Chapter 7

“Ryan, over here!”

“Heads up!”

“Port!”

Portia jumped with all her might, extending her hand as far as she could. Curling up as she came towards the ground, the green held her hands close to her chest as though protecting something precious. After realizing her body was now on the ground, Portia slowly open her hands, hoping to see a glow brighter than usual. And there it was.

“Got it!” She screamed, holding the Sync-Ball up. A loud cheer was let out behind the window separating the training room from the audience viewing it. Ryan thought leaving the window open made the game less fun as the glow of their practice outfits wasn’t nearly as distinct with light blaring in, but he would be lying if he said he didn’t enjoy when someone was rooting his team on. He, of course, could do without it, but it definitely made Henry play much better.

It was the fifth day of the week. With no classes the next day, that meant Ryan’s team would do what they always did… play Synchronize. They would, of course, share the practice room, but the rest of their peers knew that on nights like these, the room belonged to them. Of course, they couldn’t play by themselves, so once again they found themselves playing another team who thought they were up to the challenge. But they weren’t just playing any opponents today. Ryan, Portia and Henry were playing against Napp, Carol and Tsudo. These were the best two teams in the Source going head to head… well, the ones who weren’t soldiers yet. It was a constant thrill to see the two teams play against each other, but the most exciting part was seeing Ryan fighting his more vicious, female counterpart, Tsudo.

“Henry.” Portia screamed. She hurled the sync-ball to her left at her partner. Henry could’ve easily caught it, but where was the fun in that? He lifted his foot and began juggling the ball of light with his body. A crowd was watching, showing off was a must.

“And here he goes, showing off again.” Tsudo sighed. She ran her fingers through her short, blonde hair. “Hey Ryan, can’t you control your pet? We’re trying to play a game...”

Suddenly, the ball shot passed Tsudo’s face. It bounced off the wall behind her, shooting right back towards the other side of the room, never losing its speed. The sync-ball, once again came towards Portia who was in range to catch it and catch it she did, only this time there was no hesitation. Swinging immediately as she got it, she hurled it toward the corner opposite from where she stood. Its target was the bright green vortex on that side. There were three of them on each back wall. Normally, the center goal was worth more points but this was a sudden death match. The first team to score would be the victor. If Portia could get the ball into that one slot it would end the game. Before her hopes could come true, however, a hand reached out and intercepted the ball.

“Predictable as usual!” The other female on the team cried. Ryan knew better than to cover his ears, but he really couldn’t stand when Carol got excited. She always felt the need to yell everything. The girl was much shorter than Tsudo, who wasn’t very tall to begin with. Despite her reach disadvantage, it was no accident she caught the ball. Her reflexes were sharp and she had a reaction speed to match them.

“Yay.” The only male on the team cheered nonchalantly, pumping his fist as he did. Ryan couldn’t tell if he was being sarcastic, or if he really felt excitement. Napp wasn’t one to show a lot of expression, even when he was genuinely happy. Sure, he smiled and did all the other emotional things people do, but as passionate as Tsudo and Carol were, Napp was just as unassionate. His features balanced out the enemy team in more ways than one. Napp was tall. Really tall. Being just under six foot seven inches, he was the tallest of all the students. Tsudo alwas strategically put him in the center to block their main target. Though he was slower than both his teammates, Napp wasn’t a slouch when it came to using his body. He knew his reach and growth was his advantage, using them whenever he saw fit to.

“Are you ready! Get setty! Here it comesy!”

Carol let loose the sync ball. It went in between Ryan and Portia with them both knowing that they reaching it was a possibility but since t wasn’t going to hit either of their targets it wasn’t worth the risk. Leaving their post would leave their goals wide open, so both just watched as the ball bounced against the wall behind them, up to the ceiling, and then back towards the enemy team. As soon as it bounced back, Henry, Ryan and Portia all realized it was no accident. After bouncing off the walls, the sync ball headed straight for Napp’s lower body.

“This is bad!”

“No fair!”

“Aw, geeze.”

Napp had a signature move he loved to pull off, kicking the sync-ball at his opponent. The ball not only moved at an overly high speed, but it turned the ball into a weapon, hurting anyone who touched it.

As the ball came off of Napp’s foot, a shriek of panic filled the room from both teams. The ball bounced off the walls, off the ceiling, it was almost impossible to predict where it would wind up or who would get hit. Finally, after ten seconds of watching and dodging, the ball bounced just over Ryan’s goal. The Green saw his opportunity, jumping and turning at the same time, he let the ball rest in his stomach, catching it as it landed. Of course, some pain followed. For some reason, Napp’s kick made the ball feel like it was a level three projectile. That wasn’t enough to do any serious damage, but it was enough to do damage Napp was the only student in the building who could send the ball to level four.

“How we doing, Ryan?” Henry asked.

Ryan began to stand up slowly. “I’m good. Just give me a minute.” He tossed the ball to Henry, knowing he couldn’t hold it for too long.

“Isn’t that just like you guys.” Henry said. “Using a move you know is unfair.” He tossed the ball up high, angling it so it would miss the goal but the other team couldnt reach it. A person could only hold a ball for seven seconds and the ball could only stay on one side for fifteen. He needed to stall for time until Ryan felt better.

“Isn’t that just like you guys, to complain when a perfectly legal move is made.” Tsudo was speaking, but she kept her eye on the ball that Henry and Portia continued to intentionally miss throwing. “This game is supposed to prepare us for the war. You think the Discretes are gonna care how fair you’re being?”

Tsudo turned to Napp. “I told you about using that move. Aim it. If you don’t miss, that’s an automatic goal.”

“I did aim it.” Napp too did not take his eyes off the ball. “I slipped at the last second.”

“Henry, stop the ball. I’m good now.”

Henry did as he was told and held the ball. Counting to three in his head, he allowed Ryan to get as much time as he could before passing it to him. Ryan took the ball and let out a breath.

“Guys… just keep it moving.”

And with that he unleashed the ball up. Henry and Portia knew what that meant. Ryan didn’t want them to aim for the goal, he simply wanted the ball to be kept out of their position and continuously moving. Big O’s team had played Ryan’s enough times to figure it out, but there was little they could do about such a strategy. If the balls went well over their reach, attempting to get it was suicide and would lead to their goals being open. It was possible to use their Aces, special moves that changed the physics of the game, but that wouldn’t guarantee anything and might actually waste a resource. The only thing they could do was keep their eye on the ball and hope their enemy would make a mistake.

The ball made its way to Ryan who let out a kick. The ball headed high, but the way Ryan kicked it made it bounce around out of reach from any team. Big O saw her chance. She held her pinky and ring finger down and jumped. Gravity suddenly left the room, and Big O found herself jumping higher than she knew her legs would allow. She had just used an Ace.

Suddenly, the ball shifted and headed straight down. Under her awaited Ryan. Seeing that the focus was above, Ryan used the gravity Ace Tsudo had activated to propel himself forward. Then, using his own Direction Ace, he caused the ball to change direction. He now had the ball and a clear shot to Tsudo’s goal.

“Ryan! I’m open!”

His eyes went back to his teammate. Ryan thought about his actions in that split second, and reacted. His hand shot the ball back to Henry. Henry caught it and hurled it to the corner goal. Carol was distraught, the ball in the last several seconds had been in three places she hadn’t expected. She wasn’t ready to catch the ball. It made it past her defenses towards her goal and… missed.

Carol caught the ball and held it; she wasn’t worried about time. Ryan had been on their side too long and their was no way he’d get back on time. His teams side lit up in red with a low alarm ringing.

“Well, that’s game.” Napp sighed.

“Hey, don’t even say that.” Portia said. “You still have to make the shot.”

“You honestly think Big O’s going to miss a foul shot?”

Portia grew quiet when she heard that. Almost anyone could make a foul shot, and expecting someone as good as Big O to miss was ludicrous.

Ryan picked himself off the floor and made his way over to his teammates on the side. The three watched as Big O stepped to the edge of the line. She wound up her arm and let the ball loose. Another alarm rang out. That was the end of the game. Big O’s team had won.

Ryan reached out his hand.

“That was a good game.”

“Well it would’ve been.” Tsudo responded, reaching out. “You had an unforeseen strategy with a winning shot and what did you do?” Her eyes shifted towards Henry. “You threw it away, ironically, to trash.”

“Are you still doing this?” Henry said.

“Wait, Henry.” Ryan got between the two. “Tsudo, that’s uncalled for. I told you, if you’re going to keep insulting my teammates after every match, I’m not going to play you anymore”

“Oh really? I thought you wanted to be the best soldier you could be? Going to be hard to do that if you’re not facing the Forefront in Synchronize matches.” Tsudo looked up to the viewing fans. “Do you think any of these other chumps will even be a match for you?”

“Don’t put your problems on me. I’ll have just as much fun playing with anyone else. But you… you seem to only get a kick out of playing my team. So I’ll say it again. Respect us or don’t play.”

“That attitude of yours will get you a long way. I suppose I could treat surface trash here a little better…”

“Don’t worry about it Ryan. Let her talk all the smack she wants. My brother told me it just means she’s got it for me.”

“Riiiiiight. Well, at least Brothamo is proof that not everyone from the surface has...”

“I’m so done with this.” Portia said. She grabbed her glassed from another student, Malla, who had been holding them for her. “Good game guys, but I’ve got better things to do then listen to O’s mouth.”

“You got that right.”

Ryan, Portia and Henry all departed from the training room and as they did, the audience watching departed as well.

“Guys, we’re never playing with them aga…” Ryan said.

“Ryan, every time we play them you want to say that. And everytime I have to remind you that we have to play them. They’re the only ones who give us any challenge.” Henry said.

“We don’t have to do anything. Tsudo should not be aloud to...”

“You’re getting mad, man. Remember what Zordo said about that.”

Ryan took a deep breath.

“Yeah. Okay. Still, we shouldn’t play with them anymore. It takes all the fun out of the game.”

“The only one Big O called trash was me. I didn’t ask you to step in Ryan, I could’ve handled it.”

“We’re a team.”

“Yeah, and I can pull my own wait. Big O is not that big of a deal. On the surface, I was hunted and treated like a criminal. If the best she can do is call me trash, it’s not even worth fighting back. And if I don’t care, you shouldn’t care.”

Ryan let a sigh through his nose.

“By the way,” Portia chimed. “Why did you throw that shot? True that Henry was open and he had an open shot, but so did you.”

“Just instinct.”

“Instinct would’ve told you to shoot the ball.”

“Well... it was a different instinct. I heard Henry call. Saw he could make the shot. I made a judgment call.”

“That’s not instinct, Ryan.”

“Well, technically it is.”

“Well, technically it isn’t. You were thinking. Since when does Ryan think while playing?”

“Since when does Ryan think at all?” Henry teased.

“It wasn’t Henry missing the shot that cost us the game, it was your thinking.”

“Well whatever you want to call it, I don’t regret it. I made the play and it is what it is.”

“But we lost.” Henry said.

Ryan shrugged his shoulders and grinned. “It’s just a game.”

Chapter 7 End

Chapter 8

For all the advantages the magna-boots brought him, their weight was not one of them. Zordo had been taught to move with the faintest of steps and these boots made that relatively difficult. With each step across a wall or a roof, he had to adjust his weight, ensuring his landing was quiet. It was possible to simply turn the boots on and off over and over, but he learned that wasted more sync energy than simply leaving them on, and because leaving them on allowed him to… well… walk up walls, the choice wasn’t difficult to make.

Zordo landed on the wall of the next building, hardening his ankles to support what gravity was straining to use against him. To think he’d been traveling for a week straight, jumping from building to building in these heavy shoes. He wasn’t tired; he’d trained himself to withstand much worse than that. It would still amaze some, just not anyone whose amazement he cared about.

Two more buildings and he’d be home. With that thought, and the possibility that Savvi could be ahead of him, he was tempted to hurry the rest of the way, but he knew better. He had been taught better. His body stilled as his senses told him of his surroundings. Nothing. He wasn’t being followed. Or atleast if he was it was by someone who was better at the art than he was. His eyes shot open as he began running up along side the wall. Coming up from a wall was the hard part. With gravity pushing against him and with the boots constantly gripping the closest thing to them, running straight up the edge of a building could easily cause one to sprain an ankle. The only way to keep going without losing momentum, or as Decson put it, keep looking cool, was for the Green to use hands. His feet left the building, pushing his body up; his hands grabbed the edge, preventing it from going back down. He could simply climb the side of the building, but that wasn’t enough for Zordo. He pulled all of his body up, balancing himself on the edge with his hands. Flipping his body forward, the Green felt his feet being pulled as they landed on the roof. He had almost lost his balance doing that. Almost... and nobody had to know. Again, his body stilled itself. If someone was following him, they would have a hard time with his consistently random stops. His gaze went down to the next building. It was lower than the one he was on and within jumping distance. No need for fancy tricks, he simply leapt over to it. Another pause. Silence yet again. He took an extra half a second to be sure. His destination was the next building. If someone were following him, he had to make sure he lead them to any location but this one. Still no hint of a pursuer. It was safe to proceed. He sprinted forward to the wall of the next building, landing firmly on the wall. Without hesitation, he moved to the nearest window and swung inside. As expected, trash lay everywhere in the room. Once again, he stayed still, waiting...

“Expecting someone?”

Zordo quickly reached for his Handheld sync pistol and aimed it in the direction of the voice. In the darkness of the room, a woman stood leant up against the wall with her arms crossed, eyes closed, and a sinister grin on her face.

“Magatha.” Zordo lowered his weapon. “You shouldn’t be here. Windowed rooms are...”

“…only for those coming and going. Otherwise, we could give away our location.”

Zordo hadn’t noticed it immediately, but Magatha had a Display in her hand.

“Yes.” She said, pulling it out. “I think that’ll be the first rule I change. I’ve always found the views of these rooms to be somewhat romantic.”

She moved towards Zordo who did not move.

“So you’ve seen the announcement. Perhaps programming our Displays to automatically link to each other was a bad idea.”

“Yes I have seen the announcement. And as happy as I am that I’ll finally be able to change your sappy curriculum, I also see the one about you.” Magatha wrapped her arms around Zordo’s neck. “D’s got some nerve, you know. I thought I made it clear that I don’t care about this war, Zordo. The only reason I’m here... is standing in front of me.”

Her smile did not change. Neither did her tone. Of all the people he had met, Zordo had the hardest time reading Magatha’s emotions. Was she upset?

“You know me well enough that I will not turn down an order from D. Will you leave?”

Was it concern she heard? Concern for her? Concern for her future? Concern for the future of Green? Magatha did not know. But the words activated something in her. She leaned forward, only slightly closing her eyes as she got closer to the man in front of her. She was almost his height, yet he always seemed much taller than her. And as she savored the feelings on her lips, the answer to his question became obvious. As much as she enjoyed this moment, she knew better than to prolong it.

“No.” She said after taking a gasp. “Leaving wouldn’t solve the problem I’m going to have, it’ll only make it worse.”

Her arms fell from Zordo’s shoulders and began to head from the door opposite of the window he came through.

“And we’ve got current problems to deal with.”

Zordo followed the blonde into the completely dark hallway. He noticed the area as they continued. The camouflage was still in play. Even if a Discrete found this building, every part near a window was completely dark. There was not enough evidence to sway a logical thinker otherwise. But as they reached the end of the hallway, Zordo felt the sting of the light. As if to completely contrast the area he just came from, the center of the building was so bright that a dark corner could not be found. Zordo squinted, allowing his eyes to adjust. It was a wonder that no matter how many times he entered and exited areas of different light intensity, his eyes always had to adjust. That did not stop his analysis, however. As he continued to follow Magatha down the stairs to the fourth floor, he noticed her walk. It was the same as always, fierce and with authority. No one would suspect she was the same woman he had just shared a kiss with.

“I gave your lectures while you were out, as you requested.”

“Hi, General Zordo.” a teenage girl said from the third floor.

“Greeting, Samatha. Did you finish your research?” Zordo acknowledged.

“Not quite, but the information you recommended helped a lot.”

Magatha continued as though the conversation had not been interrupted. “The students are all progressing fine. Not as well as I would like, but...“

“Hey look, Zordo’s back!” A young man screamed to his friends from the first floor. “Hey yo, General Z-Man!”

“Greetings, Thomas.”

“And it seems your plan to keep them blissful yet trained has succeeded. Though they won’t be as trained as I’d like.”

As the two came to the FOURTH floor, a figure ran into Zordo. As though waking up, the teen raised his head with his eyes barely open.

“Oh, sorry... general Zordo? Oh, I didn’t know you were back.”

“Greetings to you too, Napp. Perhaps if you were more attentive, you wouldn’t miss information like this.”

“Too big of a sacrifice. I already don’t sleep enough thanks to Big O’s training me outside of class. Can’t afford to stay awake while walking. Speaking of which, I have a practice game so if you’ll excuse me, sir. Captain Magatha.”

Napp continued up the stairs, holding his head down as he walked.

“Despite that, they are already much more skilled than any surface fighter in strategy alone. I’m confident that you are raising the army you wanted.”

The two reached the second door on the FOURTH floor, where their rooms were.

“…with the exception of one case.”

“Let me guess.” Zordo said, closing the door behind him. “His name starts with an ‘H’.”

Magatha stopped walking and faced Zordo.

“He was late to class, again. This kind of behavior is expected of kids but not of soldiers. How can we expect him to do handle anything big, if he can’t do something simple like show up on time?”

“Don’t tell me you tried talking to him again.”

Magatha closed her eyes and tilted her nose.

“He should be grateful that’s all I did.”

This time, Zordo could hear the tone shift in her voice. She knew he would disapprove of her actions, yet she did it anyway. He opened his mouth to speak, but someone beat him to it.

“You guys talking about Henry, again?” A woman came out of her room without locking the door. She was shorter than Magatha, but bigger in size. Her red hair stayed just above her shoulders, curly and unmanaged. Her skin held a deeper shade of orange than the other two’s. As all Greens did, she wore all black, from her vest to her shirt right down to her magne-boots. The only other color was her dark green band on her left arm.

“Please tell me you finally knocked some sense into that kid.”

“Sadly no.” Magtha sighed. The mockery was evident. “I was trying to convince our fearless leader here to reconsider letting him leave this place.”

“Did it work this time?” The woman nudged Zordo in the side with her elbow. “Did her feminine whiles finally get to you?”

Zordo stayed facing Magatha as though he didn’t feel anything. “I wasn’t aware you had… whiles.”

“All women have whiles, Zordo.” Another female emerged. Her entrance had been less noticeable as she glided down the hall. Her brown hair was much longer than it appeared, but the ponytail she kept it in was very deceitful. Her skin was exactly the same as Zordo’s in color and paleness. She stood just under Magatha in height, but taller than the other woman. Other than size, and the round glasses she wore, her outfit and green band matched the others perfectly.

“Whether or not they choose to use them, or even know how to, is another matter entirely. Isn’t that right, Nora?”

“Don’t even try it, Chrys. My elbow has more attractiveness in it than you can hope to have in a lifetime.”

“Um… yeah…what do you think, Zordo?” Chrysanthemum said, pushing her glasses to her nose. “Who’s got more whiles? Myself or Nora’s elbow?”

Zordo’s expression did not change. “I choose not to comment on whom I believe to be more attractive.”

“Smart answer.” Magatha grinned.

“Well Chrys has definitely got a pretty face, but that point on Nora’s elbow is a force to be reconned with.” This time, it was a man’s voice. A rather deep one, but with lots of kindness. The lot glanced to see the brown-skinned figure coming towards them. While he wore black like the rest of them, the splash of white that appeared all along his face from his hair and heard were more defining traits.

“You girls always go to Zordo about your looks. I know a thing or two about beauty and whiles. Why don’t you guys ever come to me?”

“Because.” Nora answered. “No body cares about what “whiles” meant back in your day, Shon. An old fossil like you probably finds the weirdest things attractive.”

“You mean, like elbows?”

Everyone found themselves snickering at the comment, save Zordo who simply raised his eyebrows. That was as close to expressing pleasure as he’d ever get.

“But back to the matter at hand.” Magatha spoke. “Henry cannot be allowed to leave this place. His skills can all be fixed, but not with his current mentality.”

“I have to agree with Magatha.” Chrysanthemum said, pushing her glasses again. “Henry’s ability to comprehend technology has suffered a lot. I’d love to blame his upcoming on the surface, but the truth is he’s not as good as he could be because he doesn’t want to be.”

“I can admit that he’s certainly not trying his best.” Shon said. “But is it really as bad as we make it appear? Henry is still skilled enough to beat anyone from the surface.”

“Don’t try to use your surface knowledge to defend this.” Nora said. “I may not have been up there as long as you were, but I remember the fighting. Sure, Henry might last if we put him in front of some Blues or Oranges, but these are Discretes we’re preparing him for. The goal of this army was to raise the children specifically to fight them. Half of Green can’t handle fighting a Discrete, let alone Henry.”

“And even if he weren’t to become a soldier, there is no area in Green that his mindset will allow him to contribute properly for.” Magatha continued. “If we let him go out into this war the way he is, there is no telling what his actions could cause to Green’s system. Letting him go out is simply rewarding him for a job not well done. We don’t have to hold back his entire team, Zordo, just him.”

Zordo took a look at those around him, before proceeding.

“Your concerns have all been notified. However, Henry will graduate with his peers.”

“Zordo…”

“I have my reasons for Henry. It’ll be okay.”

“If we let him go, we’re telling him that what he’s done so far is adequate effort.” Shon said. “Are you sure that’s okay?”

“We’ve made more than enough comments regarding the boy’s need to change to Henry directly. This talking has done nothing but negatively reinforced him. He is the way he is because he believes that he can’t change. If we continue to give this attention the way he expects us to, he will never see what we are trying to teach him. Your concerns as teachers is to prepare these students as a team for this war. It is my concern and mine alone to determine whether or not they are ready. And whichever general they work for, it will be their job to discern where they go from that point.”

Everyone was silent for a moment. The sound of a door opening finally broke the silence.

“Everyone standing in the hall. Well, I didn’t expect this.”

“Savvi.” Zordo said, walking towards him. “I was beginning to think you’d been captured.”

Savvi gave his companion a warped grin. “Seriously? I thought for sure I’d win. Modified my boots and everything.”

“I keep telling you, technology will only take you so far.”

“One of these days, Zordo, I’m going to beat you at something. And when that day comes, I’m going to brag so hard…”

“Beat me? As I recall, you were the one who wanted to race back here.”

Savvi squinted. “Anyway. Shall we get started on evaluating these kids.”

“Indeed. Crys, work with Savvi on your next lesson plan. He will be leading the next technology lesson.”

Crys’s eyes widened before calming herself down. She sighed through her nose and squinted at Zordo.

“Still no warnings with these sudden changes Zordo? How am I supposed to properly get these recruits ready if you make me push my lessons back?”

“And you could’ve gave me some warning.” Savvi pouted. “I didn’t know I’d be here for a full week and teaching! I thought this was just an evaluation. It’s gonna take me two weeks to get back to my department as it is and I have to…”

“To what…?” Zordo gave Savvi a stare. The way he said those words and the way Zordo was looking at him struck Savvi. The two had grown up together and there was no one Savvi feared more than Zordo. Even D didn’t scare him as much.

“N-Nothing.”

Magatha grabbed onto Zordo’s hand.

“And with that, all, we are dismissed.” She dragged the other Green along and headed toward the room at the end of the hall. Both went inside and it closed.

“Have I really gotten so sloppy that you can immediately tell when I’m agitated?” Zordo said

“No.” Magatha said, turning on the lights. “I’ve just gotten that good. My, your room is always tidy.”

“This surprises you?”

“Not at all considering you never use it.”

“Magatha…”

“Zordo, I may not have been at the meeting, but I did get the list of new responsibilities you’re about to have.”

“You have a lot on your plate, mister. You train these kids, even outside of class, you constantly watch over them, and you work on that secret project of yours all the time. If you want your body to last long enough to your new job, you’re going to need some sleep.”

She turned the light out and reopened the door.

“So sleep.”

The door swished closed behind her. Magatha hoped to hear noise as she got farther from Zordo’s room. Yet, there was nothing. That didn’t mean he was getting ready to sleep. It meant he was thinking… like he always did.

Chapter 8 End