

THE KINGDOM OF AZERECK PT. 5

CIVIL WAR

Based on a story by Chrisvin Jabamani



Panic spread through the crowd as they watched the two knights motionless on the dirt. The squires of both competitors ran to help their fallen knights.

When Rom's helmet came off there was a gasp from the crowd. No one expected him to be in the competition. There was an even louder noise when the second knight turned out to be Minzo.

It was quite a while before Minzo sat up. He shook his head trying to clear his mind. He looked over and saw Rom lying on the other side of the barrier.

Shocked and surprised Minzo said to his helpers. "Where did he come from?"

"It appears that Rom was the other rider," his squire told him.

His assistants helped Minzo to his feet. He still wasn't able to walk well on his own.

He looked over at Rom who was still lying unconscious on the ground.

"Did I kill him?" Minzo asked.

"No, your Majesty. He's just knocked out. He should come around in a minute or so," one of the men tending to Rom answered.

Just then Rom coughed. His mouth had blood on it and he had a big bump on his head. He rolled over and coughed again. One of his aides gave him some water to drink.

While Rom was still on the ground the king approached him.

"What's going on here? What have you done?" the king asked looking at Minzo.

"You know that I don't approve of this! You both have much to answer for. I'll see you

in the morning.”

And with that the king walked away shaking his head and muttering something under his breath that did not sound like it was going to be a good morning for either of them.

Rom was raised slowly to his feet. He looked over at Minzo in surprise.

“Did I just fight you?” Rom asked.

Minzo nodded his head and then turned to return to his shelter.

Rom had to be carried to his tent.

The doctor came and inspected Rom to make sure he was OK. He had broken his right arm, but other than that he would be OK.

The crowd of people went home talking about what had happened that day. The event had ended in a tie. There would be no winner, but the people had great respect for both of the princes. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

The next day Rom and Minzo stood before the king. Rom had a bandage on his right arm.

At first the king just looked at the boys standing in front of him. He did not say a word. Rom and Minzo were very uncomfortable.

Finally the king spoke up, “What you did yesterday was very thoughtless. I’ve invested too much into your education to do something as foolish as that.

“I’ve decided that you need to learn that you’ve got too much to lose to be doing something like tried to do yesterday.

“Do you really believe that wouldn’t find out?” the king asked not really expecting an answer.

The boys both shook their heads realizing that they would have been discovered after the contest no matter who had won.

“Here is what I have planned for you. Rom, you are to go to the east. You are to talk to all of the subjects in the kingdom to the east of Azereck. You are to collect the taxes that are due to me and bring them here in one month’s time.

“Minzo, you are to go to the western half of the kingdom and you are to do the same,” the king explained the mission the princes would have to complete.

Tax collectors were the least popular persons in the entire kingdom. The tax collectors were mean and the people didn't like paying their taxes in the first place. What the king was asking them to do was not only unpopular but also dangerous.

“This'll be a test to see if you can build loyalty among the subjects in the kingdom. I'll see you one month from now.” And with that the king walked out of the throne room with Queen Azul by his side.

Minzo and Rom looked at each other. This was not going to be an easy task.

The next morning Rom left the castle riding his favorite horse. He had two squires with him who rode in a small cart behind him.

Minzo left in the afternoon after having said good-bye to his family. He also had his squires with him.

Rom headed toward the border of the Kingdom of Nod. He decided he would go to the farthest point and then return collecting the taxes on the way back.

He had no experience in collecting taxes. He did not know how to talk to the farmers. His family had always lived in the village just outside of the castle.

On the other hand Minzo had grown up on a small farm and had met the tax collectors many times before he moved to the castle.

It took a little more than a week for Rom to reach the border of the Kingdom of Nod.

The first family he visited was happy to see a stranger coming to visit. They were even more excited when they learned that he was a prince of the Kingdom of Azereck. They were not excited when they found out that he was coming to collect their taxes.

Rom and his men pulled up in front of the small cottage. Rom jumped down from his horse and knocked on the door. No one answered.

He knocked again, still no one answered.

Rom then walked around to the back of the house. He heard soft voices coming

from inside.

He looked into the window and saw the family sitting at the table whispering to each other. When they saw Rom they jumped in surprise.

Through the window, Rom pointed to the entrance. The father of the house went to the door.

“What can I do for you sir?” the man said.

“I am Rom, a prince of the Kingdom of Azereck, and I have come to collect your taxes,” Rom stated as much like a prince as he could.

The man replied, “I don’t have your taxes right now. Can you come back in a week and I’ll pay you then?”

Rom agreed and left.

The next house he came to, he got the same response.

“I don’t have your taxes right now. Can you come back in a week and I’ll pay you then?” then next man gave the same response.

After seven different homes, Rom began to realize that collecting taxes was not going to be easy.

That night Rom stayed at an inn along the road. The innkeeper was a nice gentleman. Rom started talking to him and shared what had happened during his travels.

The innkeeper gave him an idea.

“Your majesty, if you want your taxes you have two options. The first option is take the money by force. The problem you have is that you only have two squires with you and the farmers are not afraid of you.

“The second option is to offer a discount. If they pay you a percentage of the taxes now, you will forgive the balance. If they don’t agree, then threaten to double the tax,” the innkeeper explained.

Rom thought that this was an excellent idea.

The next day he went to the first house. The farmer came out of his house when he saw Rom approaching and went to meet him.

“I told you I would pay you next week. Why are you back so soon?” the farmer asked.

Rom explained his offer to the farmer. The farmer thought about it and then agreed.

Rom gave the farmer a receipt for the entire tax that was due stating that the bill was paid in full.

The idea worked so well that Rom was able to complete his task a week earlier than expected.

The farmers were very happy and said very nice things about Rom. He made many friends and they welcomed him to come back.

For Minzo, the job was a bit harder.

Minzo was very direct in his approach to the peasants. He and his squires had little success in their attempt to collect the taxes. He spent many days returning to collect money that the farmers had no intention of paying.

One day Monzo heard about the way Rom was collecting his taxes. He decided to give it a try. The new plan worked. The farmers were happy to make a deal with the prince reducing the tax they owed the king.

Minzo was now well liked by the people in the western half of the kingdom.

On the day the king told the two princes to meet with him in the throne room, Minzo and Rom were waiting.

The king looked over the accounting of the taxes collected.

“It is very interesting what I see here. You each collected less tax than what was due, but the total amount is far greater than the money collected by the regular tax collectors. What was your strategy?” King Walter asked.

Rom started, “I spoke with an innkeeper in Florestville. He suggested that if we collected a portion of the tax, the farmers would be more willing to pay now. Otherwise they would make us wait. I thought a portion is better than no tax, so I made agreements with each the farmers. They all paid a portion of the tax,” Rom explained.

“What about you Minzo. How did you do this?” the king asked him.

“To be honest, I was told about what Rom was doing and I copied it. I wasn’t having any luck the way I tried to do it before,” Minzo said not really wanting to give Rom the credit.

“I’m impressed. You are both honest people, that is of the one reasons the tax collection is so good. Usually my tax collectors keep some of the money for themselves. You have done the kingdom a great service. I commend both of you, especially you Rom,” the king praised the princes.

After the meeting with the king, each of the princes went to their homes not knowing the purpose of the task, but they were happy that it was over.

The next day a fight broke out in the courtyard of the castle. It was Rom’s brother Klem and he was fighting Minzo’s brother Grol. As the fight went on, people from the village came to watch. Some were for Klem and some were for Grol.

As the crowd grew, word got back to Rom and Minzo that their brothers were fighting in the courtyard.

The boys ran to the courtyard to try and stop the fight, but when they got there, the fight had grown. Some were fighting for Klem and others for Grol.

It was as if the whole town was fighting.

Rom went to find his brother. As he was going through the crowd someone yelled, “There’s Rom! Let’s get him!”

Rom ducked as a rock went sailing past his head. Rom stayed low and found his brother. He pulled him out of the fight and into a doorway.

“What’s going on?” Rom asked Klem.

“Grol said that you were a poor excuse of a prince and that you have no right to be in the castle,” I had to stand up for you.

“What did you say?” Rom questioned.

“I said that Minzo is a jerk and that he isn’t fit to be king,” Klem told his brother.

They looked out of the doorway and the entire town was fighting in the streets;

some for Rom and the others for Minzo.

Rom and his brother managed to get through the crowd and back to their rooms.

They looked out over the courtyard and the fight continued.

“Look at what you’ve started! How are we going to fix this?” Rom asked himself.

The fight went on for hours. Word spread of the fight in the castle to the surrounding countryside. Farmers decided to go to the castle to fight for their prince.

Those from the east came to fight for Rom, while those from the west came to fight for Minzo.

It was turning into a civil war. No one knew how to stop it.

The fighting became more intense. Family was fighting family.

King Walter was caught completely by surprise. He had no idea how the fighting had begun and he had no idea on how to stop it.

Word of the civil war in Azereck spread throughout the surrounding kingdoms. Some of the kings had expected that something like this would happen when they learned about the two princes.

One of the kingdoms found the news exciting. The Kingdom of War was still angry at the Kingdom of Azereck for kidnapping their king. Now they had a chance to get even.

They had been planning to attack the Kingdom of Azereck for quite some time. Now they saw they had an opportunity to defeat them easily.

The new king of the Kingdom of War was not very experienced in the strategies of war. His father had taken care of all of that. He had called the best military men in his army to come to the castle to plan an attack on the Kingdom of Azereck.

Every day the new recruits were drilled in the fields. The foot soldiers learned to use their swords. They were taught how to fight without their weapons.

The archers practiced hour after hour.

The horsemen learned to ride fast in their armor, and they learned how to use their swords on horseback.

The spear throwers trained day after day.

Catapults were built and put onto wheels so horses could easily move them. The big ram that would be used to knock down the gates to the castle was built and tested.

In matter of a couple of months the Kingdom of War was ready to attack the Kingdom of Azereck.

Now he knew that the Kingdom of Azereck would be unprepared and with the civil war happening, they would be easy to defeat.

The king of the Kingdom of War began to make plans on how to invade the Kingdom of Azereck.

His generals met in the palace and drew up a plan of attack that would be very difficult for a kingdom to repel even if they were at full strength. With the Kingdom of Azereck weakened by the civil war, it should not take very long to accomplish the task of invading the kingdom and destroying it.

The king of the kingdom of War wanted everything to be ready before he attempted to attack.