Chapter 36 Split Up

Baas looked up at the sky. Clouds filled it. It was as though the sky had changed colors over night. There was no sign of blue anywhere yet grey was everywhere. Though it seemed like it would pour though, the sky was steady. There were no flashes of lighting, no roars of thunder. The grey was a light grey. The rain had not even started yet. But sure enough, it would rain. There was no doubt about that. Baas began to wonder how rain worked. It was known that the water from the sky had originally been on the ground, but how did it get up there? And once it was up there, how did it know when to come…

“Baas.” Atsuma said snapping out Baas out of his thoughts. “Stop spacing out.”

“But it’s so much fun.” Baas joked with a smile.

The group had moved on from their camp on the hill. Now that Sheina was better, they continued with their journey toward the grey territory. And with the clouds blocking the sky, they no longer had to worry about the heat. With that, they were able to make it to the grey territory without any mishaps. The group could now see the buildings that made up the territory at the bottom of the hill they were standing on.

“There it is guys.” Atsuma said as though he were marveling it. “This is our first stop.”

“And hopefully our last.” Koroko added. “I’m ready to get Vee back.”

“Hold on Koroko.” Atsuma said holding his hand up. “As you know it’s against the rules of Wig for us to attack grey bands. I don’t know about you, but I’d like to search for our Commander without the Discrete having to search for us.”

“Well then how are we going to do this?” Koroko asked upset that he couldn’t fight. “Are we going to politely ask everyone if they’ve seen her?”

Atsuma smirked. “Kinda.” He then turned away from territory and back to his group.

“The guys who took Vanessa will probably leave if they find out we’re looking for them. Given that, and the fact that we don’t even know if a grey band took her in the first place, we’ll have to play it subtly. We’ll ask has anyone seen another Orange band around while going about doing other things.”

“Doing other things?” Baas asked.

“Nobody comes into grey territory for no reason. If we’re here, we’ll have to be doing something or living here, and our bands clearly show that we don’t live here. We’ll split into three groups to make it less conspicuous. Baas and Sheina, go into the market and look for a clothing store. We’ll need hoods if we want to stay dry in this weather. Panda and Koroko, you find a place where we can stay the night. We may be searching here for a while.”

“What about you?” Pandora asked.

Atsuma smirked. “I’ve got some business to take care of at the weaponry.”

When she heard that, Pandora smiled.

“You’re going to see the old man?” Koroko asked. “I haven’t seen him in a while. Let me go with you.”

“No. I’ve made these teams for a reason.”

“Are you sure this is good?” Sheina asked. “You’re sending two non-Leaders by themselves. Not very strategic according to what we were taught in the Center.”

“Hey!” Both Pandora and Koroko said at the same time.

“Don’t worry about them Squirt. For one thing, this isn’t a battle. We’re just searching. And if this was a battle, they could handle themselves.” Atsuma nodded affirmatively.

Sheina wasn’t sure. Baas didn’t care. He had never been in a grey territory and was excited to see what it would be like.

“Come on, let’s go.” He said rushing everyone. “We’re losing day light people. The guys who took Miss Vanessa could be leaving as we speak.”

Baas then headed down the hill toward the buildings.

“Baas, be patient!” Sheina called out to him.

“How can I be patient?!” Baas called back. “I’m Baas!”

“Even though that was a play on words, it makes perfect sense.” Atsuma said smirking. He then turned to Sheina. “Don’t worry, we’re splitting up so I don’t really need to keep up with him. The only one who really needs to stay with him is you.”

Atsuma then got close to Sheina.

“Don’t let him cause any trouble. Remember we want to be inconspicuous.”

Sheina gave Atsuma a disapproving look.

“I really am here to babysit Baas aren’t I?”

Atsuma headed down the hill toward the buildings.

“What ever gave you that idea?” He said with a smirk.

After sighing, Sheina headed down toward the buildings too. She was followed by both Koroko and Pandora.

Baas was amazed as he came into the territory. The buildings were like nothing he had seen. Rather than being caves and small wooden structures, they were larger structures made of stone. The buildings all appeared similar. About 15 feet high, yet they took up plenty of area. That was much better than anything outside of the caves of Orange. Why did Orange use such cheep wooden buildings when buildings like these were so much…

“Baas.” Sheina said with her hands on her hips. “Don’t leave like that. Stay where I can see you so you don’t get lost.”

Baas rolled his eyes and smiled. “What am I? Four? I told Atsuma I don’t need a babysitter. Hey, let’s go check out some of those buildings.”

Baas tried to run off, but before he could Sheina grabbed on his collar.

“Apparently you do need one. Some of these places are houses Baas. You can’t just waltz into them. Plus, we have business to take care of, remember?”

Baas pouted to show Sheina he was let down. Sheina did not care. Pulling Baas by the collar, she pressed forward to search for a clothes store.

Atsuma laughed as he saw the two good friends run off. He laugh stopped short though when Koroko and Pandora appeared behind him.

“Come on Ats.” Koroko pleaded. “Let me go with you. Don’t send me off alone with this thing.”

Pandora squinted her eyes at Koroko as he pointed to her.

Koroko then whispered in Atsuma’s ears. “I hear, late at night, she talks to her arrows. You can’t leave me with something like that.”

Atsuma snickered. Baas may have thought he was the king of jokes, but Koroko would always be number one in Atsuma’s book. He then put his hand on his friend’s shoulder.

“Alright buddy, you can come with me.”

“Really?” Koroko asked feeling pleased.

“No.” Atsuma joked. Koroko instantly lost his smile. “Let that be a lesson to you, never ask really when something good happens. Now stop whining and go check for a place to sleep. Try the place we came here last time.”

“Come on.” Pandora said. She grabbed onto Koroko’s collar and pulled him along with her. Koroko kept his arms crossed angrily and glared at Atsuma.

Atsuma laughed as he saw the two good friends run off.

“It’s all about balance.” He said.

Chapter 36 End

Chapter 40 : An Old Friend

Atsuma entered the stone structure. To his left were swords, spears and other close combat weapons of different kinds arranged along the wall. To his right were arrows quivers and bows. In front of him was a wooden cabinet. Behind that was a door that lead elsewhere. The place had not changed much since he had last visited. But there was something missing. Where was the old man?

“I told you not to leave the counter unattended!” came a female voice from the back. There was then a crashing noise.

“Okay. I’m sorry. No need to throw things.” came another. The second one sounded younger. The one who spoke came from the back door. She was young. Her head reached to about Atsuma’s stomach. She wore a red dirty top with no sleeves. Her pants were a dark khaki color which matched the color of her flat shoes. On her left bicep, there was a grey band. She came up to the counter, depressed at first, but when she saw Atsuma she perked herself up.

“Hello sir. How may I help you?”

Atsuma smirked. It had been a while since he had seen that face.

“Elxa? Is that really little Elxa?”

The girl was confused. This man knew her name.

“Yes sir. I’m really Elxa. Are you searching or have you pre-ordered?”

Atsuma smiled. She did not remember him.

“I made an order with your father a while ago. Can I speak with him please?”

“Oh he’s not here anymore.” The girl said keeping her professional look. “He left to help the Gold’s a long time ago. We haven’t seen him since then.”

“Oh.” Atsuma said upset. He was not only upset that his order was not made, but the girls father had been his friend. He hoped he was okay.

“But if you made a pre-order with my dad, then my sister probably finished it for him. She should have finished all his products by now. He left her in charge of the store while he was gone.”

Atsuma’s mood lit up. There was some good news after all. He then heard footsteps coming from the back room.

“Elxa, what did I tell you about telling strangers our business?” The one speaking stepped from behind the door opening. “Either let them trade for something or let them lea…” The girl stopped in her tracks when she saw Atsuma. Atsuma looked at her in amazement. He knew who she was too. However, she looked totally different from when he had last seen her. He expected her to have change, but by so much… Her height was up to his nose. She wore a brick-red tight top. Her pants were black and hugged her legs. Her hair was a dirty blonde with light blonde highlights. On her left bicep, there was a grey band.

The girl looked at Atsuma again. He stood there smirking. There was no doubt as to who this was.

“Atsuma?” she said. A smile then came across her face. “Atsuma, is that really you?”

“Keels.” Atsuma responded back. “Long time no see.”

“Atsuma!” the girl said getting happy. “I can’t believe it’s you. You haven’t change at all.”

“You certainly have.” Atsuma said. “It’s only been a little over a year and yet you’re twice the size I saw you last time.”

“Yeah well, when dad left, I had to grow up quick. Literally.”

“Heard about that. It’s too bad. Your dad always treated me well when I came here.”

“Don’t think you’re so special. Dad treated anyone well. As long as they didn’t have a gold band on them.”

“Those Golds huh?”

“I can’t believe they forced dad to go make weapons for them.”

“Why can’t you believe that? They’re Golds. They think they’re the most important things in the world. Though it is a bit of a shock that they would take things this far. You’re only fifteen years old. You shouldn’t be running this place by yourself. One would think the Golds would know that.”

Keely looked down at Elxa. “When we told the Discretes about it during their visit down here, they told us that it was the consequence of leading a grey life. Can you believe that?” She then looked back at Atsuma. There was some anger in her eyes “My father left his old country so that the Discretes wouldn’t force me and Elxa to leave him and go to the Center. So that we wouldn’t have to worry about this war. How is this any better?”

Atsuma felt sorry for the two. He also felt angry toward the Golds. There was nothing he could do though. The rules of Wig stated that any Grey was obligated to help out any country. As Keely had said, in exchange for living an independent life away from the war, grey bands were obligated to help any country that requested their assistance so long as they were not asked to physically fight. Still, the Golds took things too far. No other country would take a father away from his kids.

“Oh that’s right Atsuma.” Keely said breaking Atsuma from his thoughts. “You had an order the last time you came here.”

“That’s right.” Atsuma said. The bad news had made him completely forget. “The old man didn’t happen to finish it did he?”

“No he didn’t. But you should be grateful he taught his great daughter everything he knows. I was able to get it done long ago and still keep it in prime condition. Wait here and I’ll get it.”

Keely hurried to the back room to search for the item. Atsuma was left relieved. Atleast there was some good news. He wondered though, what it would be like to be a grey band. He then chuckled at that thought. He could never be a grey band. Though they went through some of their own drama, it was always too quiet in grey territories.

As if on cue, Atsuma suddenly heard a crash from outside. He looked out the door to see what was happening. When he did, he saw a group of people with weapons running and looking up as though they were all searching for something in the sky.

“Which way did he go?”

“I heard a noise coming from that way.”

“We’ve got to find him.”

“We can’t let him get away.”

The group of people continued forward searching for their person.

Atsuma felt his adrenaline pump up. He tried to relax himself by talking calmly.

“It’s okay Ats, it’s okay. Don’t jump to conclusions. This probably has nothing to do with you. It’s probably just some random person that those guys are looking for.”

Then Atsuma could hear two women much older than himself talking from outside.

“Can you believe the mess that orange boy with the sword and shield made?”

“I know. This is suppose to be a peaceful territory and he’s got those young men all riled up.”

Atsuma squinted his eyes. Of course. Without hesitation, he quickly left the building he was in. Before he could continue his search for the Commander of his team, he would have to contain the rookie.

Soon after he left, Keely came back.

“Okay Atsuma. She said without looking up. “It’s ready. I hope…”

She looked around. Atsuma was gone.

“Elxa.” She said turning to the little girl. “What happened to Atsuma?”

“I’m don’t know.” Exla replied shrugging. “He saw Brute run by and he suddenly left.”

“Brute?” Keely asked. “Oh great he’s acting up again.”

She then went back to the room she had emerged from. After a short time, she came out wielding a sword in a sheath. The sheath was black with yellow and red flames on it. Though the sword itself could not be seen, the silver dragon that was on the handle was extremely noticeable.

“Elxa, watch the store. If anybody gives you any trouble, yell and the neighbors will help. I’ve got to take care of this.”

And with that, Keely left in pursuit.

When her sister had left, Elxa giggled. Seeing her sister with that sword meant one thing.

“Someone’s gonna get in trouble.” She sang to herself.

Chapter 40 End.