Chapter 40

Tsudo, Carol and Napp stood in positions that felt incredibly familiar to them. It was merely a day ago that they believed they’d never be playing Synchronize again, or at least not anytime soon. Now they were here and ready to dive into the game.

Across from the Forefront stood a team they had never played before. In the center was Ortin, to his left was Janet and to his right was Ring. Each of them were dressed in one-piece, Synchronization suits. Each of them were studying the rules Tsudo had transferred to their displays.

“Seems like a simple enough game.” Ring said. “Hard to believe Zordo, the man so notorious for his expertise in training, spent his time teaching this.”

“No one said you had to be here, Ring.” Ortin scolded.

“It’s better that he’s here.” Tsudo said. “The game requires three players. Him following us back was the best thing that could’ve happened.”

“Can we just get this over with?” Janet complained. “I don’t even want to be in this game, but if it’ll get the package back down to the room faster, than all the better for me.”

The three adults let their displays fall to their sides.

“Okay, let’s do this.” Ring said.

“I’ve been dying to wipe that smirk off of his face. Napp, be sure to kick the ball as hard as you…”

“No.” Tsudo said.

“No?” Carol repeated.

“We’ll be taking it easy on them.”

Napp and Carol could not believe the words that had just arrived from their captain’s mouth.

“Are you kidding!” Carol screamed. “We’ve never taken it easy on anyone!”

“That’s because we never had to.” Tsudo said, unphased by Carol’s sudden rise in volume. “The guys back in the Education department may have been worse than us, but they were never first timers. These three are.”

“Would you look at that.” Ring said sarcastically. “The trainees of Zordo are being nice enough to give us a handicap. It’s too bad we don’t need one. Just because we’re new. The game is not that hard to get down.”

“As obnoxious as Ring is being, I want to get back to storage as soon as possible.” Janet said “So I would appreciate it if you didn’t prolong the game.”

Ortin simply gave a shrug. He didn’t really want to rush the process, but there’d be no point in prolonging it if his teammates were no longer willing to play.

Tsudo let out a slight sigh.

“Alright, you heard him.”

She pressed the button on her display. As she did a ball with piercing light emerged from seemingly everywhere and floated in front of Tsudo.

“Let’s play.”

With those words, Tsudo sent the ball flying towards her opponents’ side of the court. The ball went to the right of Ring who refused to move. He could see what she was doing. Given the ball’s trajectory, there was no way it was going to hit the goal Ring was guarding. It would ricochet on the back wall and bounce back towards the opponents side. If Ring leaped for it, he would not only miss, but look ridiculous in the process. He knew the best strategy was to stay where he-

Tsudo suddenly clapped her hands once. With that, the Ace activated making the ball go in the opposite direction it was headed. Napp suddenly launched himself forward in front of Tsudo and kicked the sync-ball back in the direction it had came. Once again the ball was headed towards Ring only this time, if he stayed where he was the ball would hit him directly and moved at a threatening speed. Carol clapped her hands twice, activating the second Ace. The ball began moving double the already dangerous speed it was going in.

Without thinking, Ring found himself jumping out of the way. The ball went into the goal directly behind him.

“That’s one to zero.” Napp said.

Carol rushed over to pick him off from the ground.

“Whoo hoo! Teamwork! Yeah!”

“We used both aces, but we got the goal.” Tsudo said. “Good job you guys.”

She looked directly at Ring as he picked himself off the ground.

“My team and I were in this department because we’re the best of the best. If you insist, we’ll take you seriously. I highly suggest you return the favor.”

Dice felt humiliation and anger rising in him. He could see his supposed teammates laughing at him.

“They were trained by Zordo.” Ortin said.

“Yeah, well, we’ll see how far that training will get them.” Dice said.

The match continued for another twenty minutes. Ring decided to no longer take it easy on them. He would humiliate these kids at their own game. Well, he would at least try. No matter what he did, it seemed the experienced team had him beat at every turn. At the end, the score was twenty points to zero.

“And that last point is game.” Napp said.

“Well that was boring.” Carol said. “I thought we’d get a decent match in this department. Any of the groups back home could beat these guys.”

“That was our first time.” Ring said angrily. “One more match.”

Suddenly, there was a tap on the window looking into the room. No one had noticed, but a crowd had gathered outside during the game.

“No way, Dice, you guys lost fair and square. Let another group go.”

Not only were people gathered outside but they had watched, and some were eager to join in. Tsudo could make out the colors of jumpsuits some were wearing.

“No.” Janet said, running out of the room and into the crowd. “No no no no no no no. Guys, if you could line up and tell me exactly what size you are.”

No one seemed to be listening to female as she scurried throughout them.

“We had an audience!?” Carol screamed. “I wish I had known. I would’ve shown off a lot more of what this game can do.”

“I think you guys showed enough.” Ortin laughed. “Thank you.”

“What are you thanking us for?” Napp asked. “We just destroyed you guys.”

“You destroyed Ring. Me, not so much.” Ortin replied. “Without Tsudo, it would’ve taken me ages to figure out what this room was even for. Not only that, but you three helped me show off to everyone what this room is capable of.”

“That’s what we do.” Napp said. “Our captain can’t stand when something’s not being used to its full potential.”

“And she’ll go out of her way to fix anything that’s wrong.” Carol added. “Just wait until she becomes Vatti’s personal protégé.”

Tsudo suddenly lost the comforting smile she had built up. In the midst of everything, she had completely forgotten why she had been trying to distract herself in first place.

“If anyone deserved Zordo’s training, it’s Big O.” Carol continued. “With her in Green, we’ll definitely win this war. Tsudo won’t let us down. Right?”

Tsudo looked down at her bright eyed friend. Carol’s hopeful face… she trusted Tsudo completely. The captain could probably tell her to do anything and she’d listen.

“No, Carol. No I won’t.”

Chapter 40 end

Chapter 41

Tsudo took one last look around. She hadn’t arrived on the scene with much, but she still wanted to make sure she had everything with her. It might be a while before she returned to this building. Seeing she wasn’t missing anything, the captain turned out the light and left the door unlocked for the next person to take the room.

It was early. Many of the soldiers she usually saw pacing up and down the halls weren’t anywhere to be seen. She guessed they were still sleeping. Did they have any guards here? Another thing she’d have to remember to change once she had influence.

Making her way, to the end of the hall, she saw a face she recognized.

“Ortin. Can’t I go a day without seeing you?” She joked.

“I just wanted to see you off and thank you one more time for helping me with the training room.”

“See me off?”

“Yeah, your departure isn’t exactly a secret. Your friend, Carol-”

Tsudo held her hand up, signaling to the man that he didn’t have to finish that sentence.

“Big O!” Tsudo looked ahead of her to see Napp and Carol. She left Ortin to meet them.

“Napp, Carol. You-“

“There you are.”

The three turned to look down and see Ring coming up the stairs.

“I never got my rematch yesterday. Come on, get your suits on and lets…”

“That’s not going to be possible, Ring.” Tsudo said. “General Vatti is waiting for me to…”

“I know about your special trip with Vatti. The whole base knows. You’re not going anywhere until we get a rematch.”

Napp made a snickering noise.

“Was that a threat?!” Carol said. “Do you know what Tsudo could do to-“

“Carol.” Tsudo interrupted.

Carol wanted to keep going, but she knew better than to do that when Tsudo was against it.

“Listen, Ring, I’ve been ignoring whatever petty problems you have with me and my team because, quite frankly, I have much bigger things to worry about. I’ve spent the last two years improving my skills and once I leave here, I’m going to keep improving them at a rate faster than ever before. If you really want to be better than me, maybe actually try being better than what you are now.”

Tsudo turned to go down stairs, leaving Ring speechless. She headed to the first floor, went into one of the halls, and came back with her hands cupped. Napp and Carol followed her and observed her hands. Tsudo walked up to the vase she was told was impossible to break. Uncupping her hands, she splashed the vase with water.

“It’s just like I thought.”

After rapping his head around what happened, he had made his way to the bottom of the stairwell.

“You do see yourselves as better than us. Everyone might think you’re the best, but I know better, you can’t do the imposs-“

At that moment, Ring’s speech was interrupted by a shot. Tsudo had lined up her handheld and let out a shot. The energy soared to where the wet vase was. Upon impact, the vase shattered.

Ring, once again, found himself speechless.

“The answer is water.” Tsudo said. “It isn’t that sync energy only reacts to things that are alive, but it creates a chemical effect in water. Drench an object with water, and sync energy will make quick work of it.”

Tsudo headed back up the stairs. She was certain that Ring would be silenced once and for all once he saw that. The captain made her way passed Ortin, who was also speechless. She gave him a farewell smile as she headed towards where she knew the exit was.

Tsudo, Napp and Carol were all quiet as the headed towards the exit. The tension between them needed no words. Tsudo knew what she had to do, she just had to make sure she had the courage to do it.

The three entered the room which was the segway between the rest of the building and the outside. Vatti stood in front of the broken window entrance. She turned around, and upon seeing three people, let out a sinister grin.

“Come to tell me you’ve failed?” She asked. “Or perhaps, show me up and give that final order to your friends?”

Tsudo’s eyes narrowed. She could feel slight shaking in herself. Anger. Fear. Both were building up inside of her. Years of being told the dangers of exposing herself to her enemy, yet her greatest struggle was apparently facing this ally. She expected Vatti to see them, but regardless, she had to push past it. She turned around to her teammates.

“Carol. Napp.” The Green said fiercely.

The two stood at attention, ready to follow the order they would be given, no matter what it would be. There was a moment of silence… finally, Tsudo spoke.

“As your captain, I order you to stick with me as we continue our training.”

Napp let out a soft smile.

“Yes mam.” He said.

Tsudo looked at Carol. Her eyes seemed to waver. They showed signs of both sadness, and happiness. She wanted to respond, but was afraid of what she would say.

“It’s okay.” Tsudo said.

“Well, that was enjoyable.” Vatti said, sarcastically. “Looks like you and I don’t have as much in common as you thought.”

Vatti placed her hand on the window. Pressing down on her glove a few times, her magni-boots glowed with activation.

“I’ll see you guys in a year, when I come back to this place.”

With that, Vatti leapt upward out of the window. The next building was too far for her to make a proper jump. She had to get higher. Quickly, she made her way up to the top of the building. As she got higher, she began to notice a sound. Footsteps that weren’t going to the beat of her feet. She turned around to see, Tsudo, Carol and Napp following her. Immediately, she stopped where she was, catching her balance.

“What are you doing?” Vatti asked.

“What does it look like?” Tsudo answered.

“It looks like you’re following me.”

“That would be correct.”

“I told you, if you couldn’t order your friends to stay back, then I wouldn’t let you be my student.”

“Yes. Yes you did. And I’ve accepted that. However, there is more than one way to learn from someone.”

At first, Vatti did not understand the implication of what she was being told. After a moment, though, her eyes widened.

“Oh no. You are not going to…”

“Of course we are.” Tsudo said, grinning to her general. “You, General Vatti, are the greatest fighter in all of Green. How could the Forefront possible pass up an opportunity to study your every move and learn from it?”

“Don’t even think about it. I’m going after Discretes. I don’t have time to babysit a bunch of kids.”

“You asked for the best, Vatti. Trust me, you’re not going need to babysit. If anything, we might have to babysit you.”

“No. Just… no! What makes you think you have the right to even try such a thing.”

“We are soldiers of the Department of Security. It is our job to travel from base to base. We simply choose to…”

“NO!” Vatti screamed. Realizing her mistake, she instantly looked around to make sure they were still alone.

“No. I… I order you as general not to follow me.”

Carol let out a snicker.

“Wow, you call that an order?”

“Carol.” Tsudo said.

The red head quieted herself, though her snickering could be heard.

“I imagined you might say something like that.” Tsudo said. “So I came up with a little hypothesis.”

“How shocking, a student of the Clone’s who thinks they know everything.”

Tsudo ignored the comment and continued her speech.

“You could order us back to not follow you and technically we do have to follow those order, but Zordo is expecting a direct report from me about your treatment of us.”

The Forefront watched as Vatti’s expression changed completely.

“Fear. Always my favorite thing to see on someone’s face.” Tsudo grinned. “Like you said, everyone has something they’re afraid of. You might not be afraid to fight Discretes alone, but Zordo’s disappointment is something you dread. I’m guessing without his approval, you can’t keep killing Discretes like you want. Am I right?”

Tsudo continued to examine Vatti. She could see the anger burning on the woman’s face. As for herself, all the nervousness she had felt earlier was gone. Vatti was no longer the unbeatable adversary she appeared to be.

“Sorry , you had to be my adversary, General Vatti, but I simply don’t like to lose.

“You little brat…” was all the general managed to say. She turned to face back upwards.

“Don’t think I’m going to wait for you. I hope you can keep up.”

“If anyone can, it’s us.” Tsudo smiled.

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The next several days were filled nonstop traveling. Vatti traveled as fast as she could up and down buildings. She ran through windows she knew was unnecessarily dangerous. It would be worth it if she could lose the three nuisances who continued to follow. Despite her speed, and skill though, the three seemed to keep up with her with ease.

Tsudo was having the time of her life. Vatti was taking paths that she wouldn’t have thought to take. The more she followed, the more she got used to different things. Tsudo was also understanding rationing better and better. She and the others had brought plenty of travel food rations, but they had no idea when Vatti would stop, so they had to eat sparingly.

Finally, Vatti found herself stopping inside a building. Which one was it, she didn’t care? She was tired. Out of breath and exhausted, she looked back to see three figures arriving on the roof next to her.

“Great.” She said out loud. It was clear that no matter what she did, these three weren’t going anywhere. Once she got her energy, she would have to think of some other way of losing them. For now, though, rest. She leaned up against a pole in the middle of the room.

From her side, she took out a bar of food and began chewing on it. Her stomach let her know that this was not going to be satisfactory. She would have to ignore it for now. She had used up more energy than normally during this trip and thus had been eating more than normally.

Her mind went to the three outside, who were now most likely watching her and waiting to see which window she would leap out of. She didn’t like being watched. Leave it to Zordo to train people who could actually keep up with her actions. She could try going deeper into the building, maybe taking the stairs to a different floor. At this point, she wasn’t even sure that would work. What training Zordo had given these kids was working. They not only kept up with her physically, but mentally.

Something caught Vatti’s eye. She wasn’t sure what it was, but pure instinct told her to move. And that she did. Suddenly, sync energy was coming at her from the window. The Green had no choice but to travel inwards of the building.

She ran down the hall and turned the corner into a room.

“You’re Vatti.” A voice said. It was a female.

“Congratulations! You know who I am” Vatti shouted back. “Do you want a prize?!”

“Oh, killing you will be prize enough.” The female voice hissed. “You know, for someone with your reputation, you left quite a sloppy trail. You travel through the Source openly. It was easy to track you.”

“Maybe I wanted someone to find me.” Vatti replied back.

A lot of times, that was true, but not this time. The Green had simply been focusing so much on losing the three who were following her that she neglected to take a proper paths to her destinations.

“Well, you know how the saying goes, be careful what you wish for.”

Vatti couldn’t tell where the voice was coming from. Discrete D used this trick on her. She still didn’t know how, but some Discretes, in darkness, could make their voices appear from different places with each word they said. It wasn’t a trick she could easily bypass, but she had done so before. All she had to do was-

Suddenly, Vatti felt a hand on her throat. Without seeing her, the person had reached around the corner and grabbed her.

“There you are.”

Vatti could now see the woman up close. She looked just like any other female Discrete. Young with a slender figure. Her only standout trait was her short, brown hair. Even her eyes weren’t distinguishable with the purge visors blocking her pupil colors.

The woman wasn’t choking Vatti, just holding her by the throat. Vatti wanted to struggle and fight, but the woman had a sync weapon pointed directly at her stomach. Any sudden moves, and Vatti would surely lose her life.

“Hello Vatti. Nice to meet you, I’m Discrete S.”

“I don’t know why you feel the need to introduce yourself. Aren’t there like twenty S’s?”

“You never did show respect for your superiors. Even when we were teaching you to wield a sword.”

Vatti couldn’t help but laugh.

“To think, I learned the basics of fighting and strategy from you guys and now…”

“Now you’ve used those same skills to kill us off, you ungrateful child. You know, we Discretes don’t normally take pleasure in any of our kills, but for once, I’m going to let my emotions get the better of me and really enjoy myself.”

“It’s what I do every time I take one of your lives.”

That had angered the Discrete. Vatti felt the grip tighten around her neck. Despite the gun in her hand, this Discrete seemed to want to choke the life out of her victim. Slowly, Vatti’s ability to breathe became more and more difficult. She watched the smile on Discrete S’s face get bigger and bigger. Suddenly, the smile disappeared. Discrete S turned her sync weapon away from her.

“Nice try.” Discrete S said. “But sneaking up on a Discrete is just about impossible.”

Vatti looked over to the Discrete’s new target.

“I figured.” Tsudo said. “Hence why I have this.”

She was holding her own handheld sync weapon. Vatti did not understand. Was this a bluff? A sync weapon could kill a Discrete, but they were certainly too fast for a rookie to hit.

“Is that supposed to scare me?”

“It should.” Tsudo said. “You’re looking at the latest technology from Green, built by yours truly.”

Discrete S’s training kicked in, observing everything about her new target. The girl was young. Not too younger than Vatti, but much less experienced. But she wasn’t lying. She had every confidence in what she was saying. She truly believed that weapon would give her the upper hand. It may have appeared to be an ordinary sync weapon, but Discrete S knew better. The Greens were always following Rule 2 of the Discrete fighting style. If this girl believed the weapon was something special, Discrete S had no choice but to believe so as well. Still, that didn’t mean she couldn’t win.

The girl, just like Vatti, looked exhausted. With this fact, and that she wasn’t a Discrete, there was no way the girl would be fast enough.

Quickly, Discrete S dropped Vatti and bolted across the room to Tsudo. Before the girl could act, Discrete S elbowed her in the face, causing her weapon to fly in the air. Tsudo hit the floor, with the impact causing her eyes to shut. Once she opened them, she saw the Discrete now holding two sync handhelds.

“Not exactly sure what this does.” Discrete S said. “But it’s mine now.”

She pointed the weapon she got from Tsudo back at its creator who gave the Discrete a stern look.

“Don’t be mad.” The Discrete gloated. “I can tell just from one look at you that you’ve never fought a single person in your life in a death match. Seems we have someone whose fresh out of training.”

Suddenly, Discrete S pointed her other weapon back at Vatti.

“Ah ah ah. I don’t think so.”

Vatti froze where she stood. She had attempted to sneak away and recuperate, but hadn’t made it far.

“I can see how you were able to defeat other Discretes, but not this time.”

Keeping her weapons pointed at her prey, she looked back at Tsudo.

“Let’s see what this secret weapon of yours-”

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!”

Discrete found herself suddenly in pain. That sound… whatever it was, felt like someone shot a tiny sharp object into her ears. It wasn’t intense, but it was so surprising enough to make her bring her hands to her ears.

That’s what Tsudo had wanted. Napp suddenly ran into the room and, as hard as he could, he kicked the hand of the Discrete that her own weapon was in. It took a moment for the Discrete to focus, but she forced herself to. She still had the weapon she stole from Tsudo. Whatever was happening, she knew to use that. She pointed the weapon at Tsudo and pulled the trigger-

“Gah!” A sharp pain shot through the Discrete’s hand from. Reacting to it, the weapon dropped from her hand.

“Congratulations.” Tsudo said. “You’ve been ‘decepted.’”

Discrete S’s rage escalated. In less than a minute, she had been deceived on several accounts. She turned to her right to see the barrel of a weapon in her face.

“Like I said.” Vatti grinned. “I always take pleasure in this.”

With a pull of the trigger, Vatti unleashed a blur of sync energy. Discrete S’s head flew back with the force. Her body dropped lifeless on the floor.

“That looked like it hurt.” Napp said.

“We did it!” screamed Carol. The red head ran into the room into Tsudo’s arm.

“That’s what that noise was.” Vatti said.

“Yeah.” Tsudo said, holding her friend. “Carol’s voice is high enough to hurt normal ears. Scream it at its highest, and it makes a great distraction against someone like a Discrete. It always annoyed the Fars back in training.”

“We did it, Big O!” Carol continued cheering. “We killed our first Discrete!”

“Does this count?” Napp said. “The general was the one to pull the trigger.”

“Every little action counts.” Vatti said. “This definitely counts as your first kill.”

“Are you okay, general?” Tsudo asked.

“I’m fine.” Vatti answered.

“Guess it’s a good thing we did follow you.” Carol said.

“Not at all.” Vatti said. “I could’ve handled her myself.”

“Yeah.” Napp said. “Clearly she didn’t have you up against a wall.”

“You grunts are really cocky, aren’t you? Are you forgetting who I am? How many Discretes I’ve killed? This was a Discrete S. I’ve killed much better skilled than her.“

“So what happened this time?” Tsudo asked.

Vatti grew quiet for a moment. She didn’t want to tell them the truth. That she had grown tired and sloppy from trying to outrun them. It was embarrassing enough admitting that, but it would only boost their egos more if they knew she had failed to lose them.

“Never mind that. You guys rest. I’ll stand watch.”

“We’re good.” Tsudo said.

“We are?” Napp asked.

“We can keep going.” Tsudo said assuredly.

Vatti sighed.

“I’m sure you could, but I can tell by one look that you’re all just as tired as I am. You managed to surprise the last one, but never expect a strategy to work twice on Discretes. They usually travel alone, but on the off chance this one had a partner lurking somewhere, it’s a bit dangerous for us to attempt to travel again. We’ll stay here for a while and regain our strength. Once that’s done, we’ll make our way over to the next base.”

Napp and Carol looked at Tsudo, waiting for her order.

“Do what she says guys.”

“Finally!” Napp said, collapsing against the wall. “I’ve earned a week’s worth of breaks from all that traveling.”

“I take it you’re the slacker of the group.” Vatti grinned.

“This group has no slackers.” Tsudo said.

“Napp’s more of a complainer.” Carol teased.

“And proud of it.” Napp said. “Someone’s gotta remind everyone that we’re crazy to be doing the stuff we do.”

The group found themselves chuckling. Even Vatti let herself enjoy what had been said. It sort of reminded her of something… someone she missed.

Chapter 41 end