Chapter 94:

Several hours passes after the event at the Black Base. The fighters, deciding that they had what they needed to continue their search, left the sight of the massacre. Once at the edge of the jungle, Atsuma decided that it be best to not move until the next morning. Despite wanting to get away from the dead bodies, the sun would be setting soon. No one ever traveled at night. And even though the group no longer cared about fighting the war, people still saw them as enemies. They were inside the depths of Blue and Gold territory, thus a couple of Oranges wouldn’t be given the friendliest welcome. The unwanted territory of the jungle would ward off any body who thought to explore but even with safety the group felt very uneasy. The situation they found themselves in seemed to be leading toward a place they didn’t want to go.

Eventually Henry woke up. As soon as he did, Atsuma and Pandora went over to him to speak some words. Eventually, the conversation lead to Henry bawling with his face in Pandora’s shirt. Everyone understood. Not even Koroko made fun of the situation. It was a very silent night in the midst of the group.

The next following days were... awkward to say the least. The group traveled from the heart of the Gold territory back NorthEast to Orange’s first base. It was difficult to talk with anyone. There seemed to be a heaviness in the air. People spoke as though it didn’t exist, but they all knew. What Diablo had said was true. This was a path that lead to a very bad ending. When the day came that Atsuma began to recognize his home surroundings, he knew what he needed to do. It was time to lighten the load as much as possible.

Morning came like it usually did. People got up, ate some scavenged food and began to prepare to depart. Before they got going, however, Atsuma gathered them all together.

“Keely.” He said firmly. “It’s time to go home. No arguing this time. You know your way to the Grey territory from here.”

Keely was a bit surprised. The order came so suddenly. But still, she nodded. There was still a part of her that wanted to stay and be helpful. But after what happened with the Black Base, she knew it was time for her to go and was grateful that Atsuma himself had released her. This life... She used to believe that she could be just a good a fighter as anyone else, but now the lifestyle didn’t seem worth it. Henry lost his entire base, Atsuma was running into death… this was not the life she was ready for. She was ready to go home.

“Thank you all.” Keely said. “I’ve learned a lot from many of you. Henry, I’m so sorry about what happened.”

“You know us black bands.” Henry said with a smile. “Always living dangerous lives.”

Sheina ran up to Keely and hugged her. “I’m going to miss you so much.”

“I wish you could come with me.” Keely said squeezing Sheina.

“I do too.” Sheina said closing her eyes.

“That... brings me to my next point. Squirt, you should go with her.”

Sheina turned towards Atsuma with a strange look. “What? What do you mean? I... I can’t go with her... I’m an Orange.”

“Squirt… ” Atsuma said. He put his hand on her shoulder. “You’re not fooling anyone. I’ve seen it since Diablo told you what the Officials really are. When we left the Orange’s second base, you were determined to be a great fighter. I saw the spark in your eyes that I see in all young fighters. But that spark isn’t there anymore.”

“He has a point.” Vatti said. “Besides, I’ve known you since we were little and you’ve never seemed like the fighting type. Trust me, even if you weren’t worried about the Discretes, this life has other things that are just as dark.”

Sheina felt tears filling up in her eyes.

“You’re done with all this fighting. And I couldn’t ask you to do anymore.”

Sheina looked over at Baas. For some reason, his reaction was the one she was waiting for. Baas looked at Sheina in the eyes. He grinned and waved.

Sheina couldn’t stop the tears from flowing. Everyone knew. They knew exactly how she felt. She didn’t want anymore of this. Her entire life had been a lie from the get go. All this killing and deceiving... it wasn’t for her. She had done her best to hide it, but for a while now she couldn’t handle it. She wanted to be as far away from it as possible just so she could forget about it. She knew she was being selfish and that Vanessa’s life was on the line, but she just couldn’t take it anymore.

The Orange then nodded as the tears continued to flow. She wasn’t sure if she’d be able to speak as the tears continued to build. Suddenly, she felt arms around her.

“Goodbye Sheina.” Vatti said as she squeezed the girl. Sheina lifted her arms to return the farewell.

“Isn’t that sweet?” Baas said.

“Baas.” Vatti called. “Get over here and help.”

“You know I would,” the Orange joked “but that’s such a girly thing to do. It’s not just us now anymore Vatti. I have to look tough in front of my manly friends.”

Vatti took herself away from Sheina, grabbed Baas by the wrist and forced him forward. “How tough will you look when you’re manly friends see you scream like a girl after being beaten up by one.”

“You make a forceful argument.” Baas, Vatti and Sheina all participated in the group hug.

“I guess hugging two very pretty girls is considered manly.”

“I’ll definitely miss your sense of humor Baas.” Sheina giggled. “I used to believe the hardest thing I had to do in life was say goodbye to you two two years ago. That is now number two, this is definitely number 1.”

“Well, despite the odds, we wound up reuniting once.” Vatti said. “It could happen again.”

“Yeah,” Baas agreed. “We only have to defeat the entire nest of people considered to be the best fighters in the world, escape with our Commander, and somehow figure out what to do once we escape. Then, we’ll come visit you.”

The three friends laughed. They then began to release from their hug. However, rather than taking her arms back, Sheina slid down her hands and grabbed both of theirs.

“Listen to me you two. You guys belong together. Don’t ever give up on each other. Now that you know this war is a complete farce, there’s no reason for you two not to stick with each other.”

Sheina brought her two hands together, and as a result, her two friends’ hands together.

“You two created legends in the Center. Stay Baas and Vatti, and create more legends.”

Sheina slowly let go of the two friends’ hands, leaving them grasped together.

Vatti was certain that her face was starting to turn red. Why did Sheina have to say something like that? It was completely embarrassing.

“Okay.” Baas let out with a smile. “But did you really have to expose me to Vatti germs.”

“By the way Vatti, Baas is still as clueless as ever.”

“I resent that.” Baas said, smiling at what he thought was a joke.

“Goodbye Baas and Vatti.” Sheina said.

“Goodbye Sheina.” The two friends answered.

Sheina went with Keely. The two began to walk away from the group. Before they were out of sight, Sheina’s band turned from Orange to Grey.

“Two down, two to go.” Atsuma said.

“Two?” Vatti repeated. “You still don’t think I’m leaving do you?”

“No no, I already got your message. As long as you’re with Baas you’re good. And looking at you two, I’d say it take something very serious to separate you two.”

That sentence made Vatti glance at her hand. It was still holding Baas’. Out of embarrassment, she quickly let go and crossed her arms.

“Okay.” Atsuma said. “As long as you’re dedicated to sticking with Baas, I don’t have any trouble with you following us. However, when we get inside the Orange base, don’t make a scene. I’ll make up an excuse as to why you’re with us.”

Vatti nodded.

“That just leaves you Henry.” Atsuma said. Henry the entire time had been standing off to the side. His face was angry.

“I hope you don’t think I’m just gonna go into a Grey territory.” He said upset.

“No I...”

“Because in case you forgot, I’m marked for death. My brother’s gone, my family’s dead, by now my home is the nest for flies. The only thing I can do now is help you guys. I don’t care about your Commander, but I got a score to settle with those sunglasses wearing jerks.”

“Calm down Henry, I wasn’t going to send you anywhere. I was just going to say that you have to follow Vatti’s lead. We have to stop in Orange to get some supplies and I’ll need you guys to behave a certain way until we leave.”

“Whatever.” Henry grumbled. “As long as I get there. I won’t stop until Discrete A himself is dead.”

“Right.” Koroko scoffed. “Well that’s everyone Ats, can we go now?”

“Alright,” Atsuma commanded, “we’re headed into the Orange base. We may be working together, but as far as everyone else is concerned, Vatti and Henry are enemies. Stay close together so that no one will sporadically attack. Remember, the more people who know the truth, the more danger they’ll be in, so don’t go talking about anything. I’ll explain what I need to if anyone asks.”

Chapter 94 End

Chapter 95: Splitting Up

The remaining members of the group traveled a couple more days before reaching the first base of Orange. Atsuma explained the plan briefly to everyone. Vatti and Henry would be the group’s prisoners. Atsuma and the others would grab supplies that they would need for the upcoming battle quickly, and then head out.

The group seemed like its usual self. Even Henry was starting to lighten up and smile a little. However, Baas noticed things that showed their nervousness. Little twitches or shakings whenever a person brought up the Discretes or anything related to the plan. The group was smiling, but it was nervous. The mountains in the distance. The Oranges that they passed. The group was getting closer to the base... which meant they were getting closer to the cliffs.

Finally, the group came towards the mountains. As explained by Atsuma, Henry and Vatti stayed near him. They were acting as prisoners and didn’t say anything. Vatti, out of instinct, was observing the passage into the Orange. All this time she had thought that there was some long route, but a simple trail led into the heart of the base. Of course, that trail was guarded by plenty of Fars and the occasional Near.

Henry kept his head down. Everyone in the base took one look at him and immediately reached for their weapon, but the sight of being led by Atsuma made them continue their business. For once in his life, he wasn’t proud to demonstrate his band. Perhaps, he should’ve gone with Keely after all.

The group continued throughout the dusty terrain. Some people were saying hi, other’s glanced at the group without looking. It didn’t matter too much. As long as no one tried to stop them, they were fine.

“Atsuma, Koroko.” Someone called out. “Be careful, Acol and Altea are in the base.”

“Thanks for the heads up.” Atsuma smiled.

“Miss Pandora.” A female Far said as she walked aside the group. “I can’t seem to improve on my shot. Do you think you could give me some tips later on?”

“I don’t think so.” Pandora shrugged. “I probably won’t be in base very long. “If Ralf is around, he should be able to help you out. Last I checked, his bow skills had improved greatly.”

“Hey.” A 16 year old whom nobody knew approached. To his left, trying to use the boy to separate herself from the group, was a girl whose identity was also unknown to the group.

“You’re that kid Baas right?”

“Last I checked.”

“You’re the one that beat Atsuma.”

“Well, he claims something else happened, but yeah.”

“Dude, there’s like a line of people in the White band training room waiting to fight you.”

“Really?” Baas’ eyes grew wide.

“Yeah. I just got here last month so I’ve never seen you fight, but I heard it was amazing.”

“Ask him.” The girl behind the guy said tugging on his shirt.

“Alright, hold on. My friends here, Alice, actually did see you fight. She was wondering if you’d be willing to give her some pointers some time. She uses the short sword, just like you.”

“Sure!” Baas said getting excited about his newfound reputation.

“AHEM!” Vatti coughed really loudly.

“Oh yeah... but probably not anytime soon. I’ll be leaving the base soon.”

“But... some other time though.”

“Oh definitely. Assuming I come back alive.”

The kid laughed as he and Alice walked away. When he thought they were far away enough, he spoke to Alice. “Hey, he didn’t say ‘no.’ That’s a start right?” He didn’t know, but Baas could still here him. The Orange couldn’t help but let out a huge smile. The thought of him gaining a reputation was very pleasing. Vatti, on the other hand, felt another sense of emotions.

“Atsuma.” Another Orange walked up. “Man, where’ve you guys been? There’s been all sorts of rumors from you becoming a Grey band to you dying.”

“Hey, Case. Yeah, we’ve been taking care of some personal stuff. Still not done either. Don’t plan on staying long. Gonna get some supplies and then we’ll be heading out.”

The man named Case glanced down at Vatti and Henry.

“Looks like one of the rumors were true.”

“What?” Koroko asked confused.

“You know Tessy? I was talking to her and she said that while her group was out in a Grey territory, they heard some Blues talking about how a ship had been sank by a bunch of Oranges. Given you guy’s... past records with Blue ships, we figured it was you. Looking at that Blue prisoner, I’d say we were right.”

“You got that right.” Koroko boasted. “Those Blues didn’t know what hit them.”

Vatti tried to hold in her anger. She wanted to burst out, but she was in enemy territory. Despite that though, Baas could tell the signs of Vatti anger. He knew them all too well.

“Atsuma.” Baas hummed nervously. “Can we get a move on? I feel a disturbance in Vatti’s soul.”

Atsuma was about to agree with Baas, but before he could, a familiar voice called his name.

“Atsuma!”

“Eltin! You’re here in first base?”

“Uh, in case you forgot, you were supposed to be here too. With Vanessa gone, we need to establish a Commander for the first base.”

“Oh that’s right.” Atsuma had legitimately forgotten the chaos the base had been left behind in.

“Hey Atsuma, I need to talk to you.”

“Sorry, I don’t. I need to get ready for my next mission.”

“Atsuma.” Eltin said, straightening his tone. “I need to see you. Now.” The voice no longer sounded like a request, but an order. Atsuma was puzzled. He wasn’t normally ordered around by Eltin or... anybody who was a Commander. If he was speaking like this, it may held more water than a usual situation.

“Give me a sec.”

Eltin nodded as Atsuma turned to his team.

“Okay guys, quick change in plan. Baas, you take Vatti and Henry to the prison holding place.”

“Say what!?!” Vatti exclaimed.

“It’s only temporary. I don’t know how long Eltin will hold me and the longer you guys are standing out here in the open, the more suspicious we look. Need I remind you, we don’t want to start answering questions.”

Vatti leet out a sigh from her nose. She wanted to protest, but she didn’t exactly have a better plan.

“Once you’ve done that, stay with them. Orange isn’t used to taking in prisoners. If someone else comes across them, they may try to kill them. If anyone asks, just tell them I said they’re not to be touched.”

“Atsuma, maybe I should go.” Pandora spoke up. “I don’t think Baas knows where the prisoner cells are and nobody’ll question me if I’m doing it.”

“No!” Atsuma said, startling the group. “Sorry for yelling, look, this plan is delicate and I need everyone to be in the right spots. Baas and the other kids must be in the cells to draw attention away from them. Panda, you and Koroko get the usual stash of weapons and wait for me outside the meeting room.”

“Atsuma, are you okay?” Baas asked.

“What?’ Atsuma asked confused.

“I can’t put my finger on it, but there’s something about you that’s... off.”

“We’re about to go on the biggest mission ever. I’m a little stress.”

“Still...”

Don’t worry about it. It’s nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“That’s what I said isn’t it? Now go!”

Baas didn’t say anymore, still, there was something not right. Something Atsuma wasn’t letting him know.

Chapter 95 End