set his eyes on the terrain below. He could see the top of the four pentagons and even the woods and rocky terrain beyond.

"Did you have to kick Lotaga off the team? Don't you think that is a little of an overreaction?" Salka said, coming to stand beside Salka, his eyes forward. Silence stretched out between them. Salka had indeed kicked Lotaga out of his team. The boy had

not listened to instructions and he needed punishment. It was about disobedience to orders from his superior. Not anything to do with the fact that he almost died. Salka convinced himself.

"You didn't have to bring the boy to the central Pentagon. Don't you think it's an overreaction on your part?" Salka threw senraki's question back at him. Another silence fell between the two men both holding reasons for their own decisions.

"I have to please the guild. You know they are always watching. They already deem me unfit to tan this academy. Refusing to give them the boy to interrogate pissed them off. You know they always retaliate." Sentaki said what Salka already knew and they both fell into silence again. They always met like this once in a while to talk.

"You could have just handed him over. Why go through the trouble?" Salka asked even though he himself felt reluctant to just hand over the boy to be tortured by those old-school old hags.

"The boy doesn't seem to know who is. But someone out there sure does. If they sent even Tonga on the suicide mission then the boy must be something special. Perhaps the person behind the boy has links to the guild and I hate being used." Sentaki said and Salka nodded. They had both been there when the boy fought with his guys out. It was as if he was a weapon meant for war or and his eyes.

"Could he be from an extinct tribe. In the myth of tribes, some tribes went extinct because they held too much power and other tribes felt threatened." Salka said, sounding stupid even to himself. How could he even think myths were true.

"After seeing how he moved. I have never seen anything like it. You said he is a genius too. I don't think it's a coincidence. Why would so called powerful tribes go extinct?" Senraki answered with uncertainty too.

"I sparred with him today. His strength is at par with that of a junior instructor when he is in that zone. His eyes turn black when frustrated too. I suppose he was pushed the other day too." Salka said, remembering how fast the boy moved. He was still no match for him but he had a feeling he would keep getting stronger.

"You pushed him?" Senraki asked with a hint of mockery.

"I refuse to believe he was just a killing machine. Lotaga vouched for him. Seems he becomes quite the beast when he can't handle his emotions.

"I hate being in the unknown. His healing abilities are also impeccable. How can such a tribe go extinct?" Senraki asked the same question yet again and silence stretched for a while.

"I already sent spies south to look into his adoptive parents. They must have picked him somewhere. There might still be a trail." Salka said feeling like he was grasping for straws. Sixteen years is a very long time to keep a tail. But he could not just sit still.

"Could he be from the south? They are said to have eyes of strange shades?" Senraki said and Salka finally turned around swiftly.

"I thought you knew better than to mention the south. Besides, it's been years since the south shut its borders. No one goes south anymore. Why could the south abandon their own in the north anyway. They are secretive people and Tagayia has almost nothing on them." Salka said but he could not help but maul over what Senraki had said.

"I'm just saying salsal. Don't be so agitated. If it is a secret art then I have never heard one that powerful." Salka agreed with a nod. It seems they couldn't come up with a fitting identity for the boy. He was a mystery.

"You know the guild is not going to stop. Right. The boy is a suffocation chamber protegee and now annihilates three men way above his rank. I know I'm curious too." Salka said, folding his hands on his chest.

"Those old hugs act like they appreciate talent when they only want to control it. He is in my school now whether they like it or not. I won't submit to their wishes." Senraki said. He is a stubborn man after all and he doesn't take lightly to intimidation.

"That would start a war. The ten schools organization can't protect you against the guild forever." Salka said, shaking his head. He was acting as if he wanted the situation to go some other way but deep down he had always wanted to vanquish the guild.

"But you will protect me forever. Won't you salsal?" Senraki said in a mocking tone and salka had to stop himself from throwing him down to his death.

"I only protect the galka war academy. You deserve to die if you can't protect yourself." Salka snickered and the two laughed. They had known each other for years and Salka had had to fight the urge to kill senraki every step of the way. They were rivals in battle and if

a rival could not even protect themselves they were not a worthy rival. They both knew that.

"You are so ruthless." Senraki feigned hurt.

"And you are insufferable," Salka bit back. "You should let the boy join the others. The midyear examinations are coming up soon and he needs to make his mark." Salka continued. Salka did not answer to that and just stared into the distance for another long while.

"How is lotaga taking his elimination from your team.? You know that boy respects you." Senraki asked after a long moment.

"You should get your eyes checked if you think that brat respects me." Salka snickered. "He doesn't listen to anything I say." Salka continued. He could not for his sake remember the last time lotaga had listened to him. He had punished him so many times he thought the brat actually enjoyed being punished.

"He saved the asakana brat and chimera one. You should not punish him for too long." Senraki said and an irritated sound left his throat.

"I will punish him till he learns. It might have worked for Good this time but it was still reckless. He will not always be a senior instructor. He might one day be a captain that people depend on. He needs to grow up. I will exempt him from all missions till I am sure he is grown." Salka said leaving no room for debate.

"Such anger." Senraki said and Salka just sighed and ignored him. The two stared straight ahead for another long moment before Senraki finally excused himself.

"Let me go bait my mouse again." Senraki cackled as he went. He was a man of many schemes and that was not new to Salka. They both had different roles to play.

Salka still stood on the edge long after Salka left. He was back to his thoughts yet again. It seemed there was a long strong behind Sagiri. Even his admission to the Galka war academy had been forced into him according to what he had said in the interrogation. It seemed as if someone wanted the boy at Galka war academy and the same person or yet another person wanted to take him out of it.

Why would someone want the boy so bad?

One thing was clear however. Sagiri could keep getting stronger and if someone wanted to use him then it could be a threat to Tagayia. He agreed with Senraki on that one. The boy could not be left to fall into the hands of someone who wanted to use him as a weapon.

## **Chapter 83 83: 81. SUPRISE ATTACK**

Another two days had gone by since sagiri trained with Salka, and he had been training even harder than before. After seeing how far beneath someone like Salka he was, his hunger to get better had increased. Even when the power within him had taken over, he still had not stood a chance against Salka. Killing starshaped must have been luck because he was already weakened, and the two, well, it was all the power within and not him. His body did not get tired easily, nor did the archive exhaust him after reading a few pages anymore. He had ended up finishing five whole books a day that were not in the syllabus. The central pentagon was full of knowledge, and the archive inside of him had always

been hungry. He also wanted to get stronger on his own and not to depend on the power he could not yet understand.

It had been a long day. he trained in hand-to-hand combat alone, trying to imagine Salka as the opponent. It pushed him to go beyond his limits. He then took on dagger handling and training after ten in the morning. His skills had improved, but he knew he was still far behind. He no longer dropped it, and implementing what Kaka had taught him, he had finally begun to learn how to become one with the blade and merge his will with it. A short blade should be like an extension of your arm, and he was beginning to understand. With his current rapid growth, even his thrusting had become more powerful, and the straw man looked tattered when he was done.

After lunch and after eating quite a portion of food, he was more than ready to go to the library and let the archive feed its hunger. He settled on the fourth year's books, and they were larger and deeper than the other years' books. It made the archive even happier, and all he had to do was skim page by page so that the archive could rewrite it to be as one with his memory when he finally rested or went to bed. even the archive that used to feel like a foreign part of his brain had begun to feel like a part of him. a part of his brain. His growth had brought him so many discoveries.

Supper came by quicker than expected, and he was ready to eat. He went to the dining wing ahead of the instructors. He did not feel comfortable eating at the same wing as his superiors, and he did not think he could anytime soon. The mid-year exams were also days away, and he wondered if he could be allowed to join the others. The footsteps that always followed him still did and even when he went back to the training pit, he could hear them. He had stopped caring about them since the person had not tried to harm him. He could perceive grief hanging around the person more than ever and he wondered whether the grief had anything to do with him.

Even when night came, he still trained hard in the pits, trying to merge his hand-to-hand combat with the small blades. He had been allowed to have two by Torena when he saw him training with sticks.

It was past ten o'clock when he finally dropped on his back chest heaving and muscled burning. His chest rose and fell rapidly as he tried to catch breath. He had been going and going for a while, trying to perfect what he had learned, and perhaps being alone with his own thoughts had turned him into a training psychopath like Kaka. Thinking of Kaka, he couldn't help but remember his always scowling face and how he and Maita had gone against the intruders without a second thought. The Bami clan descendants were really admirable.

He was still thinking about anything and everything while he rested, when he perceived the grief now closer than ever. He paused in his thoughts and pushed his senses out. Lying down on his back. His ears were close to the sand, and he could hear a pair of footsteps approaching. They were so subtle as if the person was tiptoeing, wanting to catch him off guard. He remained as silent as possible and even closed his eyes. The person stood at the edge of the pit, and he could feel him watching him. He must have been convinced he was oblivious to his surroundings because he jumped into the pit arena and walked slowly, closing in on Sagiri's position where he was lying down.

Now that he was closer to the grief he perceived earlier was much thicker, mixed with a hint of revenge.

Revenge?

What had he done for someone to want to take revenge on him?

The person came to a stop a few feet from Sagiri and Sagiri remained still for a few moments, waiting to see what the person wanted to do. The sound of blades being drawn reached his ears. His eyes snapped open, and he only managed to roll away to avoid being stabbed by the two daggers aimed for his throat. He rolled again to create distance before

coming to a stop on his left knee and his right hand. He lifted his head, and his eyes finally met with the attacker. It was a familiar face. The junior instructor who had given him a tour on the first day he arrived.

Only now, he looked like a shell of the man he was when they first met, his eyes twisted in pain and the urge to revenge. Sagiri cocked his head to his side to understand what he had done to the gut to deserve death, but he could not come up with one excuse. They had never met again after he gave him a tour. Perhaps only in passing or during assemblies, but he could not, for his sake, think of something he had done to the man that made him change from an instructor to a man filled with grief and the urge to revenge.

"You wish to avenge me, why?" Sagiri asked, standing to his feet. If the guy wanted to kill him. The least he could do was tell him the reason.

"You really don't know?" he asked, and Naga's lips trembled with pain and rage as if he could not imagine sagiri did not know what he had done.

"I do not, or I could not have asked," he said matter-of-factly, and Naga's hands tightened around his blades.

"My brother was killed during the exercise because of you. I overheard Senraki saying the intruders came for you. My brother wanted to become a captain. and you took that away from him," he said, each word with venom, and his lips trembled even more. sagiri could now understand why the man reeked of grief. He had lost his brother, which was a good reason to grieve and seek his revenge.

"Did you know the two instructors were cut into so many small pieces? The psychopaths who did it did not stop cutting them, even long after they were dead. All because of you!"

His voice trembled when he said the last part and the grief hanging around him became bigger then. "I had to identify him through his only remaining finger. He couldn't even be married with a full face. He was a good man and he died because of you. you should have never come to galka war academy! perhaps my brother could be alive!" Naga gritted his voice breaking as if he did not want to remember what had become of his brother.

"I see. Will killing make you feel atoned?" sagiri asked wondering what he could do to make the man quench his thirst for pain. He had felt the same urge toward the tamelku twins. the urge to punish and he could only imagine how the man felt after losing his blood brother. Naga must have not expected his calm question and he got angry thinking Sagiri was mocking him.

"You dare mock me?!" Naga seethed, pulling his blades back into an attacking stance.

"No. I want you to go ahead and kill me. If it will make you feel atoned." Sagiri said. he meant it. He did not know whether he would die from being stabbed anymore but he knew it was partly his fault those instructors had died. To show his sincerity, he lay back down and closed his eyes awaiting to be stabbed. He did not want to fight naga and perhaps accidentally kill him. The power in his veins did not understand sympathy and it only understood self preservation. If he fought Naga he would surely die, and killing a grieving man was not honourable as kaka could say.

"what are you doing?" Naga's voice changed from that of rage to that of confusion. Perhaps he had not expected his revenge to fall into his hands just by asking. Even so his urge was far from quenched and his blade remained pulled out.

He moved closer to sagiri and drew his blades back. sagiri could hear him tremble as if he was fighting to kill him or stop. Suddenly however Naga's presence disappeared and sagiri's eyes snapped open. He however did not expect to see Nagas body fly into a strawman shattering it in half before a person dressed in an instructor combat suit with a solid gold sash. a commander? Why was a division leader using so much force?

He then proceeded to hold him by the throat before turning to face sagiri. He had a wicked smile on his face and something was telling sagiri that the man was not a commander.

"So you are the one I have been looking for." The man's voice reached Sagiri's ears and if he was not sure before now he was sure the man was not a commander of the galka war academy.

Another intruder?

Deep in the central pentagon?

"Run!" Naga breathed but the man elbowed him to the side of his face, silencing him.

"Our friend here has a long mouth." the man laughed and sagiri shifted on his feet. "I did not think all I needed was a uniform and a sash of higher rank to break into the galka war academy. I have been here for more than two weeks and no one realised I am an imposter." The man laughed so hard. cack;led more like until the whole arena shook.

"What do you want?" Sagiri asked at the end of his rope with everyone trying to steal him as if he was some precious rock.

"I want you to come with me or I'll kill your friend here." The man said, pulling naga's throat further back.

"He was about to kill me for what you gang did. What makes you think I care if you kill him?" sagiri asked. it was true he was no friends with naga. As much as he did not want the man to die he was not willing to sacrifice himself for a aman that almost just killed him.

"What if I kill him and say you helped me do it because we are in this together. You know they don't already trust you here." The man said and sagiri shifted on his feet. nvaru had also told him that he was still very much under scrutiny and being thrown into a situation he couldn't explain would work to his good.

"No one will believe that. It's your word against mine." Sagiri said, not giving anything away. He had read that line in one of the books that talked about cases when it was one's word against another.

"Who said I don't, I happen to have a witness." The man laughed, his head tilting to one side.

"An instructor got you in." sagiri said finally putting the pieces together. breaking into galka war academy was not easy unless he had help. sagiri should have been surprised but he just sighed. He was tired of people dying just to get him and he did not want to add naga to the pile. He could at least live to become captain and fulfil his brother's dream.

"Let him go. I will come with you." Sagiri said, meaning it. After they got out of the inner nonagon and naga was not in danger he would find a way to break free.

"I see you plotting, boy. If you try anything stupid, I hear you have a friend." The man said and at the mention of nvaru the power inside him stirred merging with his urge to protect. He however fought his urge to lose control and nodded stiffly even as his hands curled into to form fists.

"Let him go. I said I'll come with." Sagiri said in a low tone, anger sipping into his voice.

The man threw Naga to the ground like a sack before he led the way. He must have been too confident to not even watch his back.

## Chapter 84 84: 82. HAD TO BE DONE

"Hand over your blades," the man said as soon as sagiri stepped into the carriage. His name was Molwa. It was surprising and odd how they had not run into any instructor inside and outside the central Pentagon. As if Molwa had chosen the perfect time to get him out. It even sounded more quiet than usual as if every instructor had suddenly been summoned somewhere else. sagiri handed over his blades. He was sitting in the back seat with the guy who had the commander's sash, facing each other. well other than the fact that sagiri had closed his eyes and pushed his senses out in conscious slumber.

"I knew Red wanted to set us up on a suicide mission that day. I mean, with a psychopath leading this school, there was no chance of getting out alive. So I just asked for a favour I was owed," Molwa continued as if he had outsmarted the entire Galka War Academy. So it meant that ten intruders had broken in that day instead of eight.

"What favour?" Sagiri asked. He really wanted to know whether a whole commander had betrayed Galka just for a favour to an abductor.

"Well, it's more of a threat. If he didn't help me get you out, I'd kill his mother, wife, and kids. I mean, it's a small favour I'm doing him. He gets you out, and I spare his family." Molwa answered with glee, and Sagiri took in a sharp inhale of breath. So that was it? The man was holding a commander's family over his head, and he was threatening him to do his will.

The commander did not look scared when they met. He was holding his head high, even as he was being coerced. It was the division commander for academics, Akama. He was in charge of curriculum and assigning different instructors to different units. Guess every man has a weakness, and if someone threatened your whole family, then even the strongest of men could fail, too. Warrior families were kept secret, especially to a man of such a rank, and he wondered how the intruder had found out about the academic's family. He was the one driving the covered military carriage, with Molwa and Sagiri at the back.

"What did you do to the instructors?" Sagiri asked, even though he already knew the answer. It was even more odd since it was night and most students could be training their secret arts alone.

"Well, I had some help moving the schedule around." Molwa gloated.

"Even so, how do you think you are going to get out of the front gate with a student?" Sagiri asked, seeing a loophole in the man's plan. A student, once they entered the Galka War Academy, did not go home unless it was once a year, and they were escorted back and forth with an instructor. The exercise did not happen to fourth-year cadets, however, because once they graduated, they went straight to war college.

"Don't get too excited. That is where my man comes in. he is a junior at the gate, but he has ambition. how do you think I was able to find dead Akama's family?" he snickered, answering Sagiri's other question. So there was a betrayer after all inside the walls of Galka War Academy. There had never been a shortage of those, even in the history books sagiri had read in the central Pentagon library.

"What is in it for him?" Sagiri asked. Every betrayal in all history had been driven by a goal that was fueled by greed.

"I didn't take you for a smart one, but it seems you know quite a lot even if you have been here for less than three months," Molwa said with a smile. "You will see," he added, answering directly before he rested his back on the seat. Sagiri could almost taste the plotting and canning roll of him in waves.

Sagiri closed his eyes back up as they started the journey again at full speed from the inner nonagon to the outer one.

"Go quickly! Those fools will be back in no time." The man yelled to Akama, and Sagiri jolted at the loud, unnecessary voice before falling back to a meditative space to think. It was a long way from the outer nonagon to the inner one, and he knew it could take time. His only hope was that Salka or Lotaga, who still found time to peek at him sometimes, realized he was gone and raised the alarm. It was night, and if they didn't find Naga or realize he was gone, then Molwa could have a full night's head start.

As if answering to his thoughts after a few minutes, the carriage came to a sudden stop. making the two suddenly jolt forward, almost running into each other. They were not even halfway, and sagiri held his breath.

"What is it, Akama? Don't tell me a horse pulling this wagon is dead?" Molwa asked with irritation laced in his tone. He pulled the curtain separating the front and the back to see the reason for the sudden stop. It was dark, but the mood was full, and with the stars littering the sky, it was easy to see. There was a long pause, and Sagiri shifted his face to see what had made the carriage come to a stop. Somehow Lotaga was standing in front of the carriage with his bow drawn. Sagiri's eyes widened. The man stalking might have come to his own good, but he was injured, and if Sagiri could guess. He was still seriously hurt and had not healed well. The wound caused by Tonga's axe was deep, and it could take months to heal. Well, for normal people. Not him.

Sagiri scrambled out of the wagon quickly, and Lotaga's eyes flickered when he saw him, but quickly went back to his abductor and Akama, who was still as calm as possible.

"Just run him over," Molwa said, and Sagiri panicked.

"Lotaga, just get out of the way, we both know that your hand is still bad and you can't shoot," Akama said, still seeming unfazed.

"Damn it. This brat and ruining plans. Let me just kill him." Molwa said retrieving his blades said and after his display in the pit and Lotaga's current condition, Sagiri felt even more panicked. He was starting to get attached to Lotaga. He was just too reckless and obnoxious to die.

"If you touch him, I'll kill you both." The words tumbled out of Sagiri's mouth loud enough for Akama and Molwa to hear, and Molwa stopped in his tracks. He did not know if he could beat a commander yet but he was not going to allow them to do whatever they wanted. He then turned to Lotaga who was now looking at him skeptically.

"Hey Lotaga, quit being a nuisance and get out of the way. It is my choice to go with them. I am tired of being held prisoner." Sagiri said with as much sincerity as he could master. "You need to run back to the inner nonagon and do whatever Salka asks you to." He added some mockery to the last part. At the mention of Salka without properly addressing his name with a title, Lotaga's eyes flashed with a certain anger, and he pulled his bow further back, now aimed at Sagiri. Perhaps mentioning Salka was not the wisest choice. It seemed the man, after all, held Salka in high regard.

"I don't believe you!" Lotaga said, cocking his head to the side. "I am injured, not retarded," Lotaga said and Sagiri sighed. It seemed he needed more convincing than just hurtful words. He had studied that too. How to get your way just like a betrayer could.

"I killed Naga. He should be rotting in the combat pit. The stupid boy was blaming me for his brother's death. Perhaps if his brother were more qualified, he could not have died. Now move out of the way, or you'll be next, Salka's brat." Sagiri steadied his voice and added as much malice as he could into it, even taking a leaf out of Tonga's speech. He did not want the man to die for him, and if making him think he was a betrayer and heartless, then that was the way to go.

Lotaga stood for a long moment, his bow drawn as if he wanted to strike Sagiri in that moment before he finally lowered it and stepped aside without another word.

"Try to mind your own business next time, Lotaga or Salka couldn't have thrown you out of his battalion," Akama added insult to injury, and Sagiri fought the urge to flinch. He did not know that Lotaga had been eliminated from Salka's team. Salka's team was one of the most elite teams in the whole of Tagayia. It contained eleven members. The other six worked outside the Galka War Academy, and the eleven only came together when it was necessary. They were so fierce that they could trample a small city by themselves in one night. unmatched in battle and deadly.

Lotaga must have worked hard to join the team, and he had been eliminated because he had gone on a solo mission. Sagiri did not need to be told that the man had acted on his own. It was evident that Salka had been surprised to see him in the small clearing, half dead. He must have disobeyed once again.

Sagiri felt guilty after the way he just talked to him, but he had no time to dwell on it. Better have a broken heart than a dead one. He stepped into the carriage, not looking back, and the abductor followed him.

"I did not know you were that cruel?" was the first thing the man said. "You might have meant well, but that was brutal. I mean, the guy almost died for you twice, counting today, and you broke his heart as if it was nothing." Molwa continued, and Sagiri shifted uncomfortably. He had always wanted to have a friend and someone for him, just like everyone, but now it was starting to seem that every time someone came around him, they were prone to getting hurt. He had allowed himself to get stabbed even though he knew N'varu wanted him to live badly. He had now said hurtful words to Lotaga, even when the gut was ready to die for him.

"You should stay quiet." Sagiri gritted, closing his eyes back up. It was going to be a long night indeed. And he just hoped he could find a solution to all his problems by morning.

After what he had just said to Lotaga, Senraki was surely going to kill him when he caught him. He was now in bed with the enemy, and there was no way of escaping.

## Chapter 85 85: 83. THE PERFECT ACT

"What if your man is not at the gate?" Akama finally spoke after a while. He had slowed down, and sagiri could only think they were at the gate.

"What are you scared of, Akama? You have already become a traitor to the Galka War Academy," Molwa started. "The worst that could happen is the Zazami clan psychopath, or the Asakana clan cold-blooded captain will execute both of us on the spot, and the boy can maybe be kicked out for the way he talked to the senior instructor," Molwa said, not fazed at all.

"This is no time for jokes. We had a deal." Akama answered, bringing the whole carriage to a stop.

"Just calm down. My man will be there." Molwa sighed. The carriage moved slowly, or rather silently, from then on till they reached the gate. Even long before they reached the gate sagiri could already smell death in the air and also silence. A lot of silence. He could not perceive any movement, as if the wardens at the gate had suddenly left their post.

"It is too silent," Akama said, stopping a few feet from the gate.

"My men must have silenced the others," Akama said in a prideful tone.

"You told me you had one man. You did not say you would kill innocents. We had a deal." Akama said his voice was breaking. The smell of blood was so thick in the air that Sagiri knew even Akama could not have missed it.

"Well, I always have a backup plan in case my inside man fails me. I had to hire a dozen outside men. If this boy is that important, he will be my bargaining goods." Molwa answered, and Sagiri could perceive the betrayal rolling off of Akama in waves.

"We had a deal," Akama repeated, his voice trembling. It was past midnight, and other than Akama and Molwa arguing it was completely silent. Molwa was way more cunning and greedy than Sagiri had thought. The man could not even keep his word.

"I said I will not hurt your family. I did not mention the wardens," Molwa said, yawning as if all the talking was unnecessary.

"You said no one could be hurt by them," Akama insisted.

"I didn't say I won't kill them. They are not hurt, Akama. They are dead, and the dead can not be hurt. I thought you, being in charge of academics, were smarter than that." Molwa said, moving from his position. "Get out!" Molwa continued in a fierce tone, stepping out of the carriage. Sagiri stepped out too, and the sight of the humongous gate stood a few feet in front of them. The torches on the gate and beside it were burning brightly, illuminating the whole place.

Just like Sagiri had thought, the gate stood wide open with no warden in sight. He did not, however, have long to admire the desolate view before a strong hand was hooked around his throat enough to cut his air and blood supply to the brain before he was pulled fast against a body. They had been together for two hours, and Sagiri had gotten used to the

plotting smell surrounding the man so much so that he did not think anything of it anymore until he was held hostage again.

"What are you doing?!" Akama jumped from the carriage and drew his sword. It was a wonder that Molwa had let him keep his sword for the whole journey.

"Don't move or I'll tear the boy limb from limb, and we both know the cost will be too high to pay if a student dies," Molwa said, moving with his back towards the gate with sagiri in his clutches.

"I know you want him alive, or why would you go through the trouble just to kill him?" Akama said, and Molwa just sighed as if Akama had missed the bigger picture.

"If you are so smart, Akama, why did you think I let you, a highly trained man, wield a weapon all this time?" Molwa asked, his hand loosening a bit on sagiri's throat, and he inhaled a huge amount of breath to quench his burning lungs. Akama did not take his eyes off of Molwa for a second. It seemed that Akama was better in combat than Molwa, and that begged the question of why he let him wield a weapon.

"Kill yourself," Molwa said after a long moment of silence, and sagiri froze. Akama looked taken aback by the words, too, but he did not lower his weapon, and if anything, it tightened.

"You are too much of a stay alive. A man like you will not forgive me after I threatened your whole family. We both know that. I hate leaving loopholes in my plan and even more so, I hate being a target of a vengeful man." Molwa said with fake regret, lacing his tone. Sagiri could only be amazed at the level of madness and logic, and if he wasn't fighting to breathe he could have applauded Molwa's ability to use everyone around him without

feeling regret. blackmailing people by what they cared about and killing without restraint if it meant he could reach his goal.

He did not possess an ounce of respect for promises, human, or deals. He just said anything and used people as bridges who did not have a soul or a heart. He was more than cunning and greedy. He was a disease that ate away everything it touched, and that fact infuriated sagiri. Perhaps even sagiri was just another bridge or another means to an end for him. Perhaps he was just a bargaining chip whom he could use to achieve his goal, and maybe keep using him to acquire more money, and seeing how the man acted, he would never be satisfied.

Such blatant greed repulsed sagiri so much so that the power in his veins cackled and came alive.

Molwa put two fingers under his tongue and blew. A whistle-like cry echoed far and wide, and it could only mean he was calling for his minions. Sagiri waited with bated breath for a long moment, but nothing happened. Another moment passed, and still no movement. Molwa put two fingers under his tongue and whistled again, this time louder, and it almost tore sagiri's ears off. Now that he thought about it, he had not seen or used his oru-shells since he woke up.

damn it! They must have gotten crushed when he was on a rampage, while they were still in his combat suit pocket.

Another moment of silence passed by, and sagiri could feel Molwa shift uncomfortably. Molwa put the two fingers under his tongue yet again, and sagiri brazed his sensitive ears for a louder whistle this time, but before Molwa could execute the whistle, a low laugh tore through the silence, and both Molwa and sagiri snapped their eyes to the direction of its source.

Akama was hunched over, and he was laughing. The laughter grew louder and louder by the second, and Akama looked like he could not take hunching over anymore, so he threw his head back and laughed. His laughter was something sagiri had never heard. The earlier man who was acting as if he had been fooled was nowhere to be seen, and in his place was a cold man. sagiri could have sworn he perceived betrayal rolling off of him. Had he been acting so much, he believed it himself and got too deep into the role. If that was the case, then Akama was far more sick than Molwa. sagiri was beginning to understand that, as much as Galka War Academy had no shortage of geniuses, it was also full of sick people.

Akama laughed so hard that tears fell from his eyes and his blade from his hands. He did not stop even then, and he fell forward on his hands and knees and continued cackling.

"What is funny?" Molwa asked when he couldn't take it anymore. Even Sagiri was eager to know what was funny. He needed to know if Akama had gone mad suddenly.

"You." Another voice joined in, and Salka jumped off the wall at the top of the gate, his white combat suit appearing even whiter in contrast with the dark. Another person landed beside him. salka. His face was twisted in annoyance.

"Took you long enough, Akama." Salka said, looking at Akama, who had finally gathered himself in a flash, and he was now standing in a respectful stance as he had just shed away the man who was laughing, and he was a new man.

"The plan was almost ruined by your brat, as the recruit called him. I almost lost it there, but I have to say he made things more interesting and believable," Akama said, a flash of his earlier personality taking over for a moment before he pulled himself together quickly.

"What is going on?" Molwa asked his grip on Sagiri's throat tightening in fight or flight. They could have at least made sure he was free before they started chatting, but the marshal, captain, and academics division commander looked at ease as if he was not being choked to death.

"I will have to punish him again," Salka ignored Molwa and answered. Akama and sagiri could feel Molwa shift uncomfortably.

So it had been a plan all along? sagiri thought. He did know how long ago he had walked into Senraki and Salka's plan. He did not know whether to be relieved or worried at the moment. He could not even bring himself to think of how cruel he had been to Lotaga.

He had fallen for Senraki and Salka's cunning plan headfirst. It seemed only he, Lotaga, and Molwa were the only ones left in the dark.

How humiliating. How could he have fallen for such a display?

## **Chapter 86 86: 84. COMPASSION**

"You have already punished him enough, Salsal. Besides, it was we who did not involve him in the plan," Senraki said to Salka after they had been bickering for a long time. They had completely ignored Molwa, and he was physically beginning to tremble.

"If you don't get out of the way, I'm going to kill him," Molwa said, trying to sound courageous.

"I can't believe he threatened you to kill your wife, Mona. Does he know Mona was the discipline division commander here before she retired to take care of your little brats?" Senraki said, ignoring Molwa yet again. sagiri was starting to get into the gossip, and she was beginning to get used to his lungs burning because

"I probably should have let him go to her. It has been a long time since she sank her nails into flesh to break some windpipes. She is going to kill me for denying her the opportunity." Akama said with hearts in his eyes. He and his wife must have been a weird couple. Akama was deranged in the least, and she was fierce. They made a perfect match.

"I'm serious, I'm going to kill him," Molwa said, but his grip had gotten sweaty, and his heart was beating so hard that Sagiri could hear it.

"You kill him, and you die anyway," Salka said, and sagiri did not see his hand move, but the next second, as the blade was launched their way, and the sound of blade meeting flesh met sagiri's ears. A moment of silence passed before blood spattered on sagiri's and Molwa's grip loosened. He fell to the ground with a thud. sagiri gasped and clutched his throat, finally able to breathe properly.

"Thank you for shutting him, but he was mine to kill Salka," Akama said with regret.

"Be faster next time," Salka said.

"Your pets are going to be full this time. What do you plan to do with Ganka?" Akama asked, and sagiri could not even begin to imagine what Salka's pets were. Ganka must have been the junior who had betrayed Galka War Academy, and the death and blood sagiri smelled must have belonged to Molwa's companions from the outside.

"Dear Sagiri, I hope I did not scare you too much." Senraki was the first to speak to sagiri.

"That is the second time you have used me as bait," sagiri said after he was breathing normally again. "I wonder if there is a third time," sagiri seethed. Senraki had used him as bait to flash the Tamelku twins out so they could dig their own grave, and he had used him yet again to catch a traitor.

"we cant use the word 'use' sagiri. I might have underestimated the Tamelku twins, but this time I had Akama to protect you. not many can beat Akama in combat," Senraki said in his usual tone as if it was that simple.

"What about Naga?" Sagiri gritted. He did not care that Senraki was the marshal anymore. Senraki didn't seem to know that something had happened to Naga, so he raised his eyebrows.

"What about Naga sagiri?" he asked, and sagiri's lips trembled.

"He was just collateral I see," Sagiri said, partly not wanting to reveal that Naga had attacked him and wanted to kill him. He needed to keep it a secret as atonement for Naga's brother, and perhaps the boy could live to reach his brother's dreams. "He almost died trying to save me, but it seems you only care to use and discard people with no respect for their lives. You are no better than Molwa.

"Hey recruit, you can't talk to the marshal like that. apologize." Akama said, seemingly angry. His earlier two moods were now replaced with anger.

"The recruit is right," Senraki said in a serious tone, stopping Akama in his tracks. "He, after all, almost died because of me, and as a marshal I should set a good example to my recruits and cadets. so, Sagiri, I apologize. I will ask before I put you in the face of danger again." senraki said and sagiri breathed. He did not forgive him just yet, but he would take his word for it. If he broke, then they would stop seeing eye to eye.

"I will take your word for it," sagiri answered, saluting Senraki. It was a war academy after all, and respect was at its heart even when he was angry. He still wanted to act with discretion just as N'varu had asked him.

"You will be starting the midterm year exams next week. You will be tested in all subjects, including combat and weaponry. They both have different rankings, and I'm expecting you not to fail in both. Because if you do, you will be terminated. That was the bargain I made with the ten schools. You have to prove that you are smart, and that is why you were targeted. If you don't, then it will raise questions as to why someone could want a failure." Senraki added. He was gravely serious, and sagiri nodded and saluted him, understanding the intensity of the issue. sagiri knew for sure the textbook exams would not be hard for him, but he was not much better in combat at most. He would stand on his toes with the second-year cadets because losing control of the power inside him was not an option.

"Do you understand?" Senraki asked as if wanting to know if sagiri knew the intensity of the situation he was in.

"I understand," sagiri answered.

"The ride back to the inner nonagon was silent, perhaps maybe because sagiri was the only one sitting in the back of the wagon. Salka and Senraki had remained at the gate to wrap up things and maybe patrol or whatever the two had in mind. He had also been asked to go back to the fourth-year pentagon in the morning to resume his classes and prepare for exams.

He should have been happy about going back, but after setting foot inside the central Pentagon library, he did not want to go back yet. He had wanted to ask Senraki to be allowed in the library even after he went back, but he chose to hold his tongue for now. he did not know why the ten schools council were interested in his so much or perhaps someone was pulling strings behind them but he knew he had to pass. he was not going to hold back in the written exam and he would push himself in combat stand even in the average category. Of course he could not magically beat boys who had been training to kill and become warriors of tagayia in mere three months but with his current body, he knew he only needed three more months to be able to stand on the same footing with the fourth year cadets.

The exam was also going to determine if he became a cadet and changed the sash colour. It seemed a lot was riding on it.

After the exam, the fourth-year student would start being assigned to patrol duties around the school. They would also get assigned permanent teams from then on, which would include ten students and an instructor, making it a fully functioning squad. The teams will then patrol together, train together, and even be sent on small missions to foster their bond. sagiri had become used to members of Team 25, and he did not want to start over with a new team. Just thinking about it made him sigh.

He also needed to find Lotaga and explain things. It seemed he had been too cruel for a mere trap set by Senraki. Since he was being allowed back to join the others, he knew he had been freed of any suspicion, at least for the moment. He had a feeling, however, that

the person pulling strings might have had his claws deep in the ten schools council and even the warriors guild.

It was past three when they arrived back in the inner nonagon, and Akama allowed sagiri to sleep in for an hour or two after breakfast before he was allowed back to join the others. After what had happened, he should have lost his appetite, but he was even hungrier now, and he swallowed the large portions she served quickly. The food in the central Pentagon was also much better, and he was going to miss it. After he was done eating, however, he did not go back to his temporary room to sleep.

He still remembered the healing wing like the back of his hand, and his feet took him there. He knew who he was looking for, and he had visited the wing long enough to know which section held heavily injured patients. Naga was lying face up. A bandage was tied around his head and his left arm. He looked to be in pain even with the pain pills. Even so, he was awake, and his head turned to look at the door when sagiri walked in. his eyes widened as if he could not believe what had happened. It seemed he must have been unconscious when they brought him in and could only remember sagiri being blackmailed.

"Why are you here?" Naga asked, his expression still holding pain and grief. The question had two meanings and sagiri stepped even deeper into the room. He intended to answer both.

you will have to ask Akama, Salka, and Senraki when you leave the wing," he answered, and Naga's eyes widened slightly. He already knew the cost of what he had attempted, and he understood the weighing of its consequences.

"I am here to also tell you that I told Senraki that you were hurt while you were protecting me from Molwa. We are even now," he said, and Naga's lips quivered. It looked like he wanted to say they were not even, but instead, he just faced the other side as if he was slightly relieved. "You can become a captain like your brother. But if you try to kill me after this i will not hold back," Sagiri said the last statement slowly. He might have

been the reason Naga's brother was killed, but he was by no means at fault. He had chosen to do Naga one favour since he had lost a blood brother, but he would not allow it again. Even his compassion ran short.

He did not wait for an answer from Naga or expect thank you as he turned around and exited the healing wing.

## Chapter 87 87: 85. BACK

The fourth-year Pentagon was a beehive of activity. The exams could start in three days, and the boys had been left alone to polish their studies and skills before the start of the exam. Sagiri, on the other hand, was required to do exams across all years, so his exams would take a week.

He had not realized how tired he was, and he slept in till eight. He did not need to carry much anyway, so he had only one request. He wanted to be allowed to be able to use his blades. He told Senraki that the weapon might have had something to do with his clan, and he was just as eager to know what it was, and something was telling him they might have the answer. Everyone was allowed to use their tribe's choice of weapon to practice their secret arts. Tradition, after all, was the backbone of Tagayia.

The blades had retracted in dormancy now more than ever, and the blades had hidden themselves inside the handle. He, however, was not going to use the weapon right away as the exams were around the corner. The only weapons he had been trained to use were the spear and the blade, and since he had nothing more to learn from the textbooks, all he needed was to train.

The combat arena was more packed than usual, and when he entered, there was pin-drop silence as everyone stopped what they were doing and turned to look at him. mixed feelings were flying all around, and most of all was curiosity and unease. He had never really fit in properly before, and it was as if now there was even more distance. He took another step wearily of all the attention. His hate for being the centre of attention had never changed. After another moment, everyone turned to their partner or partners. It seemed no one was using the straw men and human mad dummies to train for the exams.

it was all good for him, and he made a peeline for the dummies. When he pulled his blades out and started going at the straw men he could feel dozens of eyes on him as if everyone was watching but trying not to make it obvious. He had not seen any member of team 25 and he had never wanted to see a familiar face so badly before.

What a bother.

He could not even concentrate on his target because of the attention, and his blade slipped out of his hand after a couple of attacks. That had never happened before in the central pentagon and the sound of the blade clattering on the floor was louder than ever, and more eyes turned to him. He did not have his shells to block out sound, and he could clearly hear the gossip now.

'I can't believe we lost two powerful cadets at this critical time because of him,' one whispered.

'I saw him egg them on,' another said. 'He must have planned to have them eliminated.'

'Why could the intruders break in to take him away?' another asked.

'How did he even escape? I hear he was stabbed pretty badly by some of his team members.

Perhaps he faked it to get the twins eliminated. Perhaps the intruders took the twins on his order, another said

'He doesn't look hurt to me, just clumsy. Stab wounds take months to heal,' another said.

Two instructors died in one night. That has never happened before in the history of the Galka War Academy. He must have brought us bad luck,' another spat

'Who is he anyway? I think he might be a child to some high-ranking member in society.' another said, and Sagiri finally understood why he was getting the creepy stares.

So that is the rumour that has been flying around. Of course, everyone must have heard about the intruders and him being taken away. The twins' stabbing must have also been common knowledge now. The only thing that was kept under wraps was his battle. It seemed the three boys were tight-lipped, which was expected of them. Kaka did not care about gossip, Kiuga was a war general in the making, and he cared more about every angle of an outcome, and well, N'varu could never tell on him.

He did not know whether to be relieved or disheartened at the new information, but he knew one thing. He and the Tameku twins, if they ever met again, only one of them could make it out alive. Those two were a cancer, and just the rage made him pick up his blades.

He breathed in, trying as much as possible to filter out the gossip, or rather, use it as fuel for his training.

He moved as if he were going against the twins yet again. It was always hard to train without a goal, and they had become his. This time, however, he did not want to use them as opponents and instead imagined Salka as an opponent. He was way faster than anyone he had ever seen, and if he wanted to improve, he needed a stronger opponent. His archive had recorded his fight with Salka and now all he had to do was visualize him standing in front of the dummy before he went for it.

He flipped the daggers and dived forward, but he did not stab the straw man. If it was Salka he could not have made the attack, and so he retracted them just as quickly and went for the [place where he could have dodged to. He closed his eyes as he went for maximum effect. Of course, Salka could evade the second attack and destabilize him without much effort. To respond to the attack, he prepared for it landing on his back with practiced precision before jumping to his feet. He kicked his feet out to sweep Salka off his feet, but of course, Salka could evade that too by jumping back, both his hands behind his back. He responded quickly and faked the sweep, but launched the daggers at his torso at the same time. The dagger landed in the belly of the straw man, and the other on the chest. He did not stop, and he went in with a moving punch followed by a moving elbow, which Salka could dodge and send him back with a kick.

He prepared to dodge the kick, but he knew he had to be fast, so he threw his body back on his hands till his back was to the strawman he had stabbed. His hands went behind his back on instinct, and he retrieved both weapons. Both acts were done simultaneously, but with his eyes closed. He twisted his body sideways to create space between him and the straw, but pushed one leg against it to gain momentum before he went for a stab with both hands stretched far back to reach Salka's neck. Salka was a tall beast of a man, and just going directly could never stand him. Of course salka could evade the attack, and so he prepared for the fall and landed on one hand and shoulder, back to roll away from the intended fall.

If it were Salka, he could have time to catch his breath, so he was back on his feet again and went in for the attack again.

The gossip had died down now, and it had turned to curiosity. He knew he had improved, and he was proud of it, but he did not want to think that he was showing off to his peers. Three more sequences of attacks, and he was out of breath completely. He leaned forward to catch his breath and finally opened his eyes. Everyone had finally gone back to training, and as his showdown had fueled their rivalry, they were now going at it harder than before.

If he wanted to catch, he needed to also drive himself past his limits, so he got into a stance again and started going at it again. His breaths came in shallow and sharp, and his chest rose quickly, but he did not stop. Sweat poured down his face as he went, but stopping was not an option anymore. Salka had said that the exam would grant him respect and a position among the boys, and now more than ever, he wanted to prove he was as much a recruit at Galga War Academy more than ever. He did not want to depend on the archive to pass the exams, but also wanted to prove himself in combat.

When lunch time came, he was eager to eat more than ever, and when he served eight servings more, his eyes fell on him yet again. He yet again did not see any members of Team 25, and he was starting to wonder if they had disappeared off the face of the earth. Just when he sat down, however, the nine walked through the door. It seemed that they had been training again, as if his almost-death encounter had brought them together. Of course, tragedies pushed people together, and he did not know if he was glad or worried.

Team 25 had finally come to accept him. At first, without a choice, then later they had just stuck it up.

Kaka's eyes landed on him, or more like on his plate, and he lifted his head in satisfaction. The others only stole glances at him as they got in line. They did not join him at the table, and he ended up eating alone. Seemed he had ruined the whole closeness by almost dying. He had always wanted to have friends, and right now he felt cold. The cold in his heart was whispering that he was not someone who could have friends. He somehow agreed with logic since he had put them in harm's way and the coldness in his heart took shape.

perhaps it were better if he stayed away from everyone.

## Chapter 88 88: 86. THE SPEAR

No one usually trained in the broken shadow, and Sagiri moved inside it alone. He did not want to mingle with anyone after Team 25's display during lunch. The stone pillars rose like broken trees, thick and uneven, their shadows overlapping and swallowing distance. It was dark, dimly lit as always, and he could not sense any presence. He whirled the spear around and got into the starting position. He had not been able to master the spear properly, and that is why he had picked the lightest one with a blade on one side. It stood taller than him since spears were meant for keeping space between you and the enemy.

Weight settled into his palms, and he breathed before he moved. He could start with a spear dance, which he was sure to taste on. It was the basis of mastering the sword before he moved to attacking and defending.

He advanced, slow at first, feet rolling heel to toe. The spear stayed close to his body, shaft angled low, the point almost touching the uneven ground.

He struck. A sharp thrust snapped forward, clean and precise, stopping a breath short of a pillar. He withdrew instantly, pivoted, and slid sideways into darkness. Another strike followed from a new angle. Then another. No wasted motion. He used the pillars as opponents. He circled one, let it break his outline, then burst out with a sweeping cut aimed at the legs. He dropped, rolled, came up behind another column, breath steady, muscles burning. The spear always tired him, and it seemed that it had not changed. It not only required the hands and the core to thrust, but the whole body to be in sync. He was convinced it was the hardest weapon to use. He had not yet received any basic training in

the bow and arrow and sword, but he was convinced they could not be harder than controlling the long rod and blade.

Sagiri increased speed. Trying to become one with the weapon, but he was beginning to realize he had given more attention to blades and had forgotten to train with the spear. He had even given more attention to hand-to-hand combat.

Thrust. Withdraw. Step. Spin. The spear whistled through the air, kissed stone, and stopped just before impact. He imagined hands grabbing for him, blades flashing. He slipped between them, spear butt smashing into imagined ribs, pointing snapping up toward his throat.

His perception stretched by the moment. He moved before thought, reacting to spaces, to absence. Sweat slid down his spine. His arms shook. His grip tightened. He forced another sequence. Then another. His breath came harder now, echoing faintly between stones.

Still, he moved. One last drive forward. A full extension thrust. His shoulder screamed. His strength faltered. But he spun on his knee on a full spin before stabbing, bringing the combination to an end. Only then did Sagiri stop. He planted the spear and leaned on it, head bowed, chest heaving. The shadows closed back in around him. With it, only one realization came. He had not mastered the spear.

"You are thinking too much. That was the most terrible form I have ever seen." Suddenly, a voice joined, and Miss Lakiya walked into the shadow colonnade. "I did not know anyone came here to train besides me," she said. She was bearing a sword longer than her own. She was tall herself, and her navy blue instructor coat flew behind her. The spear was a specialty of her tribe and most tribes of the west, and if sagiri could guess, she was a beast in the art.

sagiri bowed slightly and took a step forward.

"It is heavy," sagiri said, wondering why one could pick such a cumbersome weapon to use in battle.

"That is the secret. If one stabs you with a blade, you might make it, but if they stab you with a spear, you won't. It's heavier, so it's more lethal, and one good stab to the heart, you're dead. It's hard to miss at least one vital organ with this," she explained as if the spear was her best friend and had never failed her. "It is also best for hunting, especially against a big beast. Blades are lighter, but they sometimes can not scratch some beasts," she explained, and sagiri could not help but agree. He could not help but think of the gravescale, how helpless they had been against it with only daggers. It seems he needed to master it if he wanted to be able to cause damage to bigger beasts.

sagiri nodded.

"I will tell you a secret. If you want to get used to its weight, you need to make it a point to walk with it everywhere. After the exam, you will be allowed to carry weapons of choice around so that you get used to the weight. I advise you to carry a spear because it is the heaviest and it will make all the other weapons feel lighter." Miss Lakiya explained with one of her smiles that it could only mean she was thinking of something not specifically good.

"Now come at me with your spear. I will not use mine. Attack me, and I will dodge," she said, already throwing her sword to the side as she hadn't been talking of it as if it were a lover a few seconds before

sagiri had learned from Salka that he did not need to escape, and he did not need the attack command from Miss Lakiya before he sank. He kicked the bottom of his spear off the floor with his right foot and got into an attacking position. only for a moment before he twirled it and got into an attacking position.

He came in fast, spear driving straight for her centerline. Lakiya shifted barely a step, and the point slid past her ribs as if she had already known where it would land. Her foot tapped the stone once, and she was gone.

Sagiri turned and struck again. High. Low. A feint to the throat, a snap to the knee. The spear cut through shadow and air, fast enough to whistle. Lakiya flowed around it, spine bending, shoulders rolling, feet gliding between pillars. She never crossed her legs. Never broke the balance. She bent all the way back and caught the spear with her legs and pushed sagiri back a few feet. She was really in love with the spear.

Sagiri stuck the spear in the ground to stop the momentum before she jumped back. He pressed harder this time. These instructors were fast but not as fast as Salka, yet he couldn't keep up. Sagiri chased her through the columns, using reach, angles, and speed. He cut off paths, drove her toward stone, and thrust where escape should have been.

Just when he thought he had her, she jumped and perched on the spine of the spear momentarily, before she somersaulted above his head, tapping him forward in the process and using his head as a pivot. She must have been made of rubber, depending on how fluid her movements were. She passed him so close he felt the air move. He did not dwell on the shock of her movements and instead allowed the archive to rewrite it. He spun, slashed, stepped in deep, and went for a stab.

She ducked under the shaft, palm tapped his wrist, and suddenly the spear was pointing at space while her knee hovered a breath from his thigh.

"Again," she said.

His muscles burned. His breathing roughened. Still, he attacked. The spear was a ruthless weapon, and against a master of it, it was even more treacherous. It was as if she could predict his every move and dodged before he even executed. He kicked the spine of the spear off the ground and went for her again, but she dodged yet again. It was impressive how fast her defense was without a weapon.

Lakiya smiled then, quick and sharp, before she slipped inside his guard, twisted past the spear, and stopped with two fingers pressed to the hollow of his throat.

Sagiri froze.

"Good pressure," she said quietly. "Bad control. You and the spear are perfect strangers. You are not controlling it. It is controlling it," she continued, going to pick up her swords.

"Watch and learn," she said, getting into a sparring position, her knees wide apart and her butt so low it looked like she was sitting.

The air changed suddenly as she got fully immersed in her weapon. Her spear was held in her right hand at the centre, and the rest of it went below her arm to behind her back

She did not announce the start. She just breathed once sharply as if to be as calm as possible before she moved.

The first step cracked against the air as the pear wheeled around. She lifted the right leg so far up and attacked. The spear looked like it had come alive in her hands. spinning, snapping forward, and stabbing with so much vigor.

She advanced like she was listening to her weapon, and they were two halves of a whole. She thrust, swept as if to sweep someone off their feet, and lifted her left leg before reversing and spinning on her knee. The spear bit the air at throat height, dropped to the knees, rose again in a vicious spiral. Her footwork was relentless and short, driving steps that stole space and crushed retreat.

The dance was violent.

She twisted the shaft and let the butt strike hard, imagining ribs shattering, ankles crushed, wrists broken. Each motion carried intent and kill lines layered over one another, no wasted angle, no mercy. She spun it above her head so quickly and behind her back with one hand, then two, as if to add as much momentum as possible before she went airborne and landed the spear on the ground, shaking the ground with the force she used.

She spun once, low and fast, spear sweeping the ground, then snapped upright into a full extension thrust that would have pinned a heart to stone. She did not stop. The spear sang as she turned again, shoulders rolling, core locked, power driving from the ground up. Her breath stayed even. Her expression never changed.

When the dance ended, it ended suddenly. Silence rushed back into the arena. Miss Lakiya lowered the weapon and looked over her shoulder.

"That," she said, "is how you wield a sword. You don't command it, you let it lead, but you give the command," She said, and Sagiri could only understand what she was saying. He had not been able to look away from the beautiful violence. The spear did not look heavy in her hands, but a continuation of her will. And yet they both had been totally separate at the same time.

## Chapter 89 89: 87. MID-TERM EXAM

The exam day finally came, and team 25 was still ignoring sagiri. He could not say that he had come to get used to it, but he had come into acceptance with it. Perhaps it was because everyone was still studying hard or practicing hard in teams that he had himself entered the tense mood of preparation after the midyear exam. They would do tests every other week to defend their spot on the chat, whether it was in textbook stuff or in combat.

Each cadet would have to defend their position every week, and the final exam would be the icing on the cake to defend the position they had managed to hold the whole year. Ties were allowed, but total failure was unacceptable.

The combat arena had been locked the previous day to allow for exam preparation, and the exam arena had been arranged so neatly that it instilled more fear. The compulsory subjects would take the first day, then the special units for a day, and then the combat test would start on the third day.

sagiri had been forced to start his exams three days earlier than the rest, according to the new exam schedule, to accommodate him giving the rest three more days to grind. It had

been a tough three days sitting for sixteen hours to do exams for the first year. Then the second day, second year exams, and the third day, third year exams. It was not his brain that was tired, but his hands ached, and his back was beginning to complain from sitting for long hours. It was harder putting everything he was asked down on paper.

Since he did not have anyone close to him, he did not need to hold back anymore, and he did his absolute best without holding back to appear normal. Perhaps it was time to use what he had to his advantage. he would be ranked across all years both in written exams and combat.

It was finally the fourth day after a gruesome three days, and he was more than ready. He took a seat at the far back of the exam arena. Today he had to sit for yet another sixteen hours, but on the plus side, he was not going to do it alone, but with every fourth-year cadet. The exams started at five and went all the way to twelve o'clock, where they could break for lunch and then come back to continue with the written exam till nine at night. Then, only they were allowed to eat and sleep. The first day went by slowly and yet quickly at the same time. The second day was just the same way, and the only thing that was failing was Sagiri's fingers. Who knew a pen would feel as heavy as a spear after using it for five days on end without stopping?

Galka War Academy taught perseverance in every way, and even the written exams were held to test them both mentally and physically. No one was allowed out of their seat, or stand, or even look at the person seated three feet from them until it was time to put the paper down. even writing when done so much it could feel tiresome.

The third was, however, welcomed with so much joy and smiles. sagiri must have been the only one who was not happy. The day kicked off with cadets being split into classes, and each class was afforded a different arena. They would start with weaponry, where each student was supposed to show prowess in each weapon.

Just his lack, they started with the bow and arrow. The targets were set halfway across the arena, and each student was supposed to shoot alone. Five arrows at least at the five targets across the room. It was as if someone had arranged the day just to ruin it for him. Kaka Asakana was first to go, and of course, he hit the five bullseyes in the dead centre and scored a total of ten points from all ten instructors who were now examiners, making a perfect hundred percent.

They held up the cards displaying points, and unlike the written exam, in which they had to wait three days to get the results, the weaponry exam awarded points on the spot. Kiuga was not far behind, and he scored a staggering 98 points. Everyone was either good or above average. When it was Sagiri's turn, it was as if everyone was waiting for him to do well after the display on the game of tag in his second week in the academy.

He could hear their physical disappointment when he not only missed the targets by a mile, but the arrows never made it halfway across the distance between him and the target. He scored a solid 0 points for himself, and he walked back to his position. After a short break of thirty minutes.

Next, it was the spear test. With the spear, they needed to perform the third dance. The spear had an average of five dances, each one harder than the last. The examiners using the third were like choosing an average dance, either hard or easy. Again kaka scored a staggering hundred percent, so perfect it hurt. When it was his turn, he had barely mastered the first dance, let alone the second. He did not even know where to start the third with the heavy spear. He settled for the first dance, which earned him only one point across all instructions, which was a mark for trying, but he missed out on the nine for failing to follow instructions and do the third. At least he now had a point, and he had moved from last place to solid last place.

At this point, he had become a laughing stock, and his classmates were having a field day watching him fail.

Next it was sword handling and dance. And as if the instructors hated him their requirement was the fourth dance, which they had begun to learn after they became fourth year cadets. It was supposed to be beautiful to watch, and Kaka scored another solid hundred percent. It was as if the instructors did not need to look at him to know he had aced the dances. If Sagiri had not seen how hard the boy trained, he could have said he was lucky, but above his talent, genetics, and strength, he was still the hardest working person he had ever met, and he could only stand in awe.

Sagiri had never picked a sword in his life, so he just forfeited, earning him another perfect 0 to his roster and holding onto his last position.

Next it was the dagger test. Straw men were brought in by junior instructors. Every student was supposed to hit all the vital organs in under ten seconds, and they were supposed to do it accurately while still maintaining proper stance and execution. This must have been yet the most difficult test, and Sagiri could almost hear Kiuga's excitement across the room. The boy was a master of hitting vital points, and Kaka was no better than him in that area. Sagiri wanted so much to see who was the best in small-blade-handling between the two.

Every student was given six daggers in total, one for the two spots behind the back where the kidneys should be, another for the heart, another in between the eyes, and another on the other side of the torso where the liver was situated, another for the spot between the eyes and the last to the small depression on the neck.

Kaka, being the top student in combat and weaponry, was, of course, the first one to take the centre position in front of the instructors and stood in front of his straw man with the vital points drawn into it. He showed neither fear nor hesitation. Just readiness.

When the command to start went off Kaka took a second to pause, took a deep breath before he moved. His hands moved to retrieve the blades, holding two in each hand and securing them tightly between his fingers. First, he slid with one foot forward towards the

dummy and released all four at the same time, his head almost touching the ground. Before the daggers could reach the first target, he had already moved.

He used one leg as momentum and the other as a pivot. He rolled on the ground as if avoiding an attack, which put him at the back of the straw man. Here, he released the two remaining daggers with so much precision. The former blades and the latter almost landed at the same time. Even with the small width of a small moment between them before he executed the second attack.

He was already back on his feet in a second. The boy had the potential to be the next Salka if he kept getting better. Sagiri was convinced that if he sparred with Salka, Salka might have to use one of his hands to defend and not just both of them behind his back as he did to Salka.

Even with the perfect execution sagiri received a perfect ninety-nine. His lip twitched from seeing the nine from the master of blades, Bekuro Dalimba. From the reaction of other students, however, it seemed like it was hard to even get a six from the man, let alone a nine. sagiri had trained with him, and he knew better than anyone that the man might have been made of small blades because of how fast and smoothly he moved with the blade.

Kiuga was next, and he was all smiles as if he had been waiting for this moment his whole life. When the start command came, sagiri barely saw his leg move, applying as much force to the ground, he left a skid mark. He spun around with one eye closed and released the first two daggers. Another turn, and he released the following two, but not before opening the closed eye this time and closing the one that was previously open. He didn't stop even when the four blades landed on the front vital points.

Instead of using the momentum from the two turns that were so quick, sagiri marveled that he jumped back on his arms. barely landing before he threw himself back this time, twisting mid-air. His fit landed on the head of the straw man. just barely a whisper of a

touch. It was enough, however, and he used the moment to jump even higher mid-air, the wide grin never leaving his face once. He floated in the air, his hands open wide with the two remaining blades on end.

His head was facing downward and back facing the two targets this time, both his eyes open. Only when his body arched so much that his head touched his fist did he release the two blades so easily and with precision. With how much everyone was looking at him. It seemed he was the best in that art. He did not miss to yell.

"Back stabber!" as he twisted his body to acquire the perfect landing.

He landed gracefully on a crouch before saluting, turning around. It was a perfect ten from everyone, even Bekuro. A perfect hundred percent. sagiri could not find fault with Kaka's execution, and he could only think that the man loved to see style and not just brutal force. Either way, anyone standing against the two in battle was in trouble. kiuga was agile and swift, and Kaka was fast and brutal.

Next, it was the class president for class E, Asari. And he was not bad himself. He actually had a perfect ninety-nine percent with Kaka, and the others ranged from eighties to nineties. kiuga kaka and asari, however, maintained the lead, but with what sagiri could see. It seemed that the small blades had great competition. He now understood why Kaka never held back, even though he was the best. The competition was tough. Everyone was either good or excellent, and only a few were still above average. He was the only one way below average.

If he failed all in all the weapons, his fate must have been unclear since Senraki told him he needed to defend his results to the council of the ten schools. He did not know what could happen if he failed in every weapon, but he knew it would not be good. At least for the bow and arrow and sword, he had never had any training in them, but he had completely failed in the spear, and his only hope was passing the dagger test.

His feet felt a bit weak, and his hands clammy. Since his birthday, he had also been able to understand his own emotions to some level, unlike before, as if before the archive and the power inside him had made him not grow those now. However, if he could say he actually felt what he had felt ooze out of other people.

Nervousness.

## Chapter 90 90: 88. BREAK THROUGH

His feet felt a bit weak, and his hands clammy. Since his birthday, he had also been able to understand his own emotions to some degree, unlike before, as if the archive and the power inside him had kept him from growing those now. However, if he could say he actually felt what he had felt ooze out of other people.

Nervousness.

The human seemed foreign now and more intimidating, as if he hadn't trained with it a thousand times. under the watchful eye of the examiners and his classmates, whom she had failed three times in front of, his hands felt cramped.

The small blades in his hands felt heavy and foreign. He had seen different boys use different combinations. two at a time. Four and two like kaka. One at a time in consecutive small durations. It seemed that they had been tested a couple of times and used the combination a few hundred times. him, on the other hand, this was his first time,

and he felt like he was standing in front of a multitude of a thousand people instead of just less than a hundred.

The walk to the centre place felt even longer, and the eye contact with the straw man felt even deeper. sagiri stood with his legs slightly apart and one blade in each hand. He was not going to do it the kaka or kiuga way, with his hands going clammy.

"Hey, Sagiri the blind. Don't fail me again." It was Kiuga. It was the first time he had spoken to him directly or indirectly in the last few days, and his words made him feel some kind of way, as some little weight had been lifted off his shoulders. It was as if he was not performing in front of a multitude anymore, but in front of one person. The ice that had settled in his heart since his friends gave him a cold shoulder felt like it had been touched by a sunny day.

sagiri was not even wearing his hearing aids anymore to put on a facade, and he did not care.

"Start!" Bekuro was the one who announced. Time froze at that moment, and sagiri froze too. He tried to calm down, but he couldn't. One second went by, then another, then another. Three seconds out of ten gone, and he hadn't moved. kiuga had asked him to calm down. Senraki had told him what was at stake. Yet, he was still frozen.

Another second trickled by.

"If you don't move, you are out of team ten." Kaka snickered, and it was as if that grounded him instantly. He had spent all these days not understanding why his teammates were not talking to him. The him before he turned sixteen could not have felt much, but after he started to become aware of his rapid body growth, he was experiencing

what could be described as pain for the first time. pain of losing something you thought you had. pain of being ignored by those you held dear and the distress of not understanding the reason.

At Kaka's words, he finally breathed and shut everyone and everything out. even his feelings. They must have been the ones holding him back. He knew how not to feel more than anyone, and he had done it for the past sixteen years, so he stopped feeling. It was just him and the straw man now. He let the archive record the outline, and as the fifth second trickled by, he shut his eyes and moved.

He had trained more than a few hundred times on his own. he would just imagine he was alone in the combat pit in the central Pentagon with no one in sight. He crossed his hands on his chest when he covered half the distance. Four seconds remained to go. He however, did not feel pressured. There was no time limit during his training, and he just needed to hit the vital organs. He had learned about them in the library and memorized them like the back of his hand. There was no way he was going to miss.

He pulled his hands further back before opening them with force. His first two dagger blows were aimed at the heart and the liver. another second tickled but.

Three more seconds to go.

He pulled two more from his pocket and crossed his hands. This time, he needed more momentum.

"He is running with his eyes closed?" A voice said.

"He hit. He actually hit the target with his eyes closed," another added.

"He is in team 25, of course, he can hit with his eyes closed," kiuga's voice said, and Kaka snickered.

He released the third dagger straight to the depression at the base of the neck. That put him in close range enough that he would not shoot again. He had to think fast. He stepped on the first he had driven to the strawman's heart and used the momentum to twist his body and sit on the strawman's head, facing forward on his knees. The third second tickled by. He twisted the blade between his fingers and drove it into the skull of the straw man.

Two more blades and two more vital points to go.

Another second went by.

with one second left. He did not have time to change his position to go for the vital points at the back. He had to think fast or not think at all. With that one second ticking by, he threw his body weight back and spun the blades just like Bekuro had shown him. You let the daggers drop, but capture them at the last second and drive them into a vital organ when you are cornered.

He let his blades slip in his hands as if he wanted to let them fall, but he caught them just in time and drove them into the two vital points in the back.

The last second tickled by as soon as he drove the daggers into the vital points. Then time stopped. He remained in the same position and did not open his eyes for a long moment after it was all done.

I did it.

I did it

a feeling he had never felt before hit him. He let himself fall backwards, catching himself with his hands and landed softly on his feet. He barely saw the instructors holding up the tags, and this time it was not a zero. It was four eights and five sevens and one six from Bekuro. a seventy-three. He was in the above-average category. thought the guy who had scored the lowest was seventy-eight and a staggering five points ahead of him. he had never felt so much peace in his heart. He had hesitated, yes, but he had done it.

"Recruit, Sagiri, 73 points!!" Bekuro announced, and sagiri looked at the ceiling of the arena. It felt even better than when he was able to hunt and catch a squirrel after a long moment of stalking it and hunting it.

"I did not know he was that good at handling blades," a voice said.

"Maybe he is not completely useless. Let's wait and see where he ranks in the written exam."

sagiri did not care to hear all the gossip, so he turned around and walked away. He was proud that he had been able to show results in something he had trained so hard in day and night. Perhaps killing 'star-shaped' one with a blade provided the breakthrough he needed.

He walked out of the arena, and his feet took him to a quiet place. He walked and found himself in the shadow colonnade arena. It was quiet as always, but after being ambushed way too many times, he could not take chances anymore. He pushed all his senses to listen to any movement and feel for any presence. Only when he proved that there was no one there did he move.

He walked deeper and deeper into the shadows and chose a spot which was raised not too high, but with a pillar he could rest his back on. He had not had a rest in the past five days, and the final day had drained him. Six days of no proper rest. He sank to the ground with a groan and rested his back on the broken pillar. He pulled his legs crisscrossed below him and rested his back even deeper into the pillar. He could feel his muscles relax physically and even his bones that had not stopped growing expand slightly under his skin.

He pushed himself into conscious slumber, and it had become easy for him now. It was so silent and peaceful, and it stayed that way for a long time. He could have stayed there for hours.

His peace, however, did not last long because something moved. not something. someone and there were many of them. His eyes snapped open in a rush. He had grown to become weary of any presence. This group, however, does not have threatening air hanging around them. This group had a smell not specifically threatening, but it was full of mischief.

Mischief?