Chapter 96

Eltin walked into the meeting room, somewhat upset, but trying to hide it. Atsuma followed, disgruntled and not being subtle about it.

“Alright Eltin.” Atsuma demanded. “What is it? Seriously, I’m busy so if we can make this quick, that would be great.”

“You see mister Eltin, even now, he demonstrates my point.”

Atsuma almost jumped as Cham came toward the center of the room. The meeting room was always kept dark except for the bright light shining on the table, so Atsuma hadn’t seen him.

“Cham,” Atsuma squinted” I should’ve known you were the one who actually needed to see me.”

Cham let out a huge sigh from his nose.

“Mister Atsuma, it is Command...”

“Yeah, yeah, Commander Cham. What do you want?”

Cham made a face towards Eltin.

“I already agree with you on this Cham.” Eltin said “You don’t have to push it further.”

“Agreed on what?” Atsuma asked. “What’s going on?”

“Mister Atsuma, where have you and your team been these past months?”

“Well, we were gonna come back to the first base, just like you told us to, but then we thought we’d stop by a Grey territory. You know? Take in some sites, say hi to some old friends.”

“Mister Atsuma, you’re already in enough trouble as it is, don’t make it worse. You were out looking for Vanessa weren’t you?”

“What if I was?”

“Atsuma, please.” Eltin spoke “Commander Cham is right. You’re in serious trouble now. There’s a slight chance to fix it, but if you don’t...”

“If I don’t what? Say I’m sorry for going to rescue my Commander? My friend? Well guess what? I’m not sorry.”

“Ats, we were all friends with Vee too, it’s not like that. We came here to get a new Commander and now we have one. It’s time to let go of...”

“I don’t care if Cham’s the Commander of the second base and I don’t care who you put in charge of this one. I’m not going to stop until Vee is safe. Bark all the silly orders that you want.”

Eltin and Cham looked at each other. Eltin looked down and sighed while Cham looked at Atsuma.

“I was afraid it would come to this.” There was a slight pause. “Mister Atsuma, you have been a great addition to this country. But no more.”

“Your actions aren’t justified Ats. You’re disobeying orders, and not only that, but you’re taking some of our best Oranges and potential white bands with you on your missions. The people here look up to you and we can’t have you breaking rules whenever you feel like it.”

“So what, you’re gonna suspend me?”

“If we thought something as simple as that would stop you, we would.”

“Mister Atsuma,” Cham said firmly. “The next time you step off of this base, you will be black banded.”

**Chapter 96 End**

**Chapter 97**

Atsuma looked at Cham and Eltin. There was a mixture of emotions building up in him: anger, sadness, annoyance, fear... none of the rest were good either.

“What did you say?” Atsuma asked.

“That is correct mister Atsuma. You are no longer apart of the Orange country.” Cham said firmly.

“However, we don’t want to make a big scene.” Eltin finished “People around here still look up to you and we don’t want to embarrass you. You’re band won’t turn black until you leave this territory. Once that happens, declare yourself a Grey band. Technically, you haven’t broken any laws, so if you do that before any Discretes find you, you’ll should be safe.”

Atsuma looked down, trying to hold in his emotions. On the one hand, he knew that this didn’t change much. The Discretes were on his enemy list anyway. Even still, a couple of days of knowing the truth did not overwrite the years of fear. No colored band, including himself, ever wanted to be black banded.

“No way!” A voice came from the hall. Footsteps were approaching rapidly. The sound of weapons hitting the floor rang.

“Aw geeze.” Eltin said. “Here we go.”

“You can’t do this!” Koroko screamed bursting into the meeting room. Immediately following him was Pandora, just as flustered as he was.

“Calm down.” Elin said. “Don’t make such a scene.”

“Calm down? CALM DOWN!?! How can I calm down when you’re doing this to Ats!?! After everything he’s done for you.”

Pandora stepped around Koroko. “Commander Cham please reconsider, Atsuma was just concerned about Vanessa. We all were!”

“Like how he figured out the Blue ships? Or the five day forest battle, remember that? Or the half mile swim incident?”

“We were just doing what Vee would’ve done for us!”

“Orange wouldn’t have half the victories it had if it weren’t for Ats.”

“He was just trying...”

“Koroko! Pandora!” Eltin raised his voice halting the other two. “All of this. Every single word you have said, was taken into account before this decision was made. Atsuma, do you still plan on going after Vanessa?”

Atsuma gave Eltin a hateful stare.“Yes.”

“And that is why he’s being black-banded.” Cham assured. “Because despite all the good that makes up for Mr. Atsuma’s stunt, he is still going to continue his actions. We cannot have that.”

“But...” Pandora started.

“Guys!”Atsuma raised his voice. “It doesn’t matter.” His gaze continued to stare down as his voice got lower. “None of it does.”

There was silence for a moment longer. Eltin and Cham thought Atsuma meant something, but Koroko and Pandora knew he meant something else. And he was right.

“Well, if he’s leaving.” Pandora said. “I’m going to.”

“Freaking idea stealer, I was just about to say that.”

“Please miss Pan...” Cham started, but Eltin held his hand up.

“We knew this would happen if they found out Cham, there’s really no use in arguing.”

Cham let out another sigh. “I was truly hoping this would go more well than it did.”

The Commander looked at Atsuma, whose eyes would not meet with his.

”I will leave you now mister Atsuma.” Cham said as he walked toward the exit “This is farewell.”

Before departing, Cham paused and looked over his shoulder. “You should be thankful to have people who care for you and understand you mister Atsuma. Atleast you’re not going alone. I hope you find happiness in the next life you choose.” And with that, Cham left, leaving only the echoes of his footprints.

Eltin looked at his friends. “Listen guys. The banishment isn’t official until you leave the base. I’ll allow you to take some weapons with you, but make sure you head straight for a Grey territory.”

“You’ll allow us?” Atsuma asked. He lifted his head up to show his angry stare at Eltin. “Prey tell Eltin, who are now the Commanders of Orange.”

Eltin straightened his gaze. “While you were away, it was decided that Cham become the Commander of the first base, while I take on the second base.”

“It figures.” Atsuma said with a sinister smirk. “First he gets the first base, something he’s always wanted, and then sends you, his lap dog, to lead the second base. Cham’s got control of both bases now which means he’s basically controlling all of Orange. I should’ve known. That man is nothing but a self-glory seeking, backstabbing...”

“HEY!” Eltin said raising his voice. “Let’s get something straight here Atsuma. I know you’re upset, but that’s my Commander and my friend that you’re talking about.”

“Oh, you mean like Vee was your Commander? Like Vee was your friend? And yet we all sat here and watched Cham make the decision to leave her. Open your eyes Eltin, Cham abandoned Vee.”

“He did no such thing Atsuma. As the Commander or Orange, he made a suggestion and the Leaders of Orange decided it was a good idea. If you want to talk about abandonment, you’re the one who went off on your own, leaving Orange when one of their most crucial members was missing! We needed you here, to help sort through this mess. You, however, decided that your idea was better.”

“I wanted to save Vee!”

“So did everyone else Atsuma!” Cham demanded now screaming. “Including Cham!”

Atsuma smirked again and looked away from Eltin while sucking his teeth. “You’re so blinded by loyalty, you can’t even see you’re being played.”

Atsuma was being malicious now. He wasn’t trying to reason anymore, he wanted emotions destroyed. Eltin felt the anger inside him boil, but he knew better than to let it out. It wasn’t what Atsuma had said that upset him, but the fact that he was saying it.

“Atsuma, do you know what the first thing Cham did was when he got down here?”

“I’m sure you’re gonna tell me.”

“He nominated **you** for Commander.”

Atsuma went quiet upon hearing that.

“Commander Cham wanted you to become Commander of the first base. As Vanessa’s best student, he felt you’d be able to uphold her legacy better than anyone. Had he succeeded, you would’ve had just as much authority as he did and could’ve ordered that rescue mission you wanted to do so much. But there was a flaw in Cham’s plan. He didn’t predict that you would disobey orders, and go off looking for Vanessa on your own. Orange couldn’t sit by and wait for you to magically reappear; we had to reestablish order. So, I was selected out of another number of Leaders. Tell me Atsuma, where does Cham nominating you for Commander, someone who clearly doesn’t respect his authority, fit into his master plan of taking control of Orange?”

Atsuma didn’t answer. He didn’t even look at Eltin.

“Cham may do things differently than most of us would, but he was made Commander for a reason. Because he puts what needs to be done over what people want done, including himself. It may have been Cham’s idea to not rescue Vanessa, but nobody blames him for it… nobody, except you.”

Eltin turned toward Koroko and Pandora. “I’ll say it again, you guys can take some weapons with you in case some one attacks you, but make sure you get to a Grey territory stat.” Eltin then let out a soft smile. “I’ll be sure to visit you.”

Eltin then began to depart from the meeting room. Atsuma was still looking away, he was fighting a decision in his mind. He lost the battle.

“Eltin wait.” He said getting up. Eltin stopped and looked at Atsuma. Still trying to find the exact words. Finally, he just sighed.

“You’ll make a great Commander.”

Eltin grinned. It wasn’t exactly an apology, but knowing Atsuma, it was probably the closest he was going to get.

“Well of course I will. Gotta be prepared for when I get called to be the... you-know-what.”

Atsuma wanted to, he really wanted to tell Eltin the truth. But he knew that doing so would just put his life in danger. Not to mention, it would ruin the moment they were having. “Listen, I need a favor. I brought in two prisoners. They should be in the holding cell with Baas.”

“Prisoners? As in, you didn’t kill them?”

“Yeah. I need you to make these kids Oranges.”

“What?”

“I know it sounds crazy, but trust me. I owe a dept to one of them and the other one has been helping us out. They’ll be dedicated enough to being Orange bands. I’m personally recommending them. Just make sure the girl gets paired up with Baas.”

“This is... a very big request Atsuma. It’s been a while since any nation has accepted a band that wasn’t a white band. But, since it is you’re going away present, I guess I can make an exception, as long as they themselves choose to be dedicated Orange.”

“Thanks Eltin... and one more thing.”

“Atsuma...”

“I know, but this is the last thing, I promise. When Baas finds out that I’m gone, he’s going to want to do the same thing these yahoo’s did and join me. Make sure he doesn’t find out until I’m long gone and he can’t follow. He’s a white band. He doesn’t know a map well enough to catch up to me, but if he sees me leaving he will follow.”

“I guess I can do that. It doesn’t sound too hard.”

“Eltin, don’t take Baas lightly, if he finds out that I left before I can get out of here, there won’t be any stopping him.”

“I think I can handle a white band.”

“I’m serious Eltin. If Baas finds out I left, don’t treat him like a white band, treat him like... like you would a Discrete.”

Eltin laughed.“Well if a Discrete wanted to do something, I don’t think there’s anything I could do to stop them.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of” Atsuma thought. He then began speaking. “Just, take him seriously Eltin. He has a great future as an Orange and I don’t want that to get messed up because he’s following me.”

“Alright Ats, he won’t get passed me.”

Atsuma put his arm on Eltin’s shoulder and smirked. Eltin smirked back.

“You guys take care of yourself.”

“You too, Eltin.”

And with that, Eltin departed the same way Cham did.

“You were planning this whole time to leave Baas and the others here, weren’t you?” Koroko asked.

“Koroko, we can’t...”

“Hey, you’ll get no argument from me.”

“Indeed.” Pandora agreed. “Those kids have barely had a chance to live.”

“And who knows?’ Atsuma said, beginning to walk out. “Baas being what he is, once he grows up to be an all-powerful weapon, maybe he will be the one to end this war. But for now, he’s gonna have to sit this one out.”

**Chapter 97 End**