Chapter 36

Vatti stared up at the ceiling in darkness. Her body was tired. Even though it had only been a few minutes of traveling from the Department of Education, Zordo had made her travel for weeks beforehand just for his little graduation ceremony. So much time wasted. She wanted to get back out there. She wanted to keep hunting Discretes. She wanted to be not here… but her body was tired.

What was worse was that she couldn’t even pass the time by training. If she wanted to be up and about as soon as possible, she needed her rest.

She hoped she would fall asleep soon. With no traveling, training or anything, she would be alone to ponder her thoughts. Left alone long enough, and she would eventually think of him. She’d think of his goofy smile, his never ending jokes, his idiotic fashion sense-

Suddenly, a knock was on the door.

“This rooms taken.” Vatti answered.

“General Vatti?”

“Yeah, it’s me. This room’s taken, go find another.”

Vatti expected to once again be left alone with her thoughts, but to her surprise, the knocking continued.

“General, I need to speak with you.”

Vatti sat up and headed to open the door. Speak with her? No one ever spoke with her.

She opened the door, somewhat frustrated of even having to do so. The face she saw immediately made her emotions head further into a negative direction.

“Oh, it’s you. Tsudo, was it?”

“Greetings, general, I’d like to speak to you about something. May I come in?”

“Come in?” Vatti said. “Why do you want to come in?”

“It’s somewhat of a private matter. Please mam.”

Vatti was tempted to close the door in the girl’s face. She might’ve too, but she remembered the warnings of Zordo. Reluctantly so, she allowed Tsudo to walk in.

“Kid, let me warn you, I am incredibly tired, so please make this quick.”

“Mam, are you aware of the state the people in this base are in?”

Vatti was somewhat surprised. Tsudo was being more blunt than she had expected. Still, the girl hadn’t managed to interest Vatti in what she was saying.

“Not as fancy as your classrooms, huh? No here really cares about-”

“No, it’s not that. It’s your soldiers, they’re in an atrocious state. They’ve allowed things like rumors to build their petty emotions. None of them know anything about sync energy. And perhaps the worst offense, they all seem completely out of practice when it comes to combat.”

Vatti nodded, showing her understanding.

“And…?”

“And?” Tsudo said, completely shocked to hear such a response. “Mam, these are supposed to be the troops who fight the Discretes. They protect everyone else yet not one of them is ready for something like that. The Discretes would slaughter all of them.”

“Absolutely.” Vatti said. “I’ve killed more Discretes than anyone out there, so I know that better than anyone. I’m still waiting for your point?”

Tsudo was having a hard time following the words she was hearing.

“Mam, we need to change whatever training these people are going through. If we ever hope to stand a chance of winning this war, we’re going to need the best of the best. As the general of this department, it’s your job to make sure that happens.”

Vatti let out a chuckle.

“My job… is that right? Wow, what has the clone been teaching you kids.”

The more Vatti talked, the more confused Tsudo became.

“My ‘job,’ as you so put it, is what I say it is. I protect all of Green as the general of Security. It just so happens that I do it alone. Those guys out there don’t even make the trips to the different bases. They all live here, doing whatever it is they feel like.

“And that doesn’t upset you? Don’t you care about your troops?”

“Not really, no. The only thing I care about is killing Discretes.”

Tsudo had no response for that.

“Do you know how I got where I am today, Tsudo?”

“Of course I do. Your story is what drove all of us back in the Department of Education. You wanted, more than anyone else, to rise in the ranks and help win the war. You, a Blue from the surface, outsmarted Zordo, the greatest warrior we have in Green. We all followed your example.”

“No.” Vatti said abruptly. “You followed a myth. Trust me, you don’t want to be like me.”

“You’re a general in Green, you’ve killed more Discretes than Zordo, and to top it all off, you’re younger than anybody could ever hope to be at your level. Why would I possibly not want to be like you?”

“I know you don’t want to be like me because I was just like you at your age.”

Once again, Tsudo was having a hard time forming words.

“General, you… you say that as if the age gap is extremely different between us.”

“It isn’t.” Vatti said. She stood up and turned away from Tsudo. “But what we’ve been through definitely is. When I was your age, I wanted to be one of the best warrior in all of Wig-Or-Log. Nothing was going to stop me from achieving that dream. And nothing did. Now, I’m stronger, faster and smarter than I ever thought was possible. The only people who stand a chance against me in a fight talk in monotone. I am the greatest. Yet even with all this power I possess, if I had known what it would take to get here, the things I had to give up, the person… the me that I was back then would definitely hate the me that I am now. These tip-top soldiers that you want so bad, the old me would be right along side you in making them a reality. The me of now couldn’t care less. I’m in this war because I want to Personally kill Discretes, and I’m doing just that. I’m the best, because I’m driven to do that more than anything, including improve anyone else who isn’t as driven as I am. So believe me when I say you don’t want to be me. Get to know me a little more, and you’ll most likely wind up hating me.”

Tsudo was silent for a moment. A lot of information had been taken in, perhaps more than she was supposed to have had. As awkward as the atmosphere was, the Green captain couldn’t leave things like this. This was Green’s main army.

“I can’t just sit around and let what’s supposed to be Green’s best defense remain something it shouldn’t. If you won’t change things, I’ll have to.”

“That’s great.” Vatti said sarcastically. “You go ahead and do that. I’m sure those guys out there are all just eager to listen to a kid with absolutely no experience.”

“You’re right.” Tsudo admitted. “I haven’t even been here for a few minutes and they’re already rejecting me. Even if I defeat them in combat, that won’t guarantee anything. Some of them will probably ignore me out of spite. I might be able to order them around as a captain, but I can’t truly help them improve if they aren’t willing to even try. To do that, they’ll have to see me as… as they see you. You’ll have help me.”

“Help you?”

“I need to build a reputation, and fast. You’re the best chance I have for that. Maybe I don’t want to become what you are, but I need to be if I want Green to go anywhere.”

“You think I have time to waste training you? I just told you, I only care about killing Discretes.”

“Then take me with you.” Tsudo said. “You said you need someone driven. I guarantee you, you won’t find anyone more prone to the task than I am. I’ll help you kill Discretes. That’s my job, to be the next generation of Discrete killers. I’ll be the best, like you are now. Only when I do that, can I change Green for the better.”

Again, Vatti let out a chuckle.

“It’s not just a matter of want, kid. You can’t become what I am.”

“And a human can’t kill a Discrete, but you’re living proof of the contrary.”

Vatti moaned to the ceiling. She was too tired for this.

“Oh my goodness, Clone why did you do this to me?” She said to no one.

Vatti turned back to Tsudo.

“You’re not going to win this argument-”

“You said I’m like you when you were my age, right? Then you should know that I’m not going to take ‘no’ for an answer. This is too important.”

“No, you’re not.” Vatti admitted. “And you’re not ever going to shut up about it either. The only way I’ll ever persuade you of anything is…”

Vatti’s expression slowly changed. Her eyes became confident as a sinister grin made its way to her face.

“…a challenge.”

“A challenge?” Tsudo said. Unintentionally, a grin appeared on her face as well. “That sounds acceptable.”

“It wouldn’t be just any challenge.” Vatti continued. “It’d be one I specifically designed for you to fail, one that’s completely unfair just to prove my point.”

“Didn’t Zordo give you a similar concept when you demanded he teach you how to fight Discretes? When something is important enough, I like to make sure I don’t lose.”

“I know that attitude.” Vatti said. “I invented that attitude. The thought of an impossible task, the possibility of a great reward behind it, and someone telling you you’re going to fail… it all makes you want to accomplish the task even more.”

“What do you want me to do? Break that vase downstairs with my handheld?”

“Any moron can break that vase.” Vatti said. “In a few days, I’ll be leaving here to head to the next base. When I do, you’ll be coming with me, as my personal protégé. Along the way, I’ll put you through the worst training of your life, things that Zordo didn’t even make me go through. We might even fight a few Discretes. You’ll be leagues above others Greens and get that reputation you want so bad, but only if you come out of the ordeal alive. It’ll be years of grueling, exhausting work. Does that excite you?”

“As a matter of fact, it does. I get more eager with every word that comes out of your mouth.”

“Of course it does. But you should know something, little girl, I don’t lose either.”

“There’s a first time for everything.”

“Well, I’m glad you’re so confident, because there’s a condition. The two friends that you brought here, Zordo has told me that they are specifically under your command. You are to order them to stay here until your training is complete.”

When she heard those words, Tsudo’s expression changed completely.

“What?” she asked.

“I said, you will train with me, but only you.”

“But… why? They can handle the training, they can keep up!”

“Not the point.” Vatti said. “You honestly want to be me? You need to be alone. Becoming better needs to be your only passion. If those two come, you’ll be partially focused on improving their skills along with yours.”

Tsudo’s eyes shifted towards the floor.

“I… I can’t leave them. They elected me their captain. The captain of a team looks out for everyone, not just herself. They expect me to help them become better. I can’t do my job if we’re not together.”

“Well, captain, I don’t care because that’s the kind of person I am and the kind of person you think you can become. You have two days to figure out what’s more important. Do you want to do your job and only look after your friends or do you want to reach my level as fast as possible and help all of Green?”

Vatti opened the door signaling Tsudo to leave. Tsudo slowly walked out. Before closing the door, Vatti had one more thing to say.

“I know failing is going to be a new experience for you, but remember, there’s a first time for everything.”

Chapter 36 end

Chapter 37

“What’s taking her so long?” Carol said.

The red head was pacing the floor. There wasn’t much room since the bed stuck out in front of the door.

“If you’re going to worry, could you do it in your own room?” Napp asked. He was laying on the bedin the room with his eyes closed. “I specifically came in here to sleep.”

“How can you sleep at a time like this?” Carol said, not looking up.

“I can sleep at just about any time.” Napp said. “Tsudo just doesn’t let me.”

“Napp, you saw what she did. Tsudo just left the challenge those guys put her in. Was she worried? Was she tired? Why did she do that?”

“Whatever’s going on with Tsudo, I don’t think it had anything to do with that challenge. I don’t think that girl even knows how to choke.”

“Then what happened, Napp!”

Napp opened his eyes. He looked at his friend. The distraught look in her eyes wasn’t something he was used to seeing. He sat up and patted the bed next to him. Carol, knowing what that meant, sat next him.

“Carol, I’m going to need you to do something for me.”

Napp put his palm on Carol’s head. Slowly, he pushed back on the girl’s head until she found herself laying down on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

“Relaaaaaaaaaax.”

Carol’s breathing slowed down and her constant shaking had finally come to and end.

“See, how friendly beds are?” Napp joked.

“Your laziness is not something I want to make a habit of.”

Napp stood up and leaned against the door.

“I’m sure whatever Tsudo is going through, she will come up with a full proof plan to make it better, like she always does. Let’s remember, she got us this far.”

“Napp!” A voice from outside the room yelled. It started the unsuspecting Napp, who jumped and tripped over himself.

“Tsudo!” Carol yelled. She quickly jumped out of bed, to open the door, in doing so, she stepped on Napp’s stomach.

“Here you guy-oof.”

Carol ran and hugged Tsudo, burying her face in the captains shirt. She spoke words that neither Tsudo nor Napp could make out as they were muffled by clothing.

“You’re just in a really huggy mood today.” Tsudo softly pushed Carol aside, and stepped into the room.

“Good to see you’re still alive.” Napp joked. He did his best to sit on the bed, dealing with the pain in his stomach.

“With the way Carol was reacting, you’d think someone had kidnapped you.”

Tsudo gave a confused look.

“I told you guys, I just needed to talk to the general.”

“You also told us not to do anything, and left with an extremely worried look on your face.” Carol burst out.

Tsudo understood. Her friends had had a right to worry.

“Sorry about that, I needed to speak to general about the state about the troops here.”

“You mean how everyone here is worse than Henry?” Napp said.

“Exactly. I see why Zordo passed the Stars now. Even with that trash on their team, they’d look like Discretes compared to everyone here. I wanted to speak to the general. I thought maybe I was just not understanding her training method or something.”

“And?” Carol asked.

“And, it’s nothing like that. These soldiers are just… bad. None of them have the mentality needed to fight the Discretes, or anyone for that matter.”

“But General Vatti is leading them.” Carol said. “She’s killed more Discretes than anyone!”

“Yeah, and her concentration of her own skill came at the cost of ignoring everyone else. Vatti doesn’t even bother making sure everyone goes through their training. She keeps herself trained and that’s it.”

“Why would Official D make her a general, then?” Napp asked. “I’ve never met the guy, but he’s supposed to be better at analyzing people than even Zordo. He would’ve known someone like Vatti wouldn’t be committed to the war.”

“No idea, Napp. But one thing’s for sure, with Vatti in charge, if the Silence ever ends, this department definitely won’t be ready for combat.”

“So, what now?” Napp asked.

“Well, now that I’ve talked with General Vatti, I’ve come up with a plan. She’s offered to make me her personal protégé. It’ll take a few years, but once I’m done training with her, I’ll have a big enough reputation that I can help everyone in the department.”

A large smile appeared on Carol’s face. Her eyes grew wide and she began shaking.

“That’s incredible, Big O! You haven’t even been here a day and you’re getting personally trained. You’ll be just like Ryan was to Zordo.”

Tsudo nodded, thinking about how to say the next thing that was on her mind. Before she could, however, Napp interject.

“Your eyes shifted and your breathing has changed.”

Tsudo stared directly at her friend. His solemn look seemed more serious than usual.

“Tsudo… is there bad news as well?”

Tsudo took a deep breath.

“There was a condition to being trained by Vatti personally. She wants me completely devoted to the task. And… she feels that if you guys come, I’ll be distracted.”

Tsudo became quiet for a moment, struggling to say what needed to be said.

“If I’m going to become Vatti’s protégé, I have to order you two to stay here.”

Napp and Carol’s body posture both changed, as though the sentence Tsudo had said had caused the two to switch personalities. Carol shoulders relaxed. For a moment, her smile left, but only for a moment.

“That… that’s great.” Her voice was softer than it had been a moment ago. “If Vatti trains you, you’ll be able to advance in no time.”

“Carol…”

“I…uh… left my stuff in my room. I need to go get some of it.”

Carol left the room before anyone could retaliate.

“We traveled light.” Napp said.

“I am aware, Napp.”

“One day she’s going to realize that Zordo taught us how to analyze people as much as our environment. Speaking of reading people, Tsudo, you’ve got doubt written all over you.”

“For the first time in a long time, I’m not sure what to do, Napp. I need to learn from Vatti. She’s the only general who can give me the reputation I need. But leaving you and Carol here…”

“…doesn’t feel right?”

“I’m your captain. I need to do what’s best for you two.”

“But you also need to do what’s best for Green.”

Tsudo fell silent. She watched as Napp stroked his bearded chin, thinking about the right words to say.

“Well, I can tell you a lot of things that you already know, but I don’t think that’ll help. I guess I’ll just tell you some stuff you probably don’t. Do I think it’s right to accept the offer? No. Do I think it’s right to decline it? No. You’re going to do something wrong no matter what choice you make. And since that’s the case, I’m going to be selfish and say to take it.”

“Selfish? Napp, me taking the offer leaves you and Carol here. I’ll get better while you two are stuck”

Napp chuckled.

“Hey, at least I won’t have to train anymore.” He said jokingly. “Tsudo, you’re going to be Green’s next great soldier, up there with the Seconds. I know that and so does Carol. We’re fine with being there with you, but the one thing we will not allow ourselves to do is hold you back. If you decide to stay because of us, we are going to feel guilty for quite some time. So if the choice is between us slowing you down and you leaving us behind, we choose the latter.”

“If… if I do go, you’ll take care of Carol, won’t you?”

Another chuckle.

“As if she’s the one who needs taking care of.”