**Chapter 27**

Eve took a sip from her cup. “Thank you for the tea, Nora. It’s delicious.”

Eve sat in a chair in the center of the training room with Nora sitting next to her. Throughout the room, the students were lined up in their respected teams, walking back and forth across the room.

“You will all follow Gia now.”

The Second had been calling names for the past hour. Every name she called, the teams were required to walk across the room at their pace while staying in the order they had been placed in.

“There’s got to be more to this test.” Henry whispered. He had been put in the middle with behind Portia and Ryan, with Ryan leading. “I am bored out of my mind.”

“There probably is, but until we see it, we have to keep walking.” Ryan responded.

“My feet are starting to hurt.” Cynthia said low. “Is this test ever going to go anywhere?”

“I agree completely. It’s bad enough we have to trample around backwards and forwards like this, but I think we’ve made it clear we can do this task.”

Samantha blew air out of her mouth towards her forehead.

“I think the students are bored.” Nora said, taking a sip from her own cup.

“If they are bored, that is their problem to solve.” Eve took another sip from her cup. “This really is delicious, what did you put in it?”

“Mixed the sugar which a pinch, just a pinch of a special ingredient Zordo showed me.”

“Of course. Apparently everything worth while has something to with Zordo.”

“Big O. Did you hear that?” Carol whispered.

“Yes. You guys want to have a little fun with this?”

“No.” Napp said from behind Carol. “At least not your kind of fun. I’m thinking about following Celphae’s lead.”

Tsudo looked over at team 5. The person in front, Celphae, was walking with her eyes closed and mouth wide open. It appeared as though she was sleep walking.

“Tsudo.” Eve said.

“Well, she’s in for a bit of a surprise. Guys, make sure you keep up.” Tsudo suddenly took off running.

It took Carol and Napp a moment, but they eventually took off and caught up with the new pacing leader. The rest of the teams weren’t as prepared. Ryan was the first to notice the difference.

“Henry. Port. Let’s go.”

“Well this is unfair, Tsudo’s team is the fastest of us all.” Portia.

“That’s probably what she’s planning. With her in charge, everyone else will fail.” Henry said.

“Henry. Don’t go so fast. You need to stay behind Port.”

“That’s not my fault, Port run faster.”

“Kyousk.” Celphae said “Grab Capry’s arm. Capry, you grab mine.”

Capry and Kyousk did as they were told.

“Wait, so you weren’t really sleepiIIING!?”

Celphae sprinted as fast as she could, pulling the other two with her.

The other two understood what she was doing.”Phae, let go of my arm.”

“Can’t. I’m the fastest runner. If I let go, you two’ll fall behind.”

“Capry’s right, you can catch up to Big O. Leave us.”

“You boys speak such silly nonsense. I can’t leave you guys behind. We pass as a group or we fail as one.”

Soon, the room of neatly organized marching teenagers became full of scurrying boots as everyone struggled to keep up with Tsudo as well as stay in the order they’d been placed in.

“Tsudo’s trying to show off again.” Nora said. “If she wasn’t so good at everything, I’m pretty sure the other students would kick her butt for making them work.”

The green took another sip of her tea.

“If you want it to stop, General, I suggest you hurry up and call another name.”

Eve, with her eyes closed, drank from her cup.

“Now why would I do that?” She said calmly. “It’s finally gotten interesting.”

The general reached for the sync weapon handheld on her hip. “War, Nora, no matter if it’s fighting or scavenging, can become a very chaotic place. You can’t just change the rules because the person in charge isn’t moving to your speed.”

Eve set the dial and pointed the weapon away from her. She grinned at Nora.

“You have to be able to adapt.”

Without facing forward, Eve shot the weapon in the air. The beam headed straight towards Carol who was able to notice it at the last second. She let out a small yell as she dodged it.

“Don’t slow down, Carol.” Tsudo said.

Eve let out another shot. This time it hit Geol in the leg who let out a yell.

“Are you okay?” Malla said, who was behind him.

“Yeah, no point in worrying about it let’s go.”

“What are you doing?” Nora screamed.

“Shooting the recruits.” Eve said. She let out a few more shots which were followed by the same number of screams. “Normally for this type of training I’d set the level to 10, but I’m guessing Zordo would have problems with that.”

“He’d have a problem with you with shooting the students, period.” Carol said in distress.

Eve let out several more shots.

“Hmm… you might be right. Perhaps I should use grenades instead?”

“Okay, I’ve seen enough. All of you stop.” Eve stood up, put her sync weapon back on her hip and replaced it with her Display. “You guys are done.”

“Done?” Coor said. His team halted to a stop “What, is that it?”

“Yes.” Eve said continuing to type on her display, pausing only to take another sip of tea. “You guys can go play Synchronize or whatever it is you do on your spare time.”

Eve left the room followed by Nora.

“Um… okay.” Henry said.

“You’re all welcome.” Tsudo said.

“You think you had something to do with this?” Extre asked.

“She probably thinks she’s responsible for the Silence.” Terra laughed.

“Oh ha ha.” Tsudo said. “But maybe you noticed that I was the last one the general called before ending our activity. If you guys gave your all when asked to do something, maybe the generals would be impressed by your moves as well.”

“Impressing at the expense of others.” Ryan said. “Thanks but no thanks.”

“My team kept up with me. So did you. It’s not my fault if trying my best makes others look bad.”

“No one acknowledges that we kept up with her perfectly.” Straw said to his team.

“You know how they are.” Geol said “It’s all about showing off to them. No one’s better at doing that than the Forefront and the Stars.”

“Well if anything, we can at least be thankful for a short day.” Napp said. He yawned and began to head to the exit. “Now we’ve got the rest of the day to do whatever we want…”

“And what we want is to use today to train.” Tsudo stepped in between Napp and the exit.

“Aaaaww.”

“Don’t ‘aaaaww’ me. The other generals have made their visits. Vatti is the only one remaining.”

“They probably saved the best for last.” Carol added.

“We’ve done what we had to do for the other generals. All that will be for nothing if we don’t impress Vatti. She’s the one in charge of actually fighting Discretes. She could test us on anything. Guns. Technology. Physical fitness…”

“Isn’t that redundant?” Napp asked

“Regardless. We will be ready.”

“And the rest of us will be NOT killing ourselves.” Extre said. “You guys might want to remember that we’ve got voting soon.”

“Because that’s going to be a hard choice.” Carol said sarcastically. “Hmm, Napp, who are you going to vote to lead our team?”

Napp remained silent with his eyes closed. Tsudo smacked him upside the head and left.

“You guys meet me in my room so we can do some studying.”

Carol exited the room excitedly while Napp followed with his head hung down.

“Oh that’s right!” Thomas screamed. “We have to turn in our votes for who’s going to lead our group!”

The loud noise got the room stirring. Some groups began to depart while others stayed. All, however, were discussing what was on everyone’s minds.

“You guys are voting for me, right?” Henry joked. He and the rest of the Stars were walking back towards the center hall.

“I choose to remain silent.” Ryan replied back with a smile.

“Maybe I’ll vote for myself.” Portia said. “If either of you are in charge, I’ll never get to the Department of Technology.”

“You sure you can handle that?” Henry teased. “Every time someone needs to talk to us, they’ll go to you. Every mission, every briefing, you’ll be the one responsible for doing all the talking.”

Portia body shook as she took her first step down the stairs. “Or maybe I won’t do that. It’s not like the Department we get into depends on who we choose.”

“Meh, you never know.” Ryan said. “Zordo’s always giving these secret tests. The other Seconds seem to like to do that too. Just keep in mind what Zordo said. The group Captain will be responsible for everything that happens, good or bad. They have to always keep what’s best for the group and what’s best for Green.”

“If that’s the case, the choice is pretty easy.” Portia said. They had reached the floor where their rooms lay.

“You guys want to play Synchronize later?” Henry asked. “We’ve got the whole day now.”

“Send me a message later.” Portia said. “I’m still studying that floating shield the Techs made during Savvi’s trip here. Once I’m done with that, I’ll join you.”

“Well, can’t play with two people. I’ll probably just train or something until Portia’s ready.”

“Wait. Ryan, if you’re not doing anything, come help me look for my Display in my room.”

“You lost it again?” Portia asked.

“I don’t know why you even ask anymore. I’m pretty sure a week hasn’t gone by that Henry hasn’t lost his.”

Portia left the other two and headed towards her room. Ryan and Henry made their way to Henry’s.

The door swooshed open as Henry and Ryan walked inside. Ryan noted the usual sign of clothes thrown all over the place.

“Henry, do you ever think the five seconds it takes to pick up a pair of pants is worth it? Where was the last place you saw your Display?”

“Um… this room? Maybe?”

Ryan sighed and began brushing clothes aside.

“Be thankful we got today off or I’d abandon you.”

Henry made his way to the desk on the opposite side of the room and pushed the junk on top to the side.

“So Ryan, between you and me, who are you voting for?”

“Whoever bribes me the best.” Ryan joked. “The bidding starts at a clean room. Portia’s has a big lead on you.”

Henry chucked.

“Seriously, though, who are you voting for?”

“Seriously?’ Ryan repeated.

Henry sat on his unmade bed.

“Yeah.”

Ryan looked up.

“Well, the votes are anonymous and I think Zordo made them that way for a reason so it’s probably better if I don’t tell you.”

“It’s not a rule, Ryan. It’s just a preference. Come on, we’re friends and teammates, you can tell me.”

“It’s not that simple, Henry.” Ryan said. He stood up and opened the closet that was behind him. “You won’t be able to vote if we can’t find your Display. Those things are supposed to be your own personal sidekicks.”

“It’s not me, is it?”

Ryan picked up a pile of clothes and piled them outside of the closet.

“What?”

“The person you’re voting for, it’s not me, is it?”

Henry stopped cleaning.

“That’s a mighty big assumption.”

“Well why else would you be so defensive about it?”

“Maybe because I’m supposed to be, Henry. Seems to me that you’re that’s unnecessarily offensive.”

“I just want to know who you’re voting for!”

“And I told you, we’re not supposed to tell each other.”

“That’s just your excuse!”

Ryan grew quiet for a moment. “Alright. I can’t find your Display. You have fun searching for it by yourself.”

Ryan started towards the door controls but Henry slammed his arm in the way.

“Henry. I don’t know what’s gotten into you. But move.”

“You got to vote for me to lead the group.”

“What? Henry I...”

“I know you’re not going to and neither is Portia. That’s why I need you to.”

“Henry, you don’t know anything. Move out of the way.”

“Just listen to me, Ryan. Just listen and I’ll move.”

Ryan took a deep breath. He could force Henry to move if he wanted to and his instincts told him to do just that. But he let himself calm down for a moment. Something was wrong with his friend, he needed to find out what.

“Okay, Henry.” Ryan sat down on the bed. “What do you have to say?”

“Okay.” Henry said. He swallowed before speaking another word. His voice was shaky, as though he didn’t want to say any of the words that were coming from his mouth. “You know how I’m always seeing the teachers for my actions. None of them, not a single one of them thinks I’m ready to join the war with the rest of you. They told me this from their own mouths. Zordo is still letting me graduate because we’re passing as a team, but that’s not going to change anything.”

Henry took a pause to try and get his words together.

“I told you about how I was born a criminal on the surface. My dad made a stupid decision and my mom declared me a criminal. Up there, when you’re a Black band, people hate your very existence more than anyone else. This is a world filled with people who want to kill each other, and they thought I deserved to die without even knowing why. No one gives you a chance to prove yourself when you’re what I was.”

Henry couldn’t hold back the tears that were coming from his eyes.

“Down here, I thought I finally had a chance to prove something. When my band turned Green, I thought I could finally prove I was worth something. But even here, they treat me like a child who has no idea what he’s doing. I’ve got more experience fighting in a war than almost all people in Green, and yet they stuck me here with the students. Vatti is a general and I’m not even a soldier yet. We came from the same place, we’re practically the same age. I don’t know if it’s because of my mom or everyone is secretly like Big O and thinks I’m worse than trash, but no one is giving me a fair shot. I’ve got Discrete blood flowing through me. My birth dad was a Great One. I’m capable of great things.”

Henry took a breath and sniffed.

“That’s why I need you to vote for me, Ryan. You’re the best fighter here. Once we’re out in the actual war, you’ll have plenty of chances to prove you’re great. Shoot, everyone here already thinks of you as a Discrete killer. This is the one time I can show people I’m worth something. I need to be the captain of the group. Port won’t do it. After what I said about her selfish want to join the Department of Technology, she’ll never vote for me. But you and I both want to get in the Department of Defense. Vote for me and I’ll prove that I’m a great captain. I just need someone to give me a chance.”

Henry was done. He stepped away from the door controls, allowing Ryan to exit should he wished. Ryan remained silent. He had just gained a lot of information. His view on many things had been altered. There were a lot of things he wanted to say, but very few of them were things he felt were appropriate for the moment. He stood up from the bed and exited the room.

**Chapter 27 End**