Subtle and insubstantial, the expert leaves no trace; divinely mysterious, he is inaudible. Thus he is master of his enemy's fate.
**-Sun Tzu**

Chapter Two: Analysis

“Shikamaru! Get out of bed right this instant! You’re getting your team assignment today and you have to leave a good impression on your jonin sensei!” Shikamaru gave a muffled groan from his pillow. If only his parents could have been satisfied that he at least graduated the academy, but no they couldn’t. He had to go all the way and have a genin team. The boy woefully dragged himself out of the warm sheets and towards the closet.

He slipped on his dull gray clothes before slopping himself down the stairs. He twiddled a rubber band between his middle and pointer fingers. The stretch of the material stung the sides of his fingers, but it helped him focus. His spiky black hair hung down limply. It irritated him, but he didn’t quite have the energy to do anything about it now. The clink of glass met his ears as a bowl was set down before him. Shikamaru opened his eyes and stared at the miso soup for a moment before downing the liquid.

He set down the bowl lightly before looked back up at his mother. The forceful woman was heckling his poor father. Shikamaru wondered how they ever got married since they seemed to argue so much. He sighed softly. He stretched the rubber band between his fingers one more time before pulling his hair back and letting the string snap around his hair.

Hopefully he wouldn’t be stuck with an intolerable group of genin. A part of him was despairing. The Ino-Shika-Cho group would probably be brought together again. Shikamaru loathed the thought. Choji wasn’t too bad to sit with as long as he didn’t babble incessantly, but Ino was a nightmare. Where Choji could show restraint, Ino didn’t even prove she had the word in her dictionary. A bit of conversation he could understand, but to talk for hours about absolutely nothing was another matter. It was a skill he didn’t want to learn.

“I’m leaving now.” Shikamaru stood up from the table and exited the room. He padded softly down the hall and slipped on his shoes. The door opened and Shikmaru headed out of the house. He looked sidelong at the deer grazing peacefully along the path. A young buck looked up at the passing boy for a moment before lowering his head once more to graze in the grass. The black haired boy was rather jealous of the deer. It would be nice to rest all day with the only thing to bother you would be whether or not you needed more food.

He huffed gloomily and made his way out of the compound. The gravel crunched beneath his feet as he padded through the dirt roads. The Nara compound was near the edges of Konoha for simplicities sake, but it made commuting a pain when necessary. Flowers sprung up along the roadside giving life to the dull road. Few houses lined the roads this far away from the center. Minutes passed and slowly more houses appeared until the shadows spread their wings over him.

Shikamaru looked up into the blue sky with the slightest of smiles on his face. The sky was so beautiful and so free. No one expected anything of it and it moved around with ease. He turned his face away and back towards the busy streets. He dipped in and out of the crowd as he made his way down to the academy. He stopped short outside the gates to take a good look.

It would be his last real class inside of the academy. He felt the gravity of the day weigh upon him. It would be his last official day of childhood. After this he would be considered a man. To be perfectly honest, Shikamaru didn’t want to grow up. Being a shinobi meant that you had to learn how to kill. You had to lose that part of humanity within you that wept for children that had their families slain.

There were no casualties in battle that did not have a backstory. There was not one person that didn’t have another that would miss them when they were gone. It could be a storekeeper that noticed a regular disappeared or it could be a loved one. Shikamaru didn’t want to cause that feeling of sadness. He scoffed at himself. Here he was, the son of a shinobi family and he couldn’t even stand the thought of death. It was pathetic.

Strands of hair fell in front of his face as he stared coldly at the ground, his eyes unusually sharp. It would have to be done anyways. He shut his eyes and silently let a tear fall from his eye. He flung the tear away with a flick of his hand and was done with it. One tear could be allowed, but no more. He looked back up at the red and white building before stepping into the courtyard.

He shoved the wooden doors open roughly before storming into the classroom. He felt a few sets of eyes upon him. They wondered what put him in such an awful mood, and rightfully so. Shikamaru rarely ever showed such reckless behavior and he silently noted to make this one of the last times. He was a ‘man’ now. He couldn’t act careless or it would cost him his life.

The other students slowly trickled into the room until the click tolled 9 am. Iruka stood at the forefront of the class with stress lines creasing his face. The betrayal of Mizuki had hit the man hard. He had never expected the man to be a traitor. The thought of being played for nearly two years was frightening to the chuunin. Iruka had spent the night conflicted. Before his capture, Mizuki had apparently decided to give Naruto a headband.

The whole thing made Iruka suspicious. He knew there had to be more to the headband than what he was told, but neither Naruto nor Mizuki had admitted anything. He toyed with the idea of taking back the headband, but in the end decided against it. Naruto had already gone through so much that he deserved to become a ninja for all of his hard work. The admission did little to lift the guilt though.

“Today is a big day for all of you. Today you are no longer children or students, you are shinobi. You are the shield of the village. Without shinobi, Konohagakure would crumble under the forces of enemy nations. You are a generation of protectors. We fight to protect our friends, our family, our village. After today you will all embark on the life of a shinobi. I know you all can accomplish great things, but remember that being a shinobi isn’t about your own pride. It is about a pride for your village.” The prewritten speech sounded droll in his ears, but it was satisfying seeing dozens of eyes light up in excitement.

“I will now announce the teams and their jonin senseis.” Iruka reached down to his table and picked up the sheet of teams. He coughed for emphasis and then began, “Team Four: Yamasaki Mai, Hitarou Kenta, Ashizu Ren.” He continued listing the teams for awhile before finally reaching team 7. “Team Seven: Uchiha Sasuke, Haruno Sakura, Inuzuka Kiba. Your jonin sensei is Hataka Kakashi.” The announcement of their jonin sensei was muffled by the squeal of happiness that escaped from Sakura.

The pinkette jumped up in the air and did a fist pump before sitting back down. Even then the girl was gushing in her chair and sending obvious glances towards her crush. Iruka sighed at the gestures but continued, “Team Eight: Hyuuga Hinata, Aburame Shino, and Kimura Teru. Your jonin sensei will be Kurenai Yuhi.” Hinata blushed slightly at the mere mention of her name and looked anxiously over at her new teammates. Shino didn’t seem so bad and neither did that Teru boy, albeit she didn’t know the blonde boy too well.

“Team Ten: Yamanaka Ino, Akimichi Choji, and Hanagaki Ryuu. Your jonin sensei will be Sarutobi Asuma.” Ino moaned gloomily. She had gotten stuck with the fat boy and the pessimist! The only thing Choji could be useful for was eating a way out of a cave if they ever got stuck. Ryuu could have potential as a warrior because he could easily talk a person into suicide just by standing near him! Ino slammed her head down into her desk and covered her head with her hands. This was just not her day!

“Team Tsume: Uzumaki Naruto, Nara Shikamaru, and Shimizu Kei. Your jonin sensei will be Yamanaka Inoichi.” Shikamaru quirked a brow. Why was it that they had been assigned a titled team and not a numbered one? He was pleasantly surprised with his future teammates though. There were definitely worse fates than this. He shared a glance with Kei who gave him a nod in return. Perhaps this could be tolerable.

“Your jonin senseis will come in individually to collect you all. Once again, congratulations on graduating and I hope to see you around the village sometime!” Iruka gave one last wave before leaving the room. The students all turned to chatter with one another, but before they had the chance a woman slammed open the door. “Am I late?” The black haired woman was wheezing in the doorway with a fist clenched upon the wall. She belatedly noticed how full the room was and straightened herself out.

“I’m Kurenai Yuhi. Team Eight comes with me! Be at Training Ground Eight in fifteen minutes for our first session.” The shaggy haired woman smiled warmly at the children before dissolving into a cloud of butterflies. Hinata and Teru shared a glance for a moment before getting up. They stepped down into the front of the hall before rushing out the door with Shino in slow pursuit. That meaning the boy was walking and was showing very little excitement at all.

Some of the students were gaping at the spot where Kurenai had once stood. “Did you see that? She just disappeared! That’s so cool! I hope my sensei teaches me that!” Ashizu chattered loudly to his squadmates. The novelty of the whole thing began to slowly die down as various teachers called their students out to their various training grounds. Soon only Team Seven and Team Tsume were left in the room and they were all getting impatient.

Naruto rolled his pencil from side to side on his desk impatiently. Where was he anyways? The sound of the sliding door brought him to attention as the blonde man stepped into the room. “Sorry about that. Team Tsume, come with me to Training Ground Fifteen.” Naruto bounced up from his chair eagerly and skidded down the stairs to his sensei. He gave a slight bow to the man before smiling up happily.

“Took ya long enough, Yamanaka-sensei! Whoa! I guess you really are my sensei now... That’s so cool!” Naruto bounced up and down. He turned to Shikamaru and Kei who had finally made their way down the stairs. He reached out to them, grabbed their hands, and bolted out the door. The faster they got to that training ground, the better. He just couldn’t wait to get the lesson started!

He had spent most of his life wishing that he could learn how to fight. The villagers had never liked him too much and he didn’t really like them back, but he didn’t hate them either. What he did want was to help the other kids that were like him. Being an orphan wasn’t an easy life even if the villagers didn’t loathe you.

Your best friend could become your enemy faster than the blink of an eye. There was no such thing as trust on the streets. They might pretend to save your life, but it was all a stage to get your trust. Those that believed in the good nature of others had a tendency to die off mysteriously unless they were strong. Naruto wanted to change that. He’d protect his friends, always.

He looked back at the two he was dragging along behind him. The girl had a distinct scowl on her face as she clung tightly onto her notebook. The boy was rolling his eyes and flopping limply as he was hauled down the streets. These people, no matter how strange, were his friends. Iruka said that ninja fought to protect their friends so that was what he’d do. He’d protect them with his life.

He smiled again and turned back to running along the streets. He dived in and out of the pockets of space left open by the milling people. Excitement coursed in his veins as he slipped in and out of the moving crowd. It was an obstacle course of sorts, like the secretary hall they had visited only a day ago. Naruto loved it.

In a few minutes the trio finally collapsed onto Training Ground Fifteen. Kei stumbled over to a tree and promptly drooped down to the ground. She wheezed weakly as she laid back onto the trunk. Stamina was not her strong suite. That was putting it lightly. Running up the stairs was enough to tucker her out on most days. Physical examination was the only class that she was borderline flunking at the academy and it showed.

A thump was heard as Shikamaru took the other side of the tree and leaned back against it. The boy wasn’t nearly as tired, but he figured it would be prudent to relax as much as possible before Inoichi arrived. “Eh? Why are you guys so tired?” Naruto tilted his head to the side in confusion. The jinchuriki hadn’t even broken a sweat from their escapade. In fact the boy was practically glowing with energy. It almost hurt to look at him.

“Not all of us are conditioned.” Kei snapped at Naruto. It was at times like this where she envied the boy.

“Ah! We gotta get you fit then, Kei-chan!” Naruto chirped back innocently. Well, he did notice that Kei was mad, but he just chose not to acknowledge it.

“You three got here rather fast.” Naruto whirled around sharply to stare at the voice. Inoichi stood there calmly standing with his arms crossed. The man smiled at the younger boys antics and headed over for the sake of his trainees. “I suppose we should all introduce ourselves to one another. I’m Yamanaka Inoichi. You already know I’m a jonin of Konoha and Ino’s father. I am also the former head of the Torture and Interrogation department.”

Three sets of eyes locked onto him with unadulterated shock. The genin could hardly believe what they were hearing. Yamanaka Inoichi, the man who apologized for accidentally bruising someone during taijutsu training, was the head of Torture and Interrogation? That could not be right. After a few moments passed they realized that it wasn’t a joke.

“Your turn, Kei-chan. If I may call you that now. It would be nice if we could all get on a first name basis. You can all call me Inoichi-sensei by the way.” The man smiled pleasantly as if he hadn’t just told them shocking news.

Kei coughed for a moment before murmuring, “Shimizu Kei. I’m from a civilian family that is in the merchant business. I spend my spare time mingling among crowds to try and hear anything interesting.” It came out clipped and short. She didn’t really know what to say after all and she was most certainly not going to relate her life story to people she hardly knew.

“Nara Shikamaru. I enjoy cloud watching and playing shogi with my father.” Shikamaru nodded sagely before turning to Naruto who was practically beaming.

“Uzumaki Naruto! I plan on becoming the strongest shinobi in all of Konoha so I can protect my friends! All of you guys included in that one by the way. I love all the different types of ramen! Ramen is the absolute best you know.” His head bobbed up and down in confirmation. Ramen was awesome.

“So I assume there’s a purpose for the T&I head to be teaching a genin team instead of working in his department?” Shikamaru coughed out. He rubbed his forehead once before looking at the jonin.

“Correct, Shikamaru-kun. But back to business, I assume you wish to know the purpose of leading your team?” The genin nodded in response, “Well I’m not going to tell you.” The jaws dropped. He wasn’t going to tell them?

“To put it differently, I’m not going to flat out tell you. Try and see if you can figure out why I’m leading your team.” Inoichi smirked at the dumbstruck faces on his students. “But onto business. You all actually are not genin quite yet.” He held up a hand to silence the rambunctious blonde and continued, “You all have to participate in an examination to see if you qualify to become a genin team. Two thirds of your academy classmates will fail this exam and will be sent back for remedials. Let’s see if you’ll join them.”

“By the end of this session you should know if you’re passing or not. In my little speech there I had a logical flaw. To pass this test, you have to find it. There’s no way to bluff your way through so hop to it. If you can tell me why I’m teaching you all, it’ll be an added bonus.” Inoichi turned towards a nearby tree and laid back against it and closed his eyes. It wouldn’t hurt to get a bit of shut eye while his genin were puzzling it out, now would it?

Naruto sat in a daze. “Er... What are we supposed to do now?” He turned to look at his companions. Kei was frantically scribbling down everything Inoichi had said. She looked down at her cyphered text with a sigh. There was a logical flaw somewhere in this?

“To begin we aren’t sure when he dropped the hint.” Shikamaru mumbled from the other side of the tree. “He could have said it during his introductory or within the past three minutes. In a summary of what he said: he’s a jonin, Ino’s father, former head of T&I, we’re not genin, two thirds fail, remedial examinations, and there’s a logical flaw.”

“There can’t possibly be anything messed up with him being a jonin and Ino’s father so those two possibilities can be crossed out. So we know it has to relate to his former position or the fact we could fail. Within the words that he said there has to be a contradiction of some sorts.” Shikamaru rubbed his palm against the dirt and gave a satisfied nod. He grabbed a stick beside him and scribbled out: T&I, not genin, two thirds, and remedials.

Somewhere at least two of these points had to contradict. What if the contradiction was a combination of two items against a third? Shikamaru’s mind was whirring around while staring at his diagram. He mumbled incoherently as he drew various lines into the dirt. Naruto and Kei went around to look over his shoulder curiously. They shared glances and Naruto gave a shrug.

The trio knew each other well enough to know that logic was Shikamaru’s strong suite and not theirs. Naruto was the one who actually went out into the field and did things. Kei normally lurked about and gathered the relevant information. It was just how they rolled. However, this was an examination for all of them. If one person failed the other people would take up the gauntlet and help the person.

“Eh, Shikamaru-san. Didn’t you forget that we should know if we pass by the end of the session?” Naruto asked curiously. Shikamaru’s head shot around and stared blankly at Naruto.

“Did he really say that?”

“Huh? Yeah, he did.” Naruto replied blankly. What was the big fuss about knowing if they would pass?

“That’s our flaw.” Shikamaru sighed at the empty looks his companions gave him. He rubbed away the notes he had scratched onto the dirt and began a new diagram. “From our graduating class only 2/3 can make it to genin teams, correct? However, if we know if we graduate or not by the end of this session then our sensei will not have had time to communicate with the other jonin. The average graduation rate can be 66%, but he spoke in absolutes. It just can’t work like that.”

He pointed down at the words with his stick. “So the graduating rate can actually be higher or lower than 66% depending on how many jonin accept their students. Otherwise they’d have to reject some students that had potential just to keep the numbers straight or accept some that aren’t as good. If there was a dry year in the academy they would also struggle because they wouldn’t have enough students to obtain the correct percentage.”

Shikamaru nodded in satisfaction as his explanation. “You two can tell him. It’s too troublesome.” He slumped back against the tree and closed his eyes. He had done enough work for the day.

Kei smirked a bit at the pony tailed boy. She got up from the ground and stretched out her sore limbs before motioning at Naruto to follow her. She strode calmly over to Inoichi. Inoichi cracked open an eye at the sound of her arrival. He looked up at the sky for a moment then back at the girl. “Ah, that was quick. It couldn’t have been longer than an hour could it?”

He listened to their explanation and let a smile creep onto his face. “Good job.” He ruffled the duo’s hair messily and got up from the ground. “I suppose that concludes your induction, hm?”

“Not quite.” Inoichi looked over Naruto’s shoulder at the black haired boy. Shikamaru had his hands tucked into his pants and had a distinct scowl on his face. “The reason why you were assigned as our jonin sensei, was it to create a younger generation of reconnaissance spies?”

Inoichi tilted his head to the side innocently and gave a look that asked for the genius to explain. Shikamaru grumbled out how troublesome it was before elaborating. “I can’t imagine the Hokage assigning you a genin team so you could tutor them in torture techniques. However, the Hokage is also smart enough to play to the strengths of all of his jonin. As department head I assume he knows you well enough to know your skills.”

“Interrogation is the only other possibility, but I also doubt that you’d immediately delve into that art. Some elements of the tactic can be less than pleasant for children of our age. Therefore I can only believe that you are here to teach us stealth. Ino-san has complained often of your absence on long distance missions.” A glimmer of amusement flickered in Shikamaru’s eye. The hyperactive girl was useful for something after all.

“Because of our drastically different purpose I assume that is why we were assigned the name Team Tsume? After all, Tsume is the move in shogi where you checkmate the opponent’s king. On that day when you visited the academy you told us about the importance of reconnaissance. Knowledge is power and power is what you need to defeat the king.”

Inoichi was silent for a moment. He broke the silence with a loud laugh. “You have me there, Shikamaru-kun. Though I admit I wasn’t expecting you to read so far into it. All of you have passed.”

Naruto whooped for joy as he danced around in the air. He was officially a genin! This would be his first step to becoming a ninja that could protect everyone he held dear. It was a momentous occasion and all momentous occasions deserved celebrations, right? “Hey, hey! We should all go to Ichiraku’s to celebrate! I’ll book the table ok! Sensei pays!”

Without waiting for their replies, Naruto took off like a shot to his second home. The three left behind all shared looks. “Do we really have to go?” Kei mumbled quietly. She ran a hand through her hair before drudgingly following the dust trail left by her teammate. Shikamaru shrugged before trailing after his friend with Inoichi in slow pursuit.

-TSUME-

A girl huddled by the candle light. She held up a small tattered notebook and read by the flickering light. “Kinjutsu...” What was she supposed to do with this knowledge? She could endeavor to learn some of the techniques she copied down, but they were forbidden for a reason. It could become painfully obvious in battle that she had learned the jutsu somewhere and it would a nuisance explaining how. She didn’t even want to think about what would happen after they found out.

However, it would be a waste to not do anything with the jutsu. She frowned slightly as she read through the lists of jutsu instructions. They were all forbidden for various reasons: it could cause self-harm, overuse of chakra, and brain overstimulation. Her finger traced down the page until she stopped on a title, **Jikan no Kaze**. She hummed in thought before putting a small squiggle beside the title.

She looked through the pages at the other various tic marks she had left beside the other kinjutsu. Some were slightly varied to represent her teammates though only the trained eye could tell that. One stood for Shikamaru and the other for Naruto. As new people entered her life she found that some were prominent enough to have their own symbols instead of being spelled out. Kei smiled slightly at the page.

She closed the book and tossed it onto the side of her bedding. She doused the flame with a short puff and crawled under her sheets. When the night was silent like this, she couldn’t help but think. Thinking wasn’t always pleasant for an information gatherer. Her mind trailed off to what she had heard earlier in the day. A jonin squad had come back with critical injuries with two out of the four already dead. One of the dead was the person who swapped shifts with his daughter to tend to the armory.

A mother had died in childbirth and the baby was hence put up for adoption. The council had voted upon a new budget for the next fiscal year. Mizuki would be executed within the next week after being interrogated. Various couples had come together and broken up. All of these thoughts crowded her mind in a rush as she sorted through her thoughts.

As the daughter of a merchant, she knew everything had a set value. Pottery was only worth as much as its quality allowed it to be. There was no variation in prices and certainly no fluctuation. Information had a set value as well, the value to which the person is willing to pay for it. Travelling merchants heard things from around the countries. The information was valuable and her family knew it. They were intel launderers.

You never knew when a certain scrap of information could come in handy so you had to collect everything. The more you know about someone, the more they fear you. It was just how it worked. Kei knew her value in comparison to her teammates. Her only worth was based off of her knowledge. She closed her eyes. Such a pathetic thing, but it was the only thing that gave her purpose. Knowledge. She hated it.

OMAKE: The Notebook from Wence it Came

Naruto clung to the side of the tree and peered around the corner. There was his target! He ducked behind the bush beside him and began jumping from tree to tree. He’d finally get to see what she was really writing now! The scratch of the pen alerted his ears as he poked his head out from above her. He stuck out like a sore thumb against the branches though he didn’t realize it. This was the moment he had been waiting for the past two years!

Whenever he had gotten too close, she’d always slam the notebook in his face and walk away. But now he had finally gotten the drop on her! He looked over the edge of the tree and down at the paper and let his jaw drop. Crude pictures of ponies and rainbows stared up at him with little dashes of sparkles every few centimeters.

He nearly fell out of his tree. All the times he had thought she was doing something like planning world domination she was really just drawing ponies? This couldn’t be right! Unless... A horrible thought struck Naruto. “KEI! You’re a closet pony fanatic!?”

**/hugs readers
R-Rated, Mzr90, gimangel163, RamenKnight, Jess, alchemists19, tekelili, briansangelthing, and Raku thank you all so much for reviewing. /happy tears
RamenKnight, sorry I had a wee bit more of the moral thing in this chapter. Hope you liked it though. :)**

**Also thank you to all of the people who put this story on alerts and favorited it!
Question: What is a C2? Apparently I have 3 of those? /confused**

**This chapter was a bit shorter, but I didn’t quite know how to extend it. I’ll make the next one longer. :) Also before I uploaded this chapter the story had 12121 words! Cool...
Ja ne~**

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