Chapter 5

“Henry...” Magatha started. However, the words that were supposed to emerge failed to escape her lips. Before her stood her student. It wasn’t the first time these two had a meeting in the office. In fact, Henry had been here for conferences more than any other student. Whatever she was going to say, it couldn’t be generic words. His ascension was coming soon. Somehow, Magatha had to reach him, this might be her last opportunity.

“Henry, why was your team late?”

“I... uh... we didn’t wake up on time.”

“Your team didn’t wake up on time, or you didn’t wake up on time?”

“Zordo’s always telling us that everything we do should be looked at as a team.”

“Indeed he does. A person’s successes belong to the team, as do their failures, however, I also to seem to recall improvement being a part of that. If only one member needs to improve for the team to improve, then that one member should do so.”

Juggling himself on the heals of his feet, Henry half feared the incoming words and half expected them. He knew the routine; he and his superior stand in the well lit office, which was big enough to be only that, while they tell him how much he sucked at being a soldier and how good Ryan was. One day they’d realize that it wasn’t his fault. He just always looked really bad with the best student on his team. One day he’d showed them what he could really do.

“Henry.” Magatha snapped. Here it comes. “I’ve seen you in here more times than I’d like. Quite frankly I’m not sure what I can say that hasn’t been said before, if not by me then by one of your other instructors.”

Magatha sat down in one of the only two chairs in the room.

“So this time, I’ve decided to simply say what’s on my mind. Hopefully, Zordo doesn’t chew me out when he gets back. Henry, do you realize why you’re not doing intense training right now as a form of punishment?”

Henry started to open his mouth, but that was because he failed to realize the point of the question.

“Teamwork, Henry.” Magatha continue. “Your team covered you, again. Had they not answered for you, things could’ve gone down a much darker road.”

She said she was going to say something different, but it was the same old thing. Henry was bad at what he did while Ryan was so good. If only he’d measure up to him…

“Teamwork.” Magatha sucked in her teeth. She seemed angry at something other than Henry. “Our general has decided that teamwork is to be the emphasis of your generation’s training Henry, but you seem to be confused as to what that means. Teamwork does not mean do poorly and your team will make up for it. It means everyone in the team contributes. Every team must arrive to class together, but because you were late, your teammates had to come and get you. You failed to enter class properly, which meant your teammates had to answer for you. When, Henry, was the last time you made up for the faults of your teammates instead of vice-versa?”

Henry didn’t answer. He knew the answer, he just didn’t say it. There was never any point in speaking; all the teachers had their minds made up about him.

“Henry. Look at me.”

The teenager’s eyes met his instructor’s. She was immensely angry.

“You are beyond this. If we were on the surface, in the past, or anywhere else that isn’t this department, people like you would be forced to do menial tasks. I don’t want to pass you. I don’t want to see you joining the ranks of the Greens because you are still acting like a child and that will endanger lives. Zordo, however, is in charge of this department and I will respect his decisions that groups pass as a team. Your teammates are enough to get you into a department as a soldier but it won’t be enough to keep you alive. Keep looking at me Henry. This program… this building… all of it was designed to help you and the other students cope with your lives until you’re ready to fight. But it is a lie. You know this more so than your classmates. Unlike them, you’ve seen death first hand. You’ve witness tragedies that some of them can’t even imagine. You’ve been closer to a Discrete than any of them. So you of all people should know that once you leave here, that lie is over. Once you are out there fighting, forcing your teammates to cover faults you could cover yourself can result in death. Keep looking at me. And when that happens, you will have no one to blame but yourself for inadequate attitude.”

This was something Henry had not heard, even though it was delivering the same message. She didn’t think he was worthy, just like the rest of them.

Magatha’s mouth moved to one side of her face. Her eyes went up while air came out through her nostrils.

“I can see that, just like before, what I’m saying still is not penetrating you. Henry, Green recruits soldiers based on their superiority, if not in fighting, then in reasoning. You were brought here not because of either of those purposes, but by accident. We cannot simply abandon you now, and so you are one of us, but just like those other students you can easily become worthy. You have just as much chance as any of them, including Ryan.”

Henry’s eyes widened slightly when she said that.

“Everyone can add to their team no matter what skill they bring or lack. All we want is for you to grow up and start seeing the potential you have. Work, Henry. Work before it’s too late.”

“I am working!” Henry almost shouted. “It’s not my fault Ryan’s so good at everything! My mom’s the most powerful Discrete! My dad was one of the top fighters on the surface! I was raised by the best of the best thieves! I know I have what it takes to be great but you guys put me on the same team as Ryan. If Vatti had been teamed up with him, she’d still be here with me, but you guys promoted her immediately because she didn’t have anyone overly skilled to compare her to. You let her fight before the Silence, but kept me with the kids! I came from the surface too and she’s not that older than me! I should be a general just like her!”

Magatha’s gaze did not falter as she stared into Henry’s eyes. The teenager tried to stare back, but found his gaze wasn’t as strong.

“It’s thanks to general Vatti’s actions that Green is responsible for the death of fifteen Discretes.” Her voice had suddenly gone back to the softness it usually had. “Single handedly, she’s killed five of them, something once believed to be impossible. That’s more Discretes than any of the Seconds have killed, including Zordo. Before the Silence, she took out three Discretes and contributed to the onslaught with successful planning and adaptation to the Discrete style of fighting.”

Magatha got up from her chair and slowly walked passed Henry.

“Vatti is a general because her actions speak louder than anything else she has to offer.”

She opened the door.

“If you truly believe you’re on the same level as her, I suggest you let your actions do the convincing… because your words aren’t convincing at all.”

Henry wanted to say more but he couldn’t. All he could do was march out the door. He could feel his anger boiling but there was nothing he could do. All the teachers were the same. It’d just be better if he left without continuing the conversation.

“Oh, and Henry…”

The Green stopped in his tracks.

“Wars are not won by proving you’re better than your allies. They’re won by being your best.”

Henry didn’t say anything. He simply continued to walk quickly toward and up the stairs. She didn’t understand, they never did. He didn’t need this. He knew what he was worth but as long as he was on the same team as Ryan, they’d never see him for what he could really do.

Chapter 5 End

Chapter 6

The air was cool with a hint of moisture throughout it. Most people from the surface might find the living in this condition uncomfortable, but the ones who dwelt in this building were not most people, particularly the dark haired woman who strode through the halls with assurity. At a quick glance, a novice would not be able to tell her apart from the others who dwelled there. She wore what they wore. A one-piece skin tight black spandex, a black belt to hold her weapons and her purge visors which allowed light through only one side of the lenses. As for her weapons, she carried one handheld sync weapon on her right hip, one sync-Shield on her back and two grenades behind her at waste level. There was one distinguishing feature though. This Discrete had a band on her left bicept. She was one of two Discretes to wear one.

The female strode toward the closed doors, which opened without her acknowledgement. As she entered the room, her purge visors brightened, allowing her to view everything. Four Discretes were in her room, including herself. Her eyes focused on the Discrete who wasn’t standing. Following her commands, the purge visor dimmed the rest of the room while brightening the man. Information appeared on the screen. Who he was. What caused his injuries. The fact that he was no longer alive.

“Where did you find him?”

“In one of the buildings about a two day’s travel from the boundary.” The man on the left answered.

“And there were no other bodies? No sign of any Greens?”

“No other bodies were found, but there were signs, mam.” The other one spoke up. “But per Discrete B’s orders, we did not track them.”

“But you were able to notice signs of them?”

“Yes. Apparently Discrete L managed to injure one of them, though not vitally.”

The woman smirked. She approached the man laying on the table.

“Though you may not know it, you were very useful.” She then turned swiftly to depart from the room.

“Feed him to the sturkfurs.”

“Yes, Discrete A.”

She strode out the room, turning down the hall. She passed by a tank of water surrounded by glass walls, other Discretes, rooms with purposes, all irrelevant to her goal. Discrete A had a destination. As it came into focus, her purge visors brightened up, allowing all to be revealed to her. Two doors combined to make one entrance. As she approached them, they pulled apart from each other, more slowly than the other doors of the building. She entered the room and... nothing. Not absolutely nothing, but what she was looking for was not there. The large metallic table in the center was there. The security screens monitoring the base on the left wall were there. The books scattered across the desks to the right were there. But he wasn’t.

“Oh, B.” The woman let out calmly. “Where are you this time?”

“I’m not hiding, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

The voice came from up. There he was. Directly above the entrance with book in hand, Discrete B sat. His body rested on the magni-boots which clung to the wall. Like her, he wore all black. Like her, he also had a black band on.

“What are you doing now, B?”

The young man turned the page as he spoke.

“Shin exercises. I’ve been up here for five hours, twenty-three minutes and seventeen seconds. I have another six hours, thirty-two minutes and five seconds before I break my record.”

Discrete A pressed her palm three times and took a step towards the wall. As she lifted her foot high, it attracted itself to the wall. Walking along the wall as though gravity didn’t phase her, Discrete A continued her conversation.

“You’ll never guess what I got today?”

“My test results?”

“Close, but no. Another Discrete has fallen.”

“To the Greens I hope. If we have reached the point where surface dwellers are killing us, we’re worse off than I believed.”

“Yes, it was to Greens. We even have proof.”

“Is that supposed to make me release an emotional response?”

“I assumed you would be happy to learn that your plan is working.”

“I might be happy if I learned that my plan was working. Considering I already knew it would work, your information has no merit on my self esteem.”

Discrete A was now on level with the crouching Discrete.

“How many times have you read that book?”

“Four times. If you’re only talking about today, only once. Right now, I’m skimming it for details.”

“Speaking of details, while I do commemorate your plan’s success, I can’t help but notice something. When I made you general, I knew your plans would work flawlessly. What I didn’t know was that it would take so long for them to work.”

“If you have issues with the timing of my plans, I believe that qualifies as a flaw.”

“B, it’s been almost two years. If we keep losing Discretes, maintaining Wig-Or-Log will be extremely difficult.”

“I expected you, of all people, to have some patience, A. You know what this plan entails. You know what I’m capable of doing, and yet you still doubt me.”

“I don’t doubt...”

“If that were true, you wouldn’t be here questioning the tactics.”

“Don’t presume to underestimate my intelligence, B. Remember your rank.”

“The rank is exactly why I’m concerned. You are the only one in all of Wig-Or-Log more intelligent than myself, which is why I believe that you understand why we can’t speed the process. The Greens are too strong at their current level. We have to get them sloppy, get them to believe that they are no longer our number one concern. Once they’ve let their guard down completely, we strike.”

“I do understand, B. But you’ve failed to explain the after effects. If this plan takes too long to execute, the Discretes will be too understaffed to handle maintaining Wig-Or-Log.”

“Then kill Discrete D. It’s as simple as that.”

“You love to believe everything is easy.”

“For us, everything is easy.”

“Exactly. For us. D may be an outcast but he earned his rank for a reason. The only people capable of killing him are here, on our side of the Source…”

“…exactly where they need to be. The day will come when the Greens are at their most vulnerable, but when that happens, D and his followers will still fight back. With three of us able to kill D, we’ll be at a supreme advantage, though that won’t work if one of us dies before that day comes.”

“I still say you’re keeping C in base out of spite.” A smirk came across Discrete A, face.

“I couldn’t care less for his feelings toward me. I keep him here because I acknowledge his skills, not because I belittle them. But we’re getting off topic. The only way this succeeds is if one of two things happen. Either Discrete D dies, weakening not only the physical skill of the Greens, but their mental state as well, or we continue as planned.”

Discrete B continued to scan the book. A’s presence had slowed him down by about twenty percent, but he was still getting what he wanted out of the…

Discrete B suddenly felt a hand scrambling through his hair. Unsure of what to do, his body reacted, loosening his grip from the book. The sound and sight of it hitting the floor was not a comfortable moment to the Discrete.

“A!”

“Someone’s gotten pretty bold.” Discrete A teased. “You said all that to me and you haven’t even looked at me.”

“If you wanted me to look at you, you should’ve said something. I won’t be able to get that book for another six hours, twenty-six minutes and eight seconds atleast!”

“Someone’s easy to EC.”

Discrete B blew through his nose. Every time he heard that phrase, he knew what it meant. Discrete A had succeeded in stirring his emotions. Not many people could do that to him, and it seemed only she knew how to have fun with it.

“Go. Get. My. Book.”

“Last I checked, B, I was Discrete A. I tell you what to do, not the other way around.” She stood up and walked down the wall.

“If you want this book so bad, come down here and get it.”

“You know I won’t do that.”

“I guess you don’t want your book, do you?” Discrete A had now reached the floor. She picked up the book by the edge of the spine and dangled it, smirking at the younger Discrete.

Scowling, Discrete B turned away. Moving meant he wouldn’t last as long as he should. If he didn’t last, his body wouldn’t improve. It was a Discrete’s purpose to improve; to strive towards perfection.

“You really are stubborn, aren’t you?” A said, still dangling the book. “Just like Baas.”

Discrete B didn’t look back down. He knew what she was doing and it wasn’t going to work. He had read the files on Baas and that statement was irrelevant. If Baas were here, he’d have probably gone down just to show her up. But Discrete B wasn’t Baas.

“What if…” Discrete A put a finger to her lips. “What if I were to promise to play a game with you? Then would you come down and retrieve your book.”

Discrete B’s pupils shifted downward.

“A game?”

“Yes. A game.”

His head turned.

“What kind of game?”

“Whatever you wanted. What’s that game you’re always trying to get me to play? The one with the paddles?”

Discrete B’s head fully faced down. It turned, as though pondering. The record… it was to improve his body, but it was something he could accomplish any day. An opportunity like this...

Before he could argue with himself further, the Discrete found himself standing. He faced directly below him at the female smirking at him. The pain in his shins and thighs was there but he had felt worse. It would’ve been another two hours and two minutes before noticeable pain would came. Pressing his palm down three times, his body flipped and tumbled as the boots released themselves from the wall. As soon as he landed, his finger pushed his palm three times more. Discrete B reached for the book, half expecting A to hold it away from him.

“Do you remember how to play?” He said, bringing the book back to himself.

“Play?”

“You’re going to play ping-pong with me.”

“Oh, you’re so silly, B. I don’t have time to play games with you, I have a Wig to run.”

Discrete A brushed past the teenager, and walked to the door which open as she stood in front of it.

“But,” Discrete B started, “you said...”

“What if I promised you... I never actually promised you.”

Discrete B breathed in a heavy gust of air, but before he could let it out, Discrete A was in front of him with her finger on his nose.

“Easy to EC.” She sang each syllable, poking his nose as the sound came out. The woman exited the room, letting the door clothes behind her, almost skipping as she walked. Discrete B stood in place for a moment, staring at the door. He walked over to the books a couple of steps away and tossed the one he had on top of the bunch. The pain in his legs was still there, but barely. He turned toward the table and folded it so one side pointed upward. Reaching in the pile of books, his hand emerged with a green paddle and a small white ball.

“EC.” He said staring at the ball. “EC indeed.”

For the next couple of moments, all that could be heard in the room was the sound of the ball hitting up against the paddle and the table.

Chapter 6 End