Chapter 31

Henry heard the knock on his door. Despite the eagerness he felt, he made sure to take his time approaching it. He opened the door to the two he expected to see.

“You ready?” Ryan asked.

“Zordo says we are so, we are.” Henry turned off the light and stepped out of the room, but not before Portia had a chance to peek inside. The three friends began walking down the hall.

“You didn’t want to clean up, Henry? Just this once.” Portia asked.

“What’s the point? It’s my room all the way to the end.”

“I’m pretty sure someone else has to use that room.” Ryan said.

“And I’m pretty sure Magatha and the rest are going to reclean the rooms anyway.”

“I hope you didn’t lose anything important.” Portia said. “You’ll most likely never see that room again.”

“Nope. Got my necklace and that’s pretty much all I need. Are you guys bringing anything?”

“Nothing to bring.” Ryan said. “Zordo said we’d only need standard equipment for the trip. Anything else we can get at whatever Department we wind up at.”

“Oh, I really hope it’s the Technology.”

“I doubt that. We failed Savvi’s test, there’s no way we’re getting in there. I’m still going for the Defense. What’s the point of being trained to fight Discretes if we’re never going to fight them?”

“Because that logic makes sense. Vatti didn’t even show up to give us a test. Besides, I figured out what was wrong with the handheld and I fixed it.”

“Vatti’s here today, though.” Ryan said. “Zordo told me all the Generals have been here since he returned.”

“I saw most of them.” Henry said. “I didn’t see Vatti.”

The three made their way down the stairs and to the first floor to the room they usually studied in.

“Do my eyes deceive me?” Tsudo said as they entered the room. “The Stars are actually on time.”

“Ha ha ha.” Henry said sarcastically.

“You won Verde’s knife, Tsudo, isn’t that enough. You think maybe today of all days you can not do this.”

Tsudo took out the kunai Zordo had given her. “Hey, I didn’t care who took the knife. It was the garbage, there, that insisted we have a Sync Ball tournament to decide who keeps it. So, you guys still think you’re candidates for the Department of Defense?”

Henry, Ryan and Portia sat down in their seats.

“Naturally.” Henry said. “I bet by the end of the year, we’ll have killed more Discretes than you could’ve dreamed.”

“You’re welcome.” Gia said.

“For…?” Henry asked.

“For all the technology, weapons, armor and pretty much every other tool you’ll have gotten from us in the Department of Technology.”

“You know what would be hilarious?” Thomas said. “If we were accepted into the Department of Technology and the Techs weren’t.”

“Oh the horror.” Samantha said. “If the Clowns make it in and we don’t, we should just surrender to the Discretes right now.”

“Do you guys think we’ll make it into the Department of Defense.” Torri asked his older siblings.

“It’s possible.” Terra said. “Perhaps if we’ve showed Zordo our best. I don’t think we’ve done that enough times, though.”

“It doesn’t really matter.” Terri said. “Wherever we go, we’ll still be helping Wig-Or-Log. If no one does the small jobs, the big jobs can’t be done either.”

“Where do you guys think we’ll see first?” Celphae asked. “Do you think we can visit our parents? Do you think we’ll see the Discrete headquarters.”

She let out a loud gasp.

“Or maybe we’ll get to go the surface. Henry, what’s the surface like!”

“I’m pretty sure I’ve told you a thousand times, Phae.”

“It’s the last day, Henry. Just one more time.”

“Yeah, Henry.” Kyousk said. “How can you say no to that face?”

Henry sighed.

“The surface is a lot hotter than it is down here. That’s because of the sun. Brightest light in the sky because the surface has to make it’s own roofs. Then there’s the land. Plants and animals everywhere. IT varies depending on where you are. My birthdad, Atsuma, lived in the mountains, giant rocks that are taller than skyscrapers. They don’t have a lot of plants. My home was like that, but it was surrounded by plants. There are places with rivers and lakes, giant holes filled with water. I’ve been all over the surface. It’s different in so many ways.”

“I want to see it so badly.” Celphae said.

“You might want to wrap around the Source, first.” Tsudo said. “We’ve barely even seen what’s all down here.”

“Once we get into the Department of Defense, we’ll see all of the Source on our patrols.” Carol said excitedly.

“Whoopie.” Napp said sarcastically.

“Five more minutes guys.” Ritch said.

“I think I’m going to go crazy.” Zayle said.

“Too late for that.” Ralph added “But I might go crazier.”

“I’M SO EXCITED!” Thomas screamed.

Cynthia covered her ears in pain.

“Just five more minutes, Cyndy.” Samatha said. “Then never again.”

“Three more minutes.”

“Or maybe, we’ll discover something beyond Wig-Or-Log.” Celphae said “Oh I can’t wait, you guys!”

She hugged her teammates tightly who both enjoyed the experience.

“One more minute.”

“And thus, our days of cadets are over.” Henry said. “See you guys on the other side.”

At the same moment, everyone received a message on their Displays. All of them received the same message.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Team** | **Team Captain** |  |  | **Department** |
| 1 | Geol | Malla | Straw | Scavenging |
| 2 | Ritch | Cord | Extre | Scavenging |
| 3 | Tsudo | Carol | Napp | Defense |
| 4 | Terri | Terra | Torri | Medicine |
| 5 | Celphae | Capry | Kyousk | Scavenging |
| 6 | Ryan | Henry | Portia | Intelligence |
| 7 | Gia | Samantha | Cynthia | Technology |
| 8 | Thomas | Zayle | Ralph | Medicine |

Chapter 31 End

Chapter 32

“WE DID IT!” Carol shouted. “WE DID IT, GUYS! WE DID IT!”

“Hey Carol, did you guys do it?” Thomas asked.

“JOKE ALL YOU WANT, CLOWNS! I DON’T CARE!”

“Oh thank goodness.” Napp said, his hands covering his ears. “That would’ve been so annoying if we had did all that work and didn’t get into the Department of Defense. And what a shocker, Big O is our captain.”

“THANK YOU, BIG O!” Carol ran to hug Tsudo. “YOU BROUGHT US HERE! YOU REALLY DID!”

Tsudo chuckled. She patted her friend on the head, letting her continue her cheer in her shirt.

“WR DRD IRT! WR ERKTRLY DRD IRT!”

Napp removed the hands from his ears. “Is she… cr…”

“Shush.” Tsudo said. “Let her have this. She worked hard for it. We all did.”

On the opposite side of the room, three females were also responding to the news.

“Two years, girls.” Gia said. “It took us two years of work.”

“And it’s all paid off, Gia.” Samantha said. “We’ll be working directly under Savvi with the most advance technology in all of Green.”

Cynthia rested her head on her desk.

“Poor thing.” Samatha said. “The anticipation did a work on her. It’s okay, Cindy. You can relax now.”

Thomas scratched his blond head to show he was confused.

“You guys voted for me, as the captain. You’re stupider than I thought.”

“Hey, whoever’s captain gets blamed for everything when they go wrong.” Ralph said.

“We got placed in Medicine.” Zayle pointed out. “Either General Decson really liked us, or the others really hated us.”

“Hmm. She was pretty easy on the eyes.” Thomas said. “Maybe I can use the fact that I was voted captain to win her over.”

Ralph grabbed his Display and started pressing buttons as fast as he could. “How do I change my vote! I need to change my vote!”

“Scavenging!” Celphae said. “Guys, we’re headed into the ruins! Ooh, maybe we’ll find the tombs of the Firsts.”

“Phae, did you see?” Kyousk asked. “You’re the captain! We voted you cap…”

“Yeah.” Capry interrupted. “Aren’t you excited?”

Celphae looked back at her Display. “Hmm, I guess. Hey, the scavengers go all over. Maybe we WILL get to go to the surface!”

Capry and Kyousk looked at each other in disappointment.

“Medicine?” Terra said. She slammed her Display on the desk. “What are those generals thinking?”

“I figured you’d be happy.” Terri said. “It’s in the back of the fighting, out of the way from most of the danger, and we can easily keep an eye on each other.”

“I suppose.” Terra said. “But we only know basic medical stuff. And we couldn’t even take Decson’s test.”

Torri sighed. “Aw, I really wanted to be in Defense.”

Terri reached behind his sister and lightly shoved his brother.

“As if you’d be good enough to fight a Discrete.” He said jokingly.

Geol reached out and shook Ritch’s hand. Both their teams had migrated to the space within their desks.

“Congratulations.”

“Don’t know if I really earned it.” Ritch said. “Today’s the day where everything gets more difficult.”

“We all have our place in the war.” Malla said. “It could’ve been worse.”

“I’m going to be honest.” Cord said. “Even though I wanted to be in Defense like everyone else, now I’m actually relieved that I’m not.”

“I know how you feel. Zordo’s pep talk wasn’t all sunshine.” Straw said. “Still, only one team from the specially trained soldiers is going into Defense?”

“Well, you can’t say they didn’t earn it.”Geol said. “Big O’s and the Forefront have been number one since day one.”

“It’s got to be hard the Stars, though.” Extre said. “No one’s ever even heard of their Department.”

“Intelligence?” Henry asked. “ Um… Port, I think my Display is broken.”

“No, Henry, it is not.” Portia held up her Display. “Mine says the exact same thing.”

“What in the Wig is the Department of Intelligence?” Henry asked.

“Your guess is as good as mine, Henry.” Ryan said. “Maybe it’s an error in the system.”

“It’d better be.” Henry demanded. “I didn’t work for two years to not fight Discretes.” He took his necklace off and began spinning the chain around his finger. “And if the Department is wrong, that captain part might be wrong too.”

Ryan was about to say something, but before he could, the door open. A woman he had never seen before walked in firmly. Everyone turned, but no one recognized her. She didn’t look too much older than them. What was odd was the shield on her back. It wasn’t an elec-shield, but an actual physical shield.

“You guys the new soldiers?” The woman asked. Before they could answer, she spoke again. “Team 3. Tsudo, Carol and Napp.”

The team came forward when they heard their names being called.

“I’m general Vatti.” The woman said. “Do you all have your things? If so we’ll be leaving immediately.”

Tsudo had not realized who this person was. She straightened herself and told herself she should’ve.

“Yes. Yes, mam. We’re ready to go.”

“Then let’s go.” Vatti said. “We’ll be traveling for a few weeks stopping at various checkpoints along the way. I trust you all are properly trained in magni-boots.”

“Yes, mam.” Tsudo answered.

“Good.” Vatti said. “Let’s go.”

She turned to immediately exit, but when the door opened, Zordo was blocking her path. Vatti jumped slightly. She thought at the speed she headed towards the room, he would’ve have caught up so quickly.

“General Vatti.” Zordo said. “Before you charge out of here, might I see these soldiers off before you take them away from me forever?”

Vatti swallowed slightly. She moved out of the way allowing Zordo to come into the room. She expected only Zordo to come in, but the other generals came in.

“I’ll be waiting outside.” Vatti said, exiting the room.

“General Zordo!” Carol screamed. “We did it! We’re in!”

“Yes, I’m aware, Carol.” Zordo said. “I’m the one who sent you the announcement.”

“General Zordo.” Tsudo said. “Thank you for your instructions.”

“Captain Tsudo.” Zordo said. “Thank you for your time. Take care of your teammates. Your new commanding officer.”

Tsudo and the rest of the Forefront headed for the exit. Before they made it out, though, Henry rushed towards Zordo.

“General, Zordo. Wait. I think there’s something wrong with the Announcement you sent.”

He showed it to Zordo who looked at it.

“There’s nothing wrong with it, Henry. That’s exactly the message I meant to sent.”

“But it’s…”

“We’ll have plenty of time to talk later, Henry. I need to address the other soldiers.”

Henry paused for a moment. He ran out the hall.

“Henry!” Ryan called.

“Don’t worry, he’ll be back.” Zordo said.

Henry jogged down the hall to catch up to the group. They were at the base of the stairs.

“Hey. Vatti!” Henry called out.

Tsudo sighed through her nose.

“That’s General Vatti, Henry.”

“I wasn’t talking to you, Big O.”

“And that’s Captain Tsudo.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Vatti said. “I never really cared for these titles. What do you want, kid?”

“Kid? Vatti, it’s me Henry.”

“Nice to meet you, Henry. What do you want? Are you part of this team?”

“Absolutely not.” Tsudo said. “If you spend too much time around trash, you’ll smell.”

“Got it. You two don’t like each other. What do you want, kid?”

“Vatti, do you seriously not remember me? Henry? We joined Green at the exact same time. I was with you when the Discretes attacked and your friend Baas di…”

“What! Do! You! Want?!” Vatti yelled. Her face was angry and her tone had lost its tolerance.

“I… I just wanted to know if you knew about this mistake.” Henry said. He held up his Display.

“What am I looking at?”

“The list of teams and their Departments, our general is clearly busy, garbage, get to the point.”

“Vatti, we entered the Source at the same time. You put my team in the Department of Defense, right? This thing that says we’re at Intelligence, it’s supposed to say Defense, right.”

“Wow, he’s so desperate.” Carol laughed.

Vatti opened her mouth to speak, but immediately closed it. She pointed her fingers up at the sky

Henry smiled. “You remembered something.”

“I do now.” Vatti said simply. “You were that annoying black band. The one I got locked up in Orange with.”

Henry’s smile disappeared.

“I mean, the teams. Do you remember anything about the teams and how you arranged them?”

“Oh, I didn’t arrange the teams.” Tsudo said. “Zordo was the one who did that. All the rest of us did was say our preferences.”

Henry could feel himself starting to panic. He spoke quickly, hoping to salvage the situation. “And what was your preference? You should have more than one tea…”

“I have one team because I preferred one team. I asked for the best and that was it. The next thing I knew, Zordo assigned me with the Forefront. Now your friend here, or enemy, whatever, made a very clear point I am clearly in a hurry. So I’ll ask again, are you part of this team? Are you what I asked for? “

“Are you the best, Henry?” Tsudo asked.

Henry looked desperately at the members of the Forefront. He looked down and away.

“No.”

“Well then.” Vatti said. “You’re not part of the Department of Defense.”

Chapter 35 End

Chapter 36

Henry walked slowly back into the room with his head held down. He made sure no one could see his face. Once he got to his usual seat between Ryan and Portia, he put his head down and left it there.

“Celphae.” Zordo said. “You’ve been hugging me for five minutes.”

“I can’t help it.” Celphae said. “I’m going to miss you so much.”

“I’m sure you will, Celphae, but your new commanding officer General Eve is known for her strict time schedule. I’m sure your excessive display of emotion is…”

“I’m sorry, hold on a second, did you just say ‘excessive display of emotion?’” Decson asked.

“Wow, he really is uncomfortable.” Magatha said. “I haven’t heard him speak like that in a while.”

Eve snickered.

“You know, there is a part of me that is counting every second that I’m standing here and how much productivity that it’s costing me. But the sight of Zordo having to show ‘excessive display of emotion’ is making it all worth it. Celphae, this is a command from your new commanding officer, take as much time as you want.”

Celphae thrusted Zordo forward.

“No, it’s okay, I’m done.” Celphae pointed to Capry and Kyousk. “You two, we are out!”

“Yes, captain.” Capry and Kyousk followed Celphae out the door.

Zordo straightened his jacket.

“She has no idea where she’s going.”

“That’s why I chose that group.” Eve said. “Nothing like a little chaos to keep things fun.”

“Says miss organized and calculating.” Savvi said.

“Oh I love my organization. It’s why I chose those six.” Eve pointed to The Gen and the Sticks. “I’m sure they’ll do exactly what I tell them and give me no trouble.”

“You got that right.” Geol said.

“Order is safe, but it’s boring. That girl. She’s fun. You six, do you have any emotion you’d like to excessively display?”

“We didn’t get called the Sticks because we display emotions.”

“In that case, I will see you all at the next meeting. You six, follow me, and you, Cord, you look like you hate babysitting. Make sure the Weirdos keep up.”

Eve walked out of the room followed.

“We’ve wasted so much time here.”

“Her final last words and yet she forgets who has to TRAVEL THE FARTHEST!” Savvi said. “Techs, you want to hug too or…”

“We invent, we don’t hug.” Gia said. “In fact, the sooner we get out of here the better.”

“But we are polite.” Samatha pressured. “Thank you, General Zordo.”

Cynthia bowed her head. The three headed for the exit, but before they could get there, Zayle, Thomas and Ralph stepped between them.

“And here we go.” Gia said. “You Clowns couldn’t just let us leave.”

“One last joke to pull?” Samatha asked.

“Men.” Thomas ordered. “Present arms.”

All three opened their arms wide.

“What is this nonsense?” Gia asked.

“We know you guys pretty much hate us.” Thomas said.

“Hate is a very strong word.” Samatha said.

“But not that far off.” Gia ensured.

“Well, regardless, you guys made our lives exciting these past two years. So we were hoping for one last gesture. No jokes. No pranks. Just a friendly gesture.”

“Genuinely?” Gia said.

“Genuinely.” Thomas said.

The Techs hesitated for a moment. They looked at each other with uncertainty. Their eyes locked and each nodded. They were all agreed.

“No.” Gia said.

The clowns dropped their arms.

“You boys have fun.”

“We always do.”

Savvi and the Techs exited the room.

“They’ll miss us.” Thomas said.

“And I them.” Zayle said, pretending to cry.

“Don’t worry.” Ralph said. “I’m sure we can find someone else to annoy.”

“Don’t make eye contact.” Terra said. She lead her brothers out of the room.

“Why was I voted captain again?” Terri asked.

“Wait!” Ralph called out. He and the other Clowns chased the Siblings out. “We have jokes we have to test on you!”

“This is my next forever.” Decson sigh. “What was I thinking? See you guys when I do.” And with that, she exited the room.

The only ones left inside the room were Zordo and Magatha standing at the front and the Stars sitting at their desks.

“Now then.” Zordo said. “You all must have some questions.”

“Lots of questions.” Henry said. He kept his head on his desk but didn’t lift it up. “You couldn’t just fail us? You had to make up a Department for us to be in?”

Magatha raised an eyebrow. “I’m a general now, Zordo. I believe I have the right to demote him.”

“Not part of your Department, Magatha.”

“You can only use that excuse for so long, Zordo.”

Zordo turned back to the new soldiers. “The Department of Intelligence was issued by Official D about half a year ago. For even longer than that he’s been gathering new members.”

“And we’re part of that recruitment.” Ryan said

“Not necessarily. D did not choose you, I did.”

“You did?” Henry asked.

“He did.” Magatha said, not looking amused.

“General.” Portia said. “I think a full explanation will clear up most of our questions.”

“Good suggestion, Portia.” Magatha said. She smiled in a way that always made Zordo uncomfortable.

“Okay then. Full explanation it is. From the beginning. When the Discretes first attacked us two years ago, we were completely unprepared and we’ve been on the Defense ever since. But, thanks to the Silence, we’ve been able to build up soldiers, like you three. Green is getting prepared to go on the offensive.”

“We’re going to be fighting?” Henry asked. He lifted his head off the desk.

“No.” Zordo answered.

“But you said…”

“Even graduated you’re so eager, Henry.” Magatha said. “Try saving questions until the end.”

Henry put his head back down on his desk to let Zordo continue.

“What I said was that Green is getting prepared to go on the offensive. We’re not there yet. That is where the Department of Intelligence comes in. It will be responsible for gathering and sorting through information on the Discretes. I have been chosen to be the general of this location, and I have chosen you three to join it.”

The room grew silent for a moment. Finally, Magatha spoke up.

“Now you may ask your questions.”

“I’m a little confused.” Portia said. “We were never trained on how to do any of this.”

“You’ll be applying the same skills we trained you to do, only you’ll be applying it to gathering information.” Zordo said.

Ryan nodded, seeming to understand. “So, just to make sure we’ve got this, we’ll be learning about the Discretes?”

“More or less.”

“Sounds to me like you’re keeping us out of the way.” Henry said.

“Henry.” Ryan scorned.

“I’m just saying my observation, Captain. For the next couple of years, we’re going to be doing communications and such.”

Magatha allowed herself a giggle.

“You have no idea what Zordo has signed you up for, do you?” She asked. “What you described is the information sorting part. There’s still the information gathering process.”

“Big deal, we’re learning. What we’ve been doing for the past two years.”

“Yes, Henry, you are learning. You are learning the most innermost secrets to the Discretes. Their strengths. Their weaknesses. Do you know how you find out about that stuff?”

Henry shrugged.

“You have to get close to them. Closer than most would feel comfortable. Close enough that they could kill you. You of all people know how terrifying it can be to be that close to a Discrete. Imagine being that close to a Discrete, but you’re unable to fight them. Now… do you think that’s a job Zordo would give to someone he’d want to ‘keep out of the way?’”

Henry sat up for a bit. His eyes dashed back and forth trying to make sense of the situation.

“But… but why us? Why did you choose us?”

“I asked that same question.” Magatha said.

Henry ignored Magatha, and continued his question. “I talked to Vatti about where you sent the teams. She said she asked for the best and you gave her the Forefront. If these missions we’ll be going on are as dangerous as you say, wouldn’t you want the best.”

Zordo paused for a moment, being sure to choose his words carefully.

“Indeed, General Vatti did ask for the best. She asked for the best fighter and that is exactly what I gave her. She did not ask for the best team. Ryan, you were trained by me personally in your fighting techniques. For the missions we’ll be going on, we may need to fight off Discretes. Portia, your knowledge of technology will be essential to collecting and arranging the data we need. And Henry, you’ve often bragged about your past criminal activities. To get in, get what you want and get out unseen. You three will be going on the most dangerous missions in the country.”