Chapter 34

The air outside of the training center felt like a long lost friend to Tsudo. It brought back memories she wanted to dwell on, as well as memories she didn’t. It was difficult to believe she had been locked up in that building for two years. She remembered how it was before then. How these tall buildings sent a slight hint of fear down her spine. Tsudo kicked off the build she was standing on a little extra hard. That fear was gone now. With the magniboots and her training, these buildings were now her playground. She would never admit it to anyone, but the Green was amazed at how well she could jump across from building to building. Even though she had trained her team intensely to make sure they had no difficulty doing it, this was still their first time actually performing the feat. She had expected some difficulty, but the act wasn’t too much different from playing Sync-Ball when the gravity was changed.

The Captain turned to make sure Napp and Carol weren’t far behind. They too seemed to be traveling at ease. That brought a smirk to her face. The members of her team had trained themselves harder than anyone just for this, and now here they were, the only team trained by Zordo to make it into the Department of Defense with General Vatti herself was guiding them their next destination. Tsudo couldn’t imagine a better situation.

The group ran up the next building they came across until they reached the top. They had expected to see their general jumping towards the next building, but Vatti had stopped. She was staring over the edge, looking at the next building.

“We’re here.” She said simply.

The three looked over at the building Vatti seemed intrigued by. It was very similar to the one they had departed from. As with most buildings in the Source, it’s external lights were on, but it showed no signs of life.

“Is that it?” Napp’s voice showed a hint of complaint. “I thought we’d be running for days before we reached the actual Department.”

“I never thought I’d see the day you complained about something being too easy.” Carol said.

“I’m not complaining about now, I’m complaining about the past. What was the point of doing all that exercise if the Department was only a few minutes away?”

“Not all the departments have a singular location.” Vatti said. “The Department of Defense is a series of locations made so that anyone could be protect at a moment’s notice. The Discrete and the clone wanted to make sure there was one close to you guys.”

Vatti put her foot on the edge of the building.

“That window there is our target. You three think you can make that jump?”

The Forefront peered over. It wasn’t a difficult jump at all, in fact they had made more difficult jumps on the way to it, but something else pondered their minds.

“A singular open window.” Carol said outloud.

“Undamaged, yet surrounded by several shattered ones.” Tsudo continued.

“That’s a little obvious of an entrance, don’t you think?” Napp said. “You might want to think about repairing some of the other windows or something, so that one doesn’t stand out as much.”

“Oh no.” Vatti groaned. “He really did make mini versions of himself. Only the clone overanalyzes details like that.”

With that, Vatti jumped off the building. She spun herself to slow her decent, positioned her feet so they would hit the side of the building, and braced her ankles for impact. Unsubtly, she landed on the cement that separated the windows. Before she had time to act, the three teenagers landed on other parts of the building.

Vatti, was slightly shocked. It was dangerous to jump immediately after her, but seeing as how the group hadn’t hit her, she proceeded inside the building.

The Greens all entered through the open window. Inside was nothing but rubble and a door that lead further in. Tsudo wasn’t surprised. Just like in the strategy they used to exit the Department of Education, it made sense that all the rooms near windows showed as little signs of activity as possible.

“Well, finally glad that’s over.” Vatti said, proceeding towards the door. “Welcome. Make yourselves at home. Yadda yadda yadda. If you need me I’ll be in the…”

“Vatti, come in. Over”

The voice had startled everyone. Vatti, hesitantly, raised her hand and pressed the button inside her collar.

“What do you want, clone?”

Everyone understood now. These were the fabled communication jackets the generals were said to wear.

“By my calculations, you should be at the closest Department checkpoint. Over.”

“How could you possibly calculate that?”

“It’s not as complicated as you think.” A female voice came through.

“Please don’t explain it, Eve.” Vatti yelled to her collar.

“Vatti.” Came Zordo’s voice. “I trust that as the respected general I expect you to be, you are explaining thoroughly the new responsibilities to your new soldiers.”

Vatti let out a hefty sigh through her nose. There was a slight delay before she found herself turned around to speak to the team.

“And Tsudo.” Zordo said. “Keep a report on your experience in the Department of Defense. When we meet again, I want to know everything you been through.”

And with that, the room went silent other than the low growl could be heard from Vatti’s mouth.

“This…” she started. “This is the Department of Defense. Our job is to protect the rest of the Greens from the Discretes. Are there any questions?”

The Forefront couldn’t help but feel nervous. Though they had done nothing to upset her, Vatti had no one else to direct her obvious anger to. The wrong statement here could lead to a very bad start of their relationship with their general.

Tsudo forced herself to speak. As uncomfortable as she was, she couldn’t let this stop her from improving.

“Could you go over the specifics?”

Vatti gave an intense look. Tsudo wasn’t sure if she was giving it to her or just to the air in general. Still, Vatti decided to answer her question.

“Scattered throughout the Source, are bases for the Department of Defense. Our job is to patrol the Source, going from base to base. We kill any Discretes we see and answer distress calls.”

“That makes sense.” Tsudo said. “With soldiers constantly on the move, it’d be difficult for the Discretes to pin down exactly where to attack. This also keeps the soldiers active and ready to respond.”

“Yeah, active.” Vatti laughed. “No more questions? Good. I’ll see you guys out there.”

Vatti hurried to the door and let it slam behind her. The three were left standing in silence.

“I don’t think she likes us.” Napp said.

“Well this is a horrible start.” Carol said. “Our first day, and the general hates us.”

“It’s only natural.” Tsudo said confidently. “Imagine it from her point of view. We’re just a bunch of rookie kids and she has to take time out of her busy schedule to show us the basics. We’ve done even less than the people here who’ve done nothing.”

“It feels like you’re leading to a ‘we need to work hard’ conclusion.” Napp complained.

“Well, I don’t have to say it now since you did.”

“Why can’t you ever come to the conclusion that we should take it easy? We just spent the last two years working hard.”

“And we got exactly what we wanted out of it.” Tsudo grinned. “Now that we’re here, we need to prove our worth just like we did then.”

“Whatever you say, Captain.” Napp sighed.

Carol was practically shaking from excitement.

“What do we do first!? Should we go in there and challenge their best fighters?”

“Because that’s how you get liked.” Napp said sarcastically. “A bunch of rookies showing up everyone else, acting like they know it all because of a few years of fancy training? Forget Vatti hating us, the whole Department will have issues.”

“I could care less about being liked.” Tsudo said. “But Napp’s got a point. We won’t get anywhere just by being jerks.”

“Hasn’t stopped us before.” Napp said.

“Do you always have to say something?” Carol complained.

“Only when I’m awake.”

“So that would be a ‘hardly ever.’”

Tsudo put out her hands, signaling her teammates to settle down.

“If we want to earn Vatti’s respect, we need to understand what that means. That might not necessarily be fighting. For now, we’ll just analyze them and find out more about the department. “

Tsudo took a step forward and opened the door to their new base.

Chapter 34 End

Chapter 35

The first sites of the department were nothing to awe at. It was so dark, in fact, that it was very difficult to make out anything. Tsudo pulled out her Display and activated the built in flashlight. The team was in a hallway, like the room the three had just came from, was dark and trashed. Along the side were doors that hadn’t been used in years. It was enough to almost make them doubt they were in the proper location. Soon enough though, as they came closer to the door on the opposite side, they could hear voices and other signs that people were clearly in the building. Tsudo opened the door.

Each member of the Forefront felt a sense of de ja vu come over them. The inside of the building was exactly like the one they had just departed from mere minutes ago, only it was much darker. Lights from the floor light up a green tint. Wandering to different locations, were the various people dressed in black outfits. They all had the same clothing and tools as each other. Tsudo recognized the equipment. She had made herself memorize it all. It was the same stuff she had on her, the standard equipment of a member of the Department of Defense. These people were all soldiers.

“So, you’re the new guys huh?” A voice said.

The team turned to their right to see a really skinny, really pale man approaching. His hair was thing but his glasses were big and round. He wasn’t quite as tall as Napp, but his came close. He had a very big smile that made Tsudo feel welcome, but also uncomfortable at the same time.

“Welcome to the Department of Defense. The name’s Ortin.”

“Greetings, Ortin.” Tsudo said. “I’m Captain Tsudo. This is Carol and Napp.”

“A captain?” Ortin said. He put his thumbs in his pocket and swayed as he talked. “That means you outrank pretty much everyone here. Well, except for General Vatti. Is it just you three?”

Ortin looked passed Tsudo, as though expecting to see someone else.

“Yes.” Tsudo said, closing the door behind her. “Were you expecting us?”

“For quite some time now.” The man said, keeping his smile. “Though I didn’t expect there to be so few of you. Did the others get sent to other defense bases?”

“It’s just us.” Carol said. “The others were placed in different departments.”

“Only three of you?” Ortin said. “Guess some people were worried for nothing. Why don’t you allow me to show you around and help you get situated?”

“Fantastic.” Napp said. “The first thing you can show us is where we’ll be slee-“

“Forgive my friend.” Tsudo said, interrupting her teammate. “His sense of humor doesn’t know when to rest. Please proceed with your tour.”

Ortin began walking down the circular hall.

“We are currently on the fourth of the five total floors. Of course, this building has much more than that, as you could tell from the outside, but most don’t roam outside these five floors.”

“That minimalizes activity.” Napp said. “Makes it more difficult for Discretes to believe anyone is inside.”

“That is correct.” Ortin smiled. “Zordo’s certainly got you all trained. The floor above us holds the training rooms, where you can target practice, get in a good workout, etc. The floors we’re currently on hold sleeping rooms and…”

“Hey Ortin!” A voice called up. “Is that who I think it is?”

A man, similar in build to Ortin walked up to the group. He had black hair and held a grin on his face.

“Yes it is.” Ortin said. The group could hear a small sigh come out as he spoke. “Captain Tsudo, this is Ring, one of our many soldiers here.”

“A captain?” Ring said, his grin not fading. “They promoted you to captain as soon as you Zordo was done with you. You must be fascinating.”

The tone, the body posture, the way he looked. Tsudo could tell this man’s intentions were not genuine. Still, there was a certain intrigue to the atmosphere. She turned to her teammates to see if they understood. It only took a glance. All three could tell. Still, he hadn’t released his hostility yet, so there was no reason to show him any.

“I can’t really call myself fascinating as it is a term of relevance. I experience myself on a daily basis, so it’d be misleading if I called myself fascinating.“

“Well, the children fortunate to have been trained by Zordo have all certainly earned that title among us here. But I can understand if your reputation has been a little over exaggerated. It seems all of Green expects you to be great when you’ve yet to prove yourself.”

The Forefront could feel their own adrenalines rising. This man was clever. He hadn’t directly insulted them, but they still felt the insult of his words.

“Perhaps, you could help set us straight.” Ring said. “Is your handheld loaded?”

“Ring, is this really necessary?” Ortin asked.

“Calm down, Ortin, I’m simply trying to put to rest some rumors. We all can appreciate that.”

“What are you proposing, Ring.” Tsudo asked.

“It’s just a little game we play. If you’re willing to try, go ahead and follow me.”

Ring made his way down towards the stairs in the middle of the grand room. Tsudo could tell that whatever this man was planning was a trap. Even with this thought, she found herself following him anyway.

Carol was right behind her captain, eager to watch Tsudo prove whatever it was she had to. Napp lingered behind slightly with Ortin, hoping to gain a different insite.

“You said earlier that people were ‘worried for nothing.’” Napp said. “I take it everyone isn’t as welcoming around here as you are.”

Ortin continued to smile, while showing signs he had been caught.

“The truth is, I’m not very welcoming either. I just felt I should show you guys some pleasantry before you got to experience… well… everything else.”

“What exactly is our reputation?”

“Oh, various things. The most popular being that you guys are going to be our superiors in every way possible: better fighters, better strategists, just all around better.”

“That explains all the glaring eyes.”

When they had arrived, not many had noticed the group entering. Now that they were close to the ground floor, it seemed that everyone was gazing at the event they were about to participate in.

The group had finally reached the ground floor.

“Here we are.” Ring said. He pointed to a vase that sat on a pedestal. It sat where what was once the main entrance to the building.

“What exactly am I doing here?”

“It’s a simple little exercise, everyone here does it every once in a while. I guess we could call it your ‘initiation.’ When we first came here, we set up that vase on a pedestal. All you have to do is break it using your handheld.”

“Break it? You mean, shoot it?”

“Yes. Everyone knows sync energy has no effect on inorganic. Breaking the vase by shooting it is impossible. But then again, so is winning this war. If you guys are truly the keys to winning this war, you should be able to do the impossible.”

“Impossible?” Tsudo said. She gave the man a confused look. At this time, she decided to really look at him. Analysis: it’s what Zordo trained her to do best. She had realized this man was rather skinny, but now she realized, he was too skinny. His muscles were not those of a soldier. Even the Techs could defeat this man in a physical battle.

Tsudo took a look around at the people gazing at her. All of them had similar builds. Some were too skinny, some were overweight. This wasn’t right. These were supposed to be the ones to defend against Discretes.

“Well?” Ring asked “Can you or can you not do the impossible?”

Tsudo turned towards him. “Where’s the general?”

“The general? Knowing her, she’s probably in one of the rooms-”

Without another word, Tsudo stormed up the stairs.

“Tsudo!” Carol called out.

She and Napp followed after their captain. Along the way, they could hear the snickering of everyone.

“Tsudo!” Carol called once again. “Tsudo wait.”

Realizing her team was behind her, Tsudo stopped on the third floor.

“Tsudo, what are you doing?” Carol asked.

“I need to find General Vatti. I have some questions I need to ask her.”

“About the vase?” Carol began to speak low, hoping no one else would hear her. “You could break that thing easily, any of us could. These idiots don’t know how sync energy works.”

“I know.” Tsudo said. “That’s the problem.”

Carol gave a confused look while Tsudo took a look around.

“Look, I need to ask General Vatti a few things. Alone.”

“Well, what should we do until then?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing.” Napp repeated. “I think that’s the first time ever that you’ve given us that order.”

“Look, I can’t explain what’s going on because right now I don’t have all the answers, that’s why I need to talk to Vatti. Until I know what we’re going to do, you two are to do nothing. Don’t pick fights, don’t break the vase, don’t do anything. Just relax until I get back.”

With that, Tsudo left her teammates in a gaze as she climbed the stairs to the fourth floor.

“We’ve got nothing to worry about, right Napp?” Carol asked.

“Even if we did, we shouldn’t. Tsudo made it clear that she’s going to be doing most of the worrying for us.”

Chapter 35 End