**Chapter 20**

Henry stared in awe at the general. She now stood before the cadets in a synchronize uniform. The outfit looked really good on her. Henry hadn’t noticed before, but she was a beautiful looking woman. Snapping out of his gaze, Henry could tell he wasn’t the only one who noticed. A good portion of the students couldn’t take their eyes off of Decson.

“I’m always surprised at how low the minds of everyone can sink?” Carol said to the rest of her group. “So she looks good, what’s the big deal?”

“It’s not that she looks good.” Napp said. He was staring down at the floor with his eyes “In our own way, we all look decent to someone else. It’s that she looks good in a way most of us haven’t seen yet.”

“Well if that’s the case, why aren’t you fixated on her looks, mister?”

“I am disciplining myself. By keeping my eyes close, I can resist whatever urges my body has and stay focus on the task at-ow Ow OW!”

Tsudo was pinching Napp on his elbow.

“Nice try. The only thing your body is urged to do is sleep. Stay focused. And Carol, don’t be so quick to dismiss looks. How we look says a lot about who we are.”

Carol pouted to herself. She didn’t like being scolded by Tsudo.

“Am I at least correct in saying these guys are way too excited?”

“…that much is true.”

Decson let out the nicest smile she could. It wasn’t difficult, she was genuinely feeling joy.

“So… I don’t really know how to play Synchronize. Can someone…”

Before she could finish her sentence, hands raised up. That worked better than expected. With the reaction she had been getting, Decson half expected them to just rush up and insist on it. She looked around at the faces. Most were eager, though for different reasons. Lust was in some of their eyes, appreciation was in others. That wasn’t what the general wanted. Her eyes darted to those who didn’t have their hands up. Eyes that were in a daze, eyes that were paying attention more to those around her and… Decson stopped searching. She found a pair of eyes, ones that were not only paying attention to her, but to everyone around. These eyes were not disinterested in her, they were too interested in everything. Unlike the others, these eyes wanted to help but saw no reason to unless needed.

“How about you?” Decson said.

“Her?” Henry almost screamed.

Tsudo smirked.

“What were you expecting?” The Green said, stepping forward. “Of course, I’d be happy to help, general.”

Decson immediately realized her mistake. This person cared about people, probably more than the others realized, but was horrible at showing it…

“Why are you three still raising your hand?” A student said. Decson recognized her from the files. Gia from the Techs. She was talking to the three from Team 8.

“Our arms got so comfortable we kept them there.” Thomas said.

“This is a new team salute we’re working on.” Ralph said.

“I was hoping the last five seconds of my life was a dream and I would still get chosen.” Zayle said.

“You’d get chosen? You can barely play Sync-ball, let alone teach it.” Ralph said.

“Well you still have trouble putting on your suit.” Zayle retorted.

“Well, at least you guys don’t have curly hair like I do.” Thomas said. “She’d never pick you if that happened.”

“You’re right!” Ralph cried. “I have so much to live for!”

Zayle put his face in his arms as though he were crying. “And I’m bald! I’m the most beautiful person in existence!”

“Your head shines like the sun that I’ve never seen before.”

Decson was smiling so hard, her cheeks were hurting. These guys had earned their name. If they wanted to, they could probably make Zordo smile.

“Well, Tsudo, let’s get started?”

**Chapter 20 end**

**Chapter 21**

Decson did her best to keep her smile. In reality, she was annoyed. Truly she had underestimated Zordo’s ability to teach. When she had asked if a student would help her learn the game, she had expected to be taught step by step the rules of the game. Instead, the student she had chosen simply transferred a file to her Display. When she opened it, she found the rules laid out:

**Synchronize (Sync Ball)**

**Goal**: Each team, consisting of three players, attempt to place the Sync-Ball into the other team’s goal. The center goal is worth two points while all others are worth one. First team to the desired number of points wins.

**Rules:**

1. A team must have three members. Failure results in the first penalty
2. Each team member must wear designated clothing to play. Failure results in the first penalty.
3. A player cannot be in possession/control of the ball for more than seven seconds. Failure results in the second penalty
4. The ball cannot be on one side for more than fifteen seconds. Failure results in the second penalty
5. A Player cannot be on an opponent’s side for more than five seconds. Failure results in the third penalty.

**Penalties**

1. Forfeit game
2. Ball forfeit to opponent
3. Foul Shot given to opponent

**Aces:** A team is allowed two aces, each of which can be activated once the game is started. After activation, each ace requires five minutes before using again, or 5 goals, whichever comes first. Aces are activated by clapping the hands. Once for the first Ace choice, twice for another.

1. Gravity – The gravity of the court is immediately turned off, effecting all players and the sync-ball.
2. Enough – Gravity increases, effecting all players and the sync-ball.
3. Double Time – The sync-ball’s speed immediately doubles.
4. Half Time – The sync-ball’s speed is immediately halved
5. Sticky – All players can cling to any surface for the next 20 seconds.

“Have you finished reading through it?” Tsudo said, smirking.

A presumptuous question. The girl didn’t ask whether or not Decson understood what she was reading or anything of the sort.

“Perhaps you could thoroughly explain some of these points.” Decson said.

Tsudo’s smirk did not fade.

“Did you not understand, something?”

The truth was, Decson had understood the game perfectly now that she had the file. But leaving it here would defeat the entire purpose of her test. She needed Tsudo to instruct her so she could determine her abilities of working with someone under her care.

“I’d like to hear your explanation. I’m sure with this file and your words, I’d understand it perfectly.”

“Interesting, Zordo showed that same file to all of us when we were just recruits and we all understood it just fine. We may have over exaggerated the genius of the Seconds. But Zordo and Savvi seemed to be on another level of intelligence all together. Maybe this is an anomaly.”

Decson was really trying hard to keep the smile she had.

“Perhaps a demonstration. If you were willing to play with me…”

“If you don’t understand the game, a demonstration **with** you would be pointless. It’d be much better if I did it with my team, or at least people who wouldn’t be useless in a match.”

That one had done it.

“Tsudo, why don’t we speak privately?”

Unable to respond, Tsudo felt her wrist being grabbed and tugged by the general. Despite her skinny disposition, this woman was strong and new how to handle a person.

“The rest of you begin playing while we’re gone.” Decson said, keeping her pleasant Don’t worry team 3, I’ll bring her right back.”

When the two were away from the rest of the recruits, Decson let herself loose.

“What is your problem, little miss?” she said low but fiercely.

“Excuse me?” Tsudo said just as low and stern.

“Every response you’ve given me has been an insult. You’re rude and very inconsiderate.”

“I’m rude? You asked me to teach you how to play Synchronize. And I did that.”

“But when I asked for further instructions, you refused. You wouldn’t even let me play.”

“Because I don’t want to waste my time!” Tsudo felt her voice getting louder and forced it back down. “I don’t know what kind of test you’re trying to throw at us, but you’re a general, and not only that, but a Second. You were trained by a Discrete and are probably one of the smartest people in all of Wig. What does it look like if I treat a person like that like a child?”

“Kind hearted? Even smart people have trouble doing some things. When you assume things about people you’re working with, you’re bound to make a huge mistake.”

“I didn’t assume. We’re not allowed to do that. I deduced, like I thought you wanted.”

“Deduced?”

“The way you acted helpless to do something which anyone of us here could do in our sleep despite you being a Second… I thought you were testing to see if we could see past your act: by treating you the way you deserve to be treated, like a general who’s skills outclass my own. I was just following the clues you left.”

Decson stopped speaking for a moment. She was still angry and still wanted to speak, but she knew from her training how devastating that could be. She thought about Tsudo’s words. She took a deep breath, and thought some more. How could she handle this?

“Zordo, this is all your fault.” She said. Tsudo heard her words, but knew they weren’t for her. Decson turned back to Tsudo.

“That... wasn’t the test I was going for.”

Tsudo lifted her eyebrows, but didn’t respond.

“I wanted you to teach me so I could test your ability to nurture. When dealing with people who need your help medically, you have to be able to keep them calm, to let them know what’s going on while not sounding threatening. I was trying to create a situation where I was completely under your submission.”

Tsudo absorbed this information. She thought about it, and about what she had done. Her face tried its best to hide it, but Decson could see what she was feeling. Failure.

“It was my fault.” The general continued. “It’s true that I wanted to test your ability to nurture, but I used deceit to do it which Zordo specifically taught you to see through. I treated you all like children, when I should’ve treated you like what you are… soldiers.”

Decson could see some of the confidence returning to the girl’s face. The two began heading back to the students.

“Tell me, what was it that first made you suspect me?”

“We’re always suspicious everyone, but what made me start searching was the fact that you called me by name. I had never met you before. It didn’t reveal your true intentions, but it told me you had probably seen files about us and were preparing some kind of test.”

“I never expected someone to see through me so easily.”

“It’s because I knew who you were. Had I met you randomly, I might’ve been fooled.”

“Hard to believe you all saw through my act. You all certainly acted fooled.”

“The others were fooled.” Tsudo said. Her eyebrows came down to glare at her classmates who were there. “They would’ve seen through you eventually, but it takes them a while to get stuff like this…”

“GO ZAYLE! BEAT THE TECH OUT OF THEM!” Henry yelled as the two came down the hall.

Tsudo sighed. “Of course, there are some who probably would’ve never figured it out.”

While the two had left, the rest of the recruits had decided who would be first to play a game. Since The Forefront was missing a player, they couldn’t watch their match of choice. However, there was another rivalry match that was always entertaining. Inside the room, the Techs and the Clowns were facing each other; the Clowns each had a smile on their face while each of the Techs did not.

Tsudo walked back over to where her team was. She slapped Napp upside the head, who was leaning against the wall asleep.

“Does she understand how to play now?” Carol said.

“We both taught each other a little something.” Tsudo said, leaning against the wall. “Another general left impressed.”

‘Yes.” Carol hissed, pumping her fist. “And when Vatti gets here, we’ll give her the show of a lifetime!”

“If you want to impress her, Carol, just scream as loud as you can. I’m sure she’s never heard anything like that.” Napp ruffled up Carol’s hair.

“Or maybe your sleep record. Seriously, Napp, how’re you sleeping all the time? It’s not natural to be that tired.”

“We can’t all be Nears, Carol. You and Tsudo will naturally have more energy than me.”

“That’s not how the Near gene works, genius.” Carol said. “Besides, look at all the other Leaders. You don’t see them sleeping nearly as much as you do.”

At that moment, Terri let out a loud yawn as he let himself fall asleep against the wall.

“I rest my case.” Napp said grinning. Tsudo slapped him across the head again.

“Terri, get yourself together. We’ve got to get ready to play a game.”

“I think I’ll take the fail, Terra.” Terri responded. He leaned up against the wall with his eyes closed.

Torri let out a yawn, similar to that of his big brother. He leaned up against the wall in as well.

“And there he goes. How many times do I have to ask you to set a good example? If not for yourself, at least do it for him.”

“You think you’d learn by now.” Terri said. He put his hands in his pockets and walked away. He was tired of hearing Terra’s complaints. As he reached the end of the hall, he noticed the presence of another person.

“You don’t have to pretend like you don’t care.” Decson said low enough so that only he could hear.

“And what would you know of pretending?”

“Well, for one, I can tell the difference between a real snore and whatever that noise you made in the classroom was.”

Terri grinned as he stopped walking. “Guess I should’ve known better than to try and trick one of the Seconds.”

Terri continued walking forward past Decson towards the stairway. His destination was the second floor, where his bedroom was. His head fell as he noticed another person walking up the opposite way.

“Terri.” Zordo said.

“General Zordo.”

“Either the clock on my Display is completely wrong, or you’re not due to be out of class for another couple of hours. Then again, it is curious that you are coming from the fifth floor.”

“You can blame that on your friend up there, sir.”

Zordo looked up to see Decson leaning against the rail. She had a cheeky smile on her face.

“Well, that explains where you’re coming from. Your departure, however, is still a mystery. You wouldn’t be abandoning your lesson, would you?”

“I relieved him.” Decson interrupted. “That young man isn’t well enough to participate in the exercise I prepared for the student. His team is excused from the exercise. Besides, I already learned what I needed from them.”

Zordo was quiet for a moment.

“Well, seeing that the head doctor of Green deems you unfit, who am I to say otherwise?”

Terri continued down the stairway, but before he made it two steps down, he heard Zordo’s voice once more.

“And Terri, make sure you get some sleep. You look horrible.”

Terri smirked as he walked down towards his room.

Zordo continued to walk up the stairs.

“You could at least pretend you don’t know what’s really going on.” Decson said. “What are you doing here?” Zordo could hear a crack in her voice. That wasn’t the question she wanted to ask.

“I came to check on your progress with the students.”

“Ah, the students.”

“You sound disappointed.”

“Well, it only takes a couple of weeks to travel here, which I did because you insisted I do so, and yet you weren’t here to greet me when I arrived. Why should I be upset?”

Zordo couldn’t follow her logic. It’s true that he had told her and the rest of the generals to come, but he hadn’t given them a definite time. How could he have known to greet her?

“And now that you’ve finally decided to show your face, there’s no ‘hello, Decson’ or ‘how are you, Decson’ but rather ‘how are my students doing?’”

Again, her logic confused him. She was the one who spoke first. Had he been given the chance, he may have greeted her.

“Well, I understand. Now that you’re mister big time teacher, you don’t have time for your old teammates. You know, those of us who were there before we took our field trip to the surface.”

Decson never hid her emotions well from Zordo. Her voice held sarcasm while her body held fear. Zordo couldn’t grasp what was happening, but he knew what to do. Before Decson realized what was happening, Zordo had his arms wrapped around her.

“What… what are you doing?” Decson said, flustered. “You hate hugs. You scold me every time I try to give you one.”

“Maybe so.” Zordo said. “But something is clearly wrong with you and you’re clearly not going to come outright and say it. Knowing you, and your affinity for hugs, I concluded this would help. Was I correct?”

A chuckle forced its way out of Decson’s mouth.

“Yes, this helps a lot.”

Zordo let go of Decson. “Now, about those students.”

Another chuckle forced its way out.

“Okay, you heatless little boy. Your students are surprisingly fairing well.”

“You expected less?”

“When I came in seeing cadets who actually had emotion and cared about one another, I doubt you had done any teaching at all.”

“Savvi said something similar. Apparently, you’re all expecting me to create an army of miniature Zordos. “

“That would be great for facing off against the Discretes, yeah.”

“I learned a long time ago that my competence is a unique feature that many do not possess, present company included…”

“Just going to ignore that one.”

“…but it does not mean everyone doesn’t have something they can contribute. Speaking of which, did you bring the chemical I requested?”

“I suppose that’s my purpose: to fetch things for you.”

This time, her voice showed sarcasm. The dealable Decson had resurfaced.

“I gave it to Magatha. I usually get requests like this from Savvi.”

“That’s not surprising.”

“What do you need it for… if you don’t mind me asking.”

“I’d be glad to talk about it, but it seems your absence has not gone unnoticed.”

Decson turned around. She could tell which cadets had just turned away from staring in her direction.

“We’ll talk more after the examination.”

“Assuming I’m still around.”

“Listen you heartless little boy, I am not leaving until you and I have a nice conversation like good friends do.”

And with that Decson, walked back towards the cadets. That wasn’t fair. Zordo hadn’t had a chance to respond. Not that he blamed her. It was her best tactic for winning any argument the two would have.

Zordo headed downstairs and through the door of the hall of the teacher’s rooms. He knocked on the door second farthest on the left, directly next to his room.

“Come in.”

The door slid open, allowing Zordo to enter. He did not entered fully, but leaned in forcing the door to stay open. Like all the bedrooms in the building, Magatha’s consisted of a closet closests to the door and a bed right next to it, giving very little room for walking. Magatha was on the opposite side of her bed sitting at her desk. Her Display lay flat in front of her as.

“Decson is here.” Magatha said without looking up. “I believe she would like to have words with you.”

Zordo remembered when Magatha needed her eyes to tell who was near. Her observation skills had come a long way since then.

“I’ve already talked with her.”

Magatha’s fingers stopped for a small moment. Zordo couldn’t tell if she had done it as a response to what he had said or if it was a coincidence.

“Do you have the chemical I asked her for?”

Magatha completely stopped typing. This time there was no doubt of what caused it.

“Decson left it in my possession, yes.”

“Would you like to know what it’s for?”

Magatha was quiet for a moment. She still hadn’t turned to look at Zordo.

“I remember a time where you wouldn’t have told me, no matter how much I asked. People used to have to work to get to know you. Now, anyone can get close to you. The challenge is gone.”

Magatha had revealed more than she intended to. Knowing Zordo, he’d see right through her words, realize what she really meant and tell her how foolish she was being. She waited for those harsh words. There were none; there was only silence. Magatha turned, shocked to see Zordo gone. The space where he stood was empty, as though he had never been there. She hurried to the position and thrust open her closet door. She had placed Decson’s vile within arm’s reach inside it. It was gone. Magatha sucked her teeth in. She didn’t even have to tell Zordo where it was, somehow… he had already figure it…

“You should’ve known better.”

Magatha’s heart raced as she turned to see Zordo sitting in the chair she had just gotten up from.

“…how? …when?”

Zordo stood up from the seat.

“I could explain to you how I knew the location.”

He approached Magatha slowly. The closer he got, the more helpless she felt.

“I could explain how I disappeared and reappeared.”

Zordo was now right in front of Magatha. Despite their similarities in height, he seemed to her like he was towering her.

“I could explain everything to you and I’m sure you’d understand it better than anyone else.”

Magatha felt helpless pressed up against the wall. Zordo’s arm came up against her head. His lips came to her ears. He spoke softly…

“But you like a challenge. So you figure it out.”

With the chemical in hand, Zordo departed the room.

Magatha was left, breathing heavily against the wall. She could still feel her heart beating frantically. She brought her hand up to it, double checking her conditions. Her lips formed a smile as she began reliving what she had just witnessed.

**Chapter 21 End**