

## Chapter 8

Zaxvo dried his eyes and picked up a common enough accessory around the word: a chain with numerous daggers sheathe on it. He buckled around his waist and turned, looking at the walls of the room he might never see again. The dark walls, that stone desk with its wooden chair, that comm screen with its pale red screen and silver handles...*the comm screen!* Zaxvo started. He picked it up and turned it on, scrolling through the lists of contact numbers, and slowly deleting the same number, every single time it appeared on any list. Finished, he put it back where it belonged, turned, and left the room. Walking through the hallways of Gradis Aesdar, he mentally prepared himself, going over tactics in his head. Turning on his thought-comm, he spoke to his former third in command and current second in command: a Toa of air called Fwasiq.

<Brigadier Fwasiq. You there?> He asked.

<Yup, I'm here Zaxvo. What is the matter-problem?> Fwasiq asked.

<Nothing. I just wanted to tell you we'll be deploying formation X.> Zaxvo said.

Fwasiq gasped.

<Formation X?!?!> He half asked, half exclaimed. <That puts you in a dangerous position-place. You could die-perish!>

<I know, but it puts me in the best place I could be to cause a lot of damage.

Look, don't worry about me: just make sure everyone else is in the right place.>

Zaxvo ordered.

<Affirmative.> Fwasiq replied. <Mata-Nui be with you.> he wished. Zaxvo

terminated the connection. *Mata-Nui be with me*, he echoed in his mind.

\* \* \*

Hozil stood with his fellow Toa Vaya, Tikaro, Akura, Lanii and Pronuta by the entrance of a tunnel in the mountains, close to where the TrueToa tacticians guessed most of the fighting was going to take place. Together, they were Red Strike Team. They were one of the most crucial parts of Formation X, which was why almost all of them had some sort of rank: Commander Tikaro, Colonel Akura and his Lieutenant Lanii, Major Pronuta, and Captain Vaya. The only one with out an official rank was Hozil, but everyone said he was officer material. *I guess that's why Zaxvo included me on this team*, he thought, the 2M-Duo hanging by his side. *Hurry up you cowardly Nastivl*, He thought, hoping the battle would start soon. *Hurry up and get here so Fwasiq can send the signal! Hurry up and come to your doom!*

Tikaro glanced at Hozil, looking for all in the world as if reading his thoughts.

"Patience, rookie." He ordered. Hozil looked astonished.

"How did you..." He began.

"Read your mind?" Tikaro finished, smiling kindly. "I didn't. I just taken so many rookies through positions like this, I can pretty much read your mind through you mask. All of those rookies were, like you, rumoured to be 'officer material'. They all also perished on these missions. This is why I want you to have patience.

Don't jump out of hear eager and rash. Limit your mistakes. And above all, keep

you wits about you and be careful. Just because you're rumoured 'officer material' doesn't mean you're invulnerable, k?" Hozil nodded slowly.

"Thanks to Zaxvo I don't have to move one inch from here," He said, patting the 2M-Duo as he spoke. Akura glanced up.

"I've worked with Zaxvo on that, as has Tikaro."

You did? Who else did?" Hozil interrupted.

"Lemme see...well, I know Element-Lord Zorkmar worked with him, and I *think* one of the other Element-Lords did as well. Maybe Aelstar of Ice, or possibly Fwasiq of Air. As I was saying, Tikaro can tell you you're not the first to carry that, and you're not the first to think that. Aye Tikaro?" He said, finishing with a question directed at Tikaro. Tikaro, in response, merely nodded, focused on the device strapped to his wrist. Akura continued. "I'm going to warn you, because I've seen this happen before. Once they realize you're shooting at them, they will send a few of their best warriors to...silence your gun and close your eyes. So please, as Tikaro said, be careful."

*I guess no matter how different we seem to each other, we're all brothers and sisters. They all really seem to care for me.* Hozil thought. *I wonder why?* He pondered. Pronuta came over to him, interrupting his thoughts.

"The only advice I can give you has already been given, so there isn't much to say. I'm sorry" He said almost apologetically. Lanii got up from her crossed legged position on the dirt floor and walked over.

"Unfortunately, I have to agree." She said, then added, as if just remembering, "Be careful of Akura when he's in one of those rages of his. That's how I got these." She indicated various scorch marks on her armour down her left side. Hearing this, Akura glanced up from staring out of the cave entrance and grinned.

"Sorry about that Lanii." He apologized, then turned back to staring at the entrance. "You know what," He added, yawning, "I'm going to get some rest. We can post a watch to watch the watch on Tikaro's wrist, and wake us all when the time comes." Tikaro nodded, but looked worried.

"It shouldn't be taking them this long to arrive; the alert went off half a quat ago." He reasoned. "Uh, whatever. I'll take first watch."

The others took Akura's advice and either sat leaning against the cave wall or lay down and dozed.

\* \* \*

*He marched through the grey world, all sound lost on his ears. Nastivl clashing with the TrueToa, teeth gritted in determination. Finally, he reached the Toa he wanted to see. There was something different about the Toa, but he could not place it. The Toa did not see him, cloaked by the power of his mask as he was wearing: a huna. The Toa whirled and spun, inflicting devastating damage to the Nastivl. Anger rose up in him at the nerve of this Toa, destroying his only hope! Then out of the chaos, a sniper perched on a mound of rock took aim. The Toa did not notice him and kept on fighting, bringing down soldier and soldier, warrior after warrior. His long bident and short mace danced around all other weapons,*

*and his elemental control shocked all. Suddenly, he drew back his arm and hurled the mace. It whirled and spun, colliding with many Nastivl. Suddenly, it thudded deep into a FalseToa's chest, only the pole remaining in view. Disappointed, the Toa snapped the pole off his bident and used it as a melee weapon, striking all within range. His dance took him in the path of the Cordak the sniper was aiming, and the sniper saw this. Pawzerts do not show satisfaction, but if they could, it would be this one. The pawzert pulled the trigger.*

\* \* \*

Hozil sat up, panting. *It was just a dream*, he reminded himself. Then he noticed the slab of rock blocking the entrance, Tikaro doing his level best to move it. "Tikaro! Why didn't you wake us?" Hozil barked, behaving rather unlike a rookie should. Tikaro looked sheepish.

"I was going to, but it just fell a decitap ago, and I figured...well, if I could move it, then there would be no need for me to wake you." Tikaro admitted. "Help me wake them now, will you?" Tikaro requested. Hozil nodded, and set to work with Vaya. In a few decitaps, the whole team was awake. Working together, they succeeded in moving the huge slab about two dio.

"Here, let me take a look. I'm the thinnest, so I'm more likely to be able to fit through that hole," Hozil said. Tikaro, leader of the team, nodded his permission. "Go ahead, but report back here in one piece," He half-joked, half-approved. Hozil squeezed through the gap, and once out, he activated his mask, transforming into a blue Pawzert. Walking boldly forwards, he saw a crowd gathered around a particular spot. Hozil walked forwards and joined the crowd.

\* \* \*

"Think he'll be alright?" Vaya asked, his voice echoing around in the cave.

"Shh!" Lanii whispered. "Not so loud! Someone outside could hear us." She reminded Vaya. "As to your question Captain, I think he should be fine. He is wearing a Mahiki, after all." She stated.

"Trust me, Hozil is one bright Toa. He knows what to do and I'd trust him with my life." Tikaro chimed in. Vaya shook his head.

"I wasn't worried about his physical health. I was worried about his mental health." Vaya said, puzzling everyone.

"Huh?" Pronuta grunted. Vaya was grim.

"Tikaro, you were with me. Remember how hard it was to get Zaxvo to lead us?" He turned to the rest of the group. "Zaxvo was really angry and depressed after he learned of the death of Zorkmar."

"I was there. I saw him go down. Ask Lanii, she came with me to...avenge him," Akura said softly. Tikaro glanced at Akura, surprise written all across his mask.

"You were? ...Anyways, Zaxvo just wanted to stay on his own in his quarters, and then when we do get him in a fighting spirit, he puts himself in the best position to afflict a whole ton o' damage on the Nastivl." Tikaro explained. Vaya took it from there.

“What I’m saying is, if Hozil find’s a good friend’s body, or remains...well, let me just say we don’t want another Zaxvo.”