

From Chapter 32

Par and Enio search for Vex at Banes

"We're about out of options," Par said. "Maybe I can make a deal. I'll turn myself in if they help Lani and let you go."

His friend rubbed his chin, either in thought, or to ease a purple wound Par had put there. "I bet they'd agree. Keeping their word is something else."

"But—"

"Let's call that Plan B."

"We have a Plan A?" Par asked.

"We have a Plan Vex."

"Yeah, but how—"

"I've got an idea," Enio said. "Follow me."

At a lull in the wharf's activity, Enio hopped onto the boardwalk and led them to an alley beside a warehouse. Par followed around that building to another alley that looped back onto the docks. Then back around to another.

"What are we looking for?" Par asked at the next corner.

"Shh." Enio pulled him against the wall and pointed. "That."

A short barge was moored at a pier. Workers rolled barrels up and down its gangplank.

Par had seen this kind of vessel before. "Agron?"

"It's not the *Sweet Carmina*, but it's Chogan. They're always around somewhere."

The vessel was smaller than the *Sweet Carmina*, but had a fat belly. A stout woman with long black hair decorated with yellow beads barked orders from the deck.

"That's the captain," Enio said. "Come on."

They slipped to a row of barrels near the boat. After another look around, they scurried close to the gangplank.

The woman saw them. "Ahoy, you lads. This ain't no playgroun'. Shove off."

"I'm Enio and this is Par. We're—"

"Well, if you're lookin' for a lift," she straightened and spoke a little louder, "I'm not licensed for—"

Enio raised his arm. He held it stationary as he had done with Agron. "We're brothers of Iorgas, Tarlid, and Loam."

"And Agron," Par added. He wasn't lying—Agron had said so himself.

The woman lowered her voice. "Are you, now?"

"We are," Enio said. "And we're not looking for a lift."

Par wondered whether they *should* ask for a ride. But no—the trouble they had brought upon Agron, he could not bring on another river family.

"Well then." She descended the creaking plank. "Welcome, brothers of the Choga. I'm Roarda, captain of the *Blue Lily*." She offered her arm as Agron once had. Enio took it. Par did, too.

She squinted at their faces. "Been in a scuffle, have you?"

Par spoke. "I won't lie to you, Captain Roarda. We're wanted..." he glanced at Enio. His friend nodded. Par continued, "We're wanted by the Hierarchy of Eloria. We're looking for help from a certain man."

The captain ushered them again behind the barrels. "Who is this man you be seekin'?"

"Alexander Vex."

Roarda raised her head and whistled. "Hey, Jontie!"

A lanky man with a stubbled, hawkish face leaned over the deck rail. "Cap'n?"

“Go check if Vex is in town.”

The man bounded down the plank and across the docks. A sign in massive black letters on a warehouse declared *Vex Imports and Exports*.

Par rolled his eyes.

Jontie spoke to a gathering of workers and ran back. “They haven’t seen him in a couple weeks.”

Par’s spirits wilted again. “When will he be back?”

“Vex comes and goes,” Jontie said. “Mostly goes.”

“Crap.” Enio huffed.

Roarda sent Jontie back to his chores. She turned to the boys. “Sure you aren’t wantin’ that ride?”

“We’re sure,” Par said. “We have business with Vex.”

“Well, if you change your minds—”

“Um,” Enio drew closer to the captain, “there’s a reward. Will your crew...?” He let the question hang.

“Don’t be worryin’ about that, brothers of Agron. My crew are my *blood* family. They’ll keep their tongues furled.”

At least they were safe from being tuned in. Par held his arm out. “Thank you, Captain Roarda. Sweet sailings and fair landings to you and your crew.”

“And to you, my young Chogan brothers.”

As Captain Roarda strode up the gangplank, barking orders, Par scurried with Enio back to the alley.

“Well,” Enio said, “at least we know where to look for Vex when he gets back.”

Par nodded. But would it be in time for Lani?