

Protégé of the Gods

By Xenny Diemes

To most warriors out in training, it could not have come on a day like this. A blistering 120 degrees on the planet Kehut, one of the many worlds under the rule of the Anubian Empire. Many would have wait it out until it gets cooler but for one particular warrior, Taeru, she didn't want to wait. Out in the sands with her blade in hand, she surveys the obstacle: 300 black obelisks in three different zones. Each demanding a different method of attack: Blade, free-mode and both. Her instructor's objective is clear: take down the most obelisks in under three minutes to qualify. This was the test that separates the losers from those who will move on to become the Imperial elite, the kind that determines if five years running through the gauntlet, building up strength and stamina is all worth it. Taeru had watched the day before of a previous squad going through this test. Some use smaller blades, others use guns, then there are those who use their bodies all the way through. Out of that squad of 100, 2 have passed. That's how discriminating such a test is. The black-backed jackal had trained for those five years back when she was a small runt, now standing before those objects as a strong, well-defined amazon of power armed with her long staff blade, a weapon of choice since the beginning of joining the armed corps.

Getting herself into position, she awaits the signal to start her run, feeling the tension mounting, the instructor yells and Taeru runs and the clock counts down. She enters into the first zone with her blade quickly slicing down each obelisk. Feeling some that are more denser than others which makes it difficult to cut, she has no time in worrying which is the thicker ones and pushes harder to cut deeper. With the last one down she enters the second zone which demands that she uses anything other than her blade to destroy these objects. Her bare hands became the option and to the amazement of the other recruits, Taeru smashes her hands into the obelisk and lifts with her new strength breaking it off its base and uses it to break fifty of the others before throwing it into the next. All this to get her pumped and charged to smash the rest and the last with her head like a ram on steroids. Now in the final Zone, the test demands a level of finesse of both, likened to a seasoned dancer. Taeru does in in spades as she uses her staff as a balance and stand for most of her attacks and others which a slice a smash is called for. Striking the weakest points and leaving nothing to chance. The jackal has heard the last five seconds of the countdown and

in her sights is the last obelisk, running at full speed, she slices down the pike with blazing speed and stops before the siren blares.

The troop cheers at her progress as she made it, all three-hundred stones destroyed and done on the dot. But the instructor angrily silences them and bluntly declares that she has failed. Though she is not allowed to talk back to her superior, she at least deserves to know why when she finished the trial right on the dot. Her instructor tells her that even the smallest seconds count and under new standards, she was .1 millisecond over. Complete bull and is ordered to leave and await further instructions. But she knew that was it, Those two before her will become the elites that protect the king and queen of the greatest empire the universe has ever known and she lost it by a single millisecond. A day later, she has her bags ready and is about to leave, to her leaving was the better option, others who went through this test weren't so lucky, having to face the shame of going too far and not making it. As she is about to walk out that door, a voice calls out to her.

"Before that stupid millisecond rule, I could cut down more in those three minutes."

"Who the hell wants to... General?!" Says a surprised Taeru and kneels down before her. "I'm so sorry, I did not know that you be here."

"It is of no worry child, I would expect nothing less from you, especially after that performance. Rise Taeru, we have much to talk about."

"Yes General Nefertina." Says Taeru

As the two walk down the grounds on their way to the exit, the two talk but get interrupted by the instructor still looking peeved after his assumption of his student's disrespect.

"Excuse me?!" says the instructor. "I did not give you permission to leave the grounds, take one step out and I'll punish you to the fullest extent of the law!" but before she can utter a word, General Nefertina looms over him with her massively strong physique and looks down, cracking her knuckles.

"Really, instructor? I expected a better threat from the likes of you like you did to the students. She's coming with me under my authority and if you wish to challenge it, you can take it two ways: Me in combat or take your complaint with King Anubis himself. Please,

I beg you to take option one, it's been years since I roughed someone up." Says Nefertina, flexing her arms under her uniform as a show of intimidation.

"Uh... no sir.. I mean ma'am. Taeru. I'll work on the authorization of your leave."

"General, what are you doing?"

"I'll explain when we leave. Just trust me."

Moments after that little scuffle, Nefertina explains herself to Taeru, on the matter at hand. Still she can't help feel down that her failure to get into the elites will run with her for a while.

"Taeru, it may feel bad now but you'll thank me of what I'm about to say. Besides, you're better off not being an elite with those overconfident bastards."

"With all due respect, how can you say that? The elites are legendary in their own right, protecting the royalty from all threats within the empire and..."

"Are nothing more than glorified bodyguards with a higher pay grade and better skills. I should know, I was one." That line quickly silenced Taeru

"Do you know of an agency called Interrealm?"

"In the history classes, they used to be a powerful interdimensional protection force before they collapse in some kind of battle."

"That's true, but if it wasn't for them I wouldn't become the woman I am now getting you of that mess. Fifty years ago, I used to be an elite. Protecting the royalty sometimes but sometimes the advisors and council as well. That was until I learned of a plot concocted by one of the king's closest advisors using a technology never before seen by us or any of our enemies in this world. Every turn I was barred from blowing the whistle on this plot, forcing me to take matters into my own hands. I knew that it would lead to my punishment or worse for defying my superiors even if they were part of the plot."

"What did you do?"

"One day when King Anubis and his wife were out on their local 'vacations'" Says Nefertina with quote marks "I found the assassin and had to get in the path of what is a powerful blaster. Blocked it with my shield and stopped it. I chased the criminal down but to no avail. I may have saved the royalty but at a cost, or so they thought. I disobeyed commands to stay away, being a lower-level elite, something your instructor doesn't tell

you when you become one by the way, in the affairs of the higher ups. Breaking from rank was punishable by death, but King Anubis came up to me with an offer."

"What is it?"

"That he and his wife were in secret meetings with the governors of the G'yptian Empire, our closest allies into having their best join interrealm for security and trade entry. Though we are not a member nation, we can reap the benefits through them. Next thing I knew, I joined them."

"Interrealm?"

"Yes."

"What about the conspirators who were trying to kill the royalty?"

"Turns out that the conspiracy runs really deep, it wasn't just the advisors that were in it but the very elites that swore to protect him." The thought had surprised Taeru.

"It can't be. Elites betray them, but why? They swore with their very lives to protect them. why after all that would turn against them."

"It was the royalty's fault to begin with and me joining interrealm was in a way atonement for the Empire's failure to see that we are facing a brave and frightening new world. These aren't the good old days, Taeru. We don't have common enemies that we can easily crush, they're changing, evolving and more than ready to take everything we fought for could come crashing down the moment those G'yptians joined and now we have to take the consequences." Nefertina looks at Taeru, looking down as he holds her blade tight.

"Taeru, child. I did not say these things to discourage you, I only say it because I was one of the few brave enough to see out instead of what's in front of me and it was scary, overtime however changed that. I got better, learned from the best and did more for the empire outside then I did in. The point of all this, is I want you to be part of it."

"Why not the others who have passed, those two other cadets before me? They are better, obey orders and all that stuff" Says Taeru.

"That's the problem the plot against the royalty created in the first place. There is a point where you can be a good little pup, keep quiet and follow orders without question. If done to the letter, we would end up without a royalty. Anyway, I and by "I", my agents have been watching you those five years. You were a bit of a troublemaker but do your best not to get kicked out. So close to being washed out but too good to lose."

"You were watching me this whole time?"

"Well they are for me, while I do pop in from time to time to see how well you progress. I even up the ante by bribing some of the instructors to push you even harder."

"You mean because of you I had to pull an extra eight hundred pounds of rocks across the desert?!"

"A simple you're welcome would be nice. Your muscles show better appreciation than you."

"I'm sorry General. I don't mean to sound ungrateful but after everything you just told me, how can I not be upset over this?" Says Taeru as she sweeps her hands over her face.

"Because I got something better. More than enough to justify pushing you further."

Taeru can only stare at Nefertina and listens further.

"You know that the attempt on the royalty was just the beginning. For the past decade since the agency fell, our resources are beginning to be stretched due to the growing concerns of weapons, beings and who knows what wants our empire. That's why I with the help of the security council are developing a new force to deal with these multiversal threats. And I want you to become part of it."

"General..."

"The elite can only give you a palace to guard, I'm offering you the stars. An offer to become something more than a glorified bodyguard."

"Become a what?"

"An officer of the Anubian Realm Corps. They're a new organization under the security council designed with the handling of multiversal threats. In the five years observing you, I see you got what it takes that sets you apart from the rest of the cadets. We need disciplined yet unconventional, loyal but willing to become the enemy, able to follow orders yet willing to break the rules to do what's right."

"I really don't know what to say."

"You can say that if you are up for it to become my, how you say, protege, then who knows what it will take you. That or..." Says the general looking back at the gates of the grounds implying that she could go be the other thing.

"If you really believe in me to do this, I'll do it."

"I'm glad, for now, I'll escort you to your transport. The next vessel back to the capitol world will be at dawn and I'll meet you there to begin your real training."

"Thank you general." Says Taeru and respectfully salutes her superior officer.

"Remember, dawn, and I'll see you there. And Taeru, one last thing."

"What is it?"

"How's your mother?"

"She's doing well, though she's going to wonder why I'm back so early"

"Don't worry, she'll understand but if she asks, tell her you're being transferred."

"Yes Ma'am" and is taken off by the transport. Watching her go off into the rising darkness of night Nefertina sees potential in her, the kind that shouldn't be wasted in the position her mother has in mind...

"Sorry, sister. I know you are doing what's best for your daughter, but It's a big, scary universe out there. I'll be damned if my niece spend the rest of her life here doing nothing worthwhile. At least it's too late for that now."

Looking back at the base, Nefertina looks back at the base and calls for the one-on-one wrestling matches begin. It has been a while since her last hand-to-hand fight and decides to go back and teach these "kids" how a real fighter moves.

End.