Reality Check

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Reality Check

by Subspace_Adventurer

Summary

Lloyd Garmadon wakes up in the hospital blind and concussed. But hey, at least his friends are there! ..except they're not exactly the ones he remembers? What is going on? And why is his dad so obsessed with ocean creatures?

Or, in which Movie Lloyd gets injured during a fight with Garmadon and wakes up with amnesia... but not?

Notes

Welcome to my very first completed multi-chapter story! This started out as a little practice writing challenge I do for myself on occasion, and after eight months of almost-daily entries, this labor of love was finished (and I made some friends along the way! 😁)

Enjoy!

- Inspired by Hearts of Green by Dancing_Shadow (AO3)/Sleepy Scorpion (FFN)

Chapter 1

There's something to be said about waking up in one's own bed. The mattress has just the right level of squish, the sheets are comfortable, and the blankets have been perfectly arranged to provide just the right amount of warmth to survive that post-wake up chill.

Unfortunately, his bed was not where Lloyd woke up. A sharp pain blossomed throughout his head, harshly pulling him from sleep's sweet embrace. As his hands went to cradle his head, he took note of how dark the room was. Usually there was some sort of light, whether it was the moonlight peeking through the cracks of the window shades or a light from the hallway right outside his door, but tonight it was pitch black. He tried blinking several times to get his eyes to readjust and focus, but to no avail.

His head was still throbbing and he could feel what seemed like bandages around his head as he struggled to sit himself up. Had he been injured? The green ninja tried to think back to the last thing he remembered, but everything was fuzzy and vague.

The sound of a door slamming open caught his attention and he turned toward the sound. A strangely-accented voice spoke up first. “Lloyd! Thank goodness you’re awake! You were out for so long, we thought…”

“You took a pretty bad hit to the head,” someone else (Zane?) interjected. “The doctors are worried about the concussion you sustained. How are you feeling?”

Lloyd winced at the new sounds and curled in on himself a bit more, wrapping his arms around his knees. “My head feels like a jackhammer was left on inside of it.” His voice was rough and raspy from disuse, and the foreign sound grated at him in a way he couldn’t place. “With the way it hurts to hear you guys talk, it’s probably a good idea you kept the lights off.” He heard several sharp intakes of air, and warning bells began to go off in his mind. “… what’s wrong?”

Several moments of silence passed before he heard movement. Someone sat on the bed next to him and took his hand. The voice, Kai’s this time, was much softer and more melancholic. “Lloyd… the lights are on. I think… the concussion has blinded you.”

The blond boy’s eyes grew wide with fear as he moved his eyes around and blinked several times, trying to force them to see again. “Wh-what? I… I mean, I can’t be…”

Zane’s cheery voice piped up again. “That is one of the side effects the doctors mentioned, but the good news is that your vision should return in time. However, whether it will be weeks or months is unknown.”

Lloyd felt a hand grasp his own free hand while another moved to rub circles across his back. “We won’t let you go through this alone. You’ve got us to look after you! I’m sure you’ll be back on your feet in no time, but until then, just let us know what you need. I’d even give up my portion of cake for you.”

Tears began to form in the green ninja's eyes as he tried to clear the fog from his mind. Blind? For how long? What was supposed to happen in the meantime? He didn't want to just sit around, but what else could he do with his injury causing this? And where did he even get the injury from in the first place?

"W… what happened? Everything's so fuzzy…"

It was Nya who responded this time. "Garmadon happened. You had him on the ropes, but then he decided to play dirty. None of us were able to get to you in time, but we found you in your mech, which is completely toast now."

Something didn't feel right about that information, but it sort of made sense? Lloyd decided that he'd have to figure it out later when he wasn't feeling so out of it. The threat of sleep was already pulling at his eyelids and he didn't know how long he could force it back. "How long was I out?"

"A little over two weeks. The doctor said it might take a while for you to wake up, but we didn't expect it to take this long!" Jay's voice almost squeaked as he sounded like he was trying to hold back tears.

"We're just glad you're back now. We'll help you get better." A hand ruffled his hair and the blond subconsciously leaned into the familiar touch. Kai always knew how to comfort him, he thought with a smile.

His eyelids drooped and he felt his body begin to relax. The hands ruffling his hair and rubbing his back guided him into a supine position and pulled the blanket up to his shoulders.

"Get some sleep, bro. We'll come back to visit soon."

As feet pattered out of the room and the door closed gently behind them, Lloyd smiled as sleep finally claimed him. He wouldn't trade his family for the world.

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The next time he woke up, he realized he could now sense light. Everything was still relatively dark, but he could at least tell that there was some sort of light in the room. A dryness in his mouth and throat made itself known as well, and he coughed a few times, grimacing at how it rattled his head, before attempting to sit up.

The sound of movement next to him caught his attention before he heard a voice. "Whoa there, slow down! It's Kai here, I'll get you some water." Two hands slid under him, one under his back and one under his head, and helped to stabilize him. Once he was fully sitting upright, a drinking glass was placed in his hands. "Here you go. Drink slowly, and let me know if you need help."

Lloyd slowly brought the glass to his lips and took a couple sips of the water. “Thanks. Is it just you here right now?”

“Yep. The others are working on homework right now down in the cafeteria, but I’ll let them know you’re awake.” There was a short pause as he heard the click clack of a message being typed out on a cell phone. “…and send! They should be up in a couple minutes, but it’ll just be two at a time. The doctor didn’t seem too happy that we were, quote ‘overstimulating the patient right after he woke up.’”

A comfortable silence fell between the two, only broken by the occasional sound of Lloyd sipping some more water. Some of the brain fog had cleared away, and the green ninja decided to bring up a question that was bugging him. “Why are the others working on homework? They don’t go to school, do they?”

Kai gave a confused hum. “What do you mean? Of course they do! We *all* attend Ninjago High—at least, we do when Garmadon’s not attacking.”

There was that other not-right thing. “What do you mean, ‘when Garmadon’s not attacking’?” The events of the past few months flashed through his mind, especially the battle at the monastery. “I thought he decided to help us?”

Another stretch of silence lapsed, this one much less comfortable, before he heard Kai’s voice again. “Uh, no? Last I checked he was still in that volcano lair of his, plotting to take over Ninjago City. Although now that you mention it, he hasn’t shown up again since you got hurt…”

The conflicting information started to make Lloyd’s head spin, his thoughts spiraling as they tried to reconcile things. Garmadon had a volcano lair? And what’s this about going to school? Behind all the new info, there was something in the back of his mind that was confirming everything he had just heard, as if that was the way things had always been, but it didn’t feel…right.

“This has to be a dream, right? None of this makes sense, and yet it makes perfect sense somehow? I didn’t attend Darkley’s for long, and I’ve definitely not been to school since the Tomorrow’s Tea incident…” Lloyd’s face scrunched up in confusion and frustration.

A short chime sound caught his attention and he heard the squeak of leather as he presumed Kai stood up from his chair. “That was the others. They’re ready to visit, so I’ll go trade places with them. Do you need anything else before I head out?”

Lloyd held up the glass of water. “I think I’m done with this for now, but otherwise I’ll be fine. Thanks Kai.”

The cup was lifted out of his hand and a clink indicated it had been replaced on the nearby bedside table. “Alright, I’ll send them in soon.” The door opened and closed, and the blond was left alone.

Without his sight, he tried to fill in the blanks with his other senses. His hands ran over the thin hospital sheet, feeling its texture and measuring the width of the bed. A slight discomfort

on the back of his hand drew his attention to an IV line. His ears picked up faint noises outside the room, and he guessed that the door was somewhere to his left. He also heard the rhythmic hum of some of the medical instruments. The air smelled of disinfectant and latex gloves, and there wasn't much to taste besides his own saliva.

The door took longer to open than he expected, but when it did, two sets of footsteps entered the room. Both sets were heavy and bold, one carefree and confident while the other was purposeful and direct. Lloyd tried to guess the person each footstep belonged to, but his mind drew a blank.

"So, how's our resident green bean holding up?" Cole's voice made itself known, and Lloyd realized that it sounded higher than he remembered. It also lacked the gravelly timbre that was associated with the earth ninja's voice, but something in him assured with perfect confidence that this was indeed Cole.

"I can see a little bit of light now, so that gives me some hope. Otherwise, I'm… still trying to make sense of things." He rubbed a finger against the IV line absentmindedly.

"Ah yes. Kai did mention that you were having some memory issues. Is there anything in particular you would like clarification on?" The set of purposeful footsteps walked closer to the bed as Zane's almost-but-not-quite robotic voice spoke rather animatedly.

Lloyd's brows furrowed as he slowly shook his head. "It's just… all of it. Nothing you guys have mentioned matches what I remember, and yet it feels like this is what's supposed to be normal. For example, the last thing I remember is making the Tornado of Creation, but Nya mentioned something about a Garmadon fight and finding me in a mech." He let out a weak chuckle as a wry smile made its way across his face. "Are you sure I'm not dreaming? 'Cuz this would make for a great nightmare story. Exactly my brand of trauma, actually."

A heavy silence filled the room, and he was sure Cole and Zane were having some sort of silent conversation about him. Soon enough, Zane's too-cheerful voice filled the room. "Concussions are serious things that affect everyone differently. It is entirely possible that you had a dream while you were unconscious due to your head injury, and the concussion has caused the events of the dream to present themselves as reality and vice versa." Lloyd swore he heard several different-toned computer beeps before the nindroid spoke again. "I have made a note to inform the doctor about this possibility. For now, we would like to just chill with you," he added with a strange emphasis on the word "chill."

Lloyd sighed and filed the whole dream reality thing away with the growing pile of 'things to think about when his head is clearer'. He then turned his focus to changing the topic. "Sooo, Kai mentioned something about school? What's it like? I don't remember attending Ninjago High."

"It's so boring. I don't see why we have to be there in the first place; we never have time to learn anything anyway with how often Garmadon attacks..."

As the earth ninja ranted about the mundane experience that was attending public education, Lloyd found himself smiling. He still wasn’t quite sure that this all was real, but at least his friends were familiar.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Lloyd learns more about the world and people he's forgotten.

Scratch his previous thought, his friends weren't actually that familiar. Throughout Cole and Zane's visit, he picked up that Zane was trying (and utterly failing) to conceal his robotic nature, and Cole was REALLY into music, so much so that Lloyd jokingly imagined his elemental power could be music or sound instead of earth.

Nya and Jay were the next ones to visit, and if the Jay he remembered was a pillar of confidence, this one was a nervous wreck. Nya seemed to be pretty much the same as she should be, but he got the sense that if there was anything between her and Jay, it was very one-sided on Jay's part.

…which was extremely concerning since Jay had just proposed to Nya before they used the Tornado of Creation, and she said yes. When he voiced as much, he got an ear-splitting laugh from Nya as if that would ever happen, and a nervous giggle from Jay.

Surely the whole thing wasn't just a dream, right? He knew there were adventures he'd had, things he was certain that he had seen and done with the other ninja, but nothing he was experiencing now matched what he thought he knew.

Time seemed to drag on endlessly. Jay and Nya eventually left him to finish their homework (that was still a strange concept; the ninja attending school), and he was left with nothing to do but lay there. He debated trying to go back to sleep, but his body wasn't tired enough to be able to fall asleep.

He absentmindedly wondered if Wu was around somewhere, and how different from his memories he actually was. There was a wide variety of differences, from Cole and Jay being the most different to Nya being the least, but every single one of them was different in some way. Even Garmadon sounded like he was different, what with his apparent obsession over having an ocean creature theme for everything.

Lloyd decided that he didn't like head injuries; it was too hard to think clearly about anything. He'd have to put in some extra agility training once he got all healed up.

Just when he thought he was going to go stir crazy, the door slammed open and an unfamiliar gasp bounced through the room. "Oh honey, I came as soon as I heard you were awake! Your friends told me about your concussion. How are you feeling? It's all right, mom's here now."

Two arms enveloped him in a hug, and the familiar scent of vanilla and sandalwood that surrounded him brought to mind images of Misako. Was she different in reality also, or would she be the same as he remembered? He weakly brought his arms up and returned the hug, content to sit in the comfort of it while he could.

His mom released the hug after a few seconds and instead she grabbed Lloyd's face, lightly turning it this way and that. "I am so sorry, honey. Everything must be so confusing and scary. What do you remember about me?"

Based on the reactions of his previous visitors when he shared about his memories, he wanted to be more tactful and thought for a moment what best to share or filter out. "Uhmm, your name is Misako, you and Garmadon got married and had me before he was banished, and you help Wu with research a lot?"

The hands holding his face began to tremble, and he was pulled into another hug. He heard her whisper "my sweet little boy" over and over, and the cloth at the back of his shoulder grew wet as she cried. This time when he returned the hug, his hand went to rest on her head and he had a chance to feel her hair. Instead of the braid he was expecting, there was a loose bun held in place by a pair of hair sticks. He felt her sobs strengthen, and he moved his hand down to rub circles into her back instead.

He wasn't entirely sure how to feel. Judging by her reaction, she had expected different information to come out of his mouth, which meant yet another person that his memories conflicted with. What made it awkward was the fact that it was his own mother this time. Someone he should be closer to than the ninja, and now it was all wrong. He had disappointed her, and he didn't even know how to make things right again.

Eventually the tears stopped falling, and his mother took several deep breaths to calm herself. "As soon as I heard that you were injured, I went straight to Garmadon and gave him a piece of my mind for daring to actually hurt his own son. Needless to say, he should stay away from the city for a while. That'll give you time to at least be released from the hospital, and then I promise we will move out of Ninjago City." She pulled out of the hug and held his face in her hands again. "We'll go somewhere far away from your father and the rest of this two-faced city. You've been through so much with the constant bullying and now this; it's the least I can do to make it up to you."

Bullying? Toward the Green Ninja? There was a lot that he was missing, but he decided to wait until later to dig into that can of worms. He didn't want to start another bout of crying.

The hands soon released his face, and the sound of a tissue being pulled out of a box came from his bedside. A couple nose blows and one hand washing later, his mother's weight settled on the side of the bed.

A nagging thought hit him as he thought about his mother's words. If they moved away from Ninjago City, he couldn't be there as the Green Ninja when he was needed (which, by the sound of things, the ninja were needed pretty regularly). "Hey mom, let's wait until after I'm better to talk about moving. I don't think I'm ready to leave the city quite yet."

A shuddering breath slowly left the woman. “You’re right. Nothing good comes from emotionally charged decisions.” She gently patted Lloyd’s leg. “When did my baby go and get so wise?”

Lloyd broke out into an awkward smile and he put a hand on top of his mom’s. “I’m sure I got it from you and Wu.” He made his eyes look down, desperately wishing he could force himself to see the hand that he knew was resting on his leg. “Do you think you could tell me some stories? Stuff that we did, places we’ve gone, things like that.”

Her hand rolled over and grabbed his hand, squeezing it gently. “I would love to.”

And tell she did. She told all kinds of stories, ranging from his childhood to vacation road trips to second-hand stories from babysitters (usually Wu). Many of the stories elicited some deep-seated emotion; sometimes fondness, sometimes embarrassment, sometimes smugness and pride.

Huh. Maybe Zane’s theory about the dream-slash-reality swap wasn’t so far off after all.

They sat there for what felt like hours, his mom telling story after story while he only spoke up to ask for clarification. He learned that his mom’s birth name was indeed Misako, but she always went by Koko instead. He learned that he was, in fact, not left at a boarding school when he was little and that he had always lived with his mom. He learned that Garmadon didn’t even really know that his son existed as more than a bald baby with no teeth, and yet his relation to the warlord was the cause of basically everyone in the city turning against him. (Thank goodness the hospital personnel were too professional to have been petty about treating him.)

Eventually Koko informed him that it was getting late and rose from the bed, promising him that she would return after work the next day. She pecked a kiss on his cheek, and then he followed the sound of her footsteps to the door and out of the room.

His head, which had been miraculously relaxed during the time his mom was there, began to throb once again, though at a lesser intensity than before. He slowly let himself back down onto his back and mentally reviewed the day. A lot of things were still fuzzy, but the conversations with everyone had helped to clear away some of the fog surrounding everything. He still didn’t remember any events before the injury, but as long as he was getting better, he’d take the day as a win.

As he closed his eyes and drifted off toward sleep, he casually wondered when Master Wu would come visit.

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Lloyd awoke to the sensation of light and the sound of gentle snoring. The bandages around his head felt more snug, and he figured they must have been changed overnight.

Opening his eyes was a chore as sleep tried to hold them hostage, but once they were open he shut them again instantly. Everything was so bright!

He gave them a few more seconds closed then tried again. The brightness was a little more bearable this time, and he could see colors now. To his right was the greatest concentration of light, indicating the presence of a large window. The light from the window washed out any colors that were in front of him, but to his left he saw a mass of dark blue with a blob of white in the center.

If the dark blue was a chair, then maybe…

“Master Wu?”

The white figure jerked and groaned, not expecting the wake up call, and another unfamiliar voice spoke up (and wasn’t that sad, the number of unfamiliar voices he’d heard in the last day or so). “Lloyd, good morning! How are you feeling?”

The blond carefully sat himself up and shielded his eyes from the sunlight. “M’ alright, I guess. Everything’s blurry and way too bright, but it’s a huge improvement from yesterday.” He closed his eyes as the light began to make them ache, and he let out a little chuckle. “Or whatever day it was. It’s kinda hard to keep track of time when you’re blind and exhausted.”

After a few seconds, the distinctly accented voice of the sensei broke the stillness. “The other ninja mentioned you had some sort of dream. Would you tell me what you remember of it?”

“I can, but it’s kinda long. You sure you want to hear it?” After receiving no response, he shrugged and began his tale. “It started out at a boarding school called Darkley’s School for Bad Boys…”

Deciding to omit some of the more… sensitive things, he vaguely recounted several events that he remembered; the prophecy of the Green Ninja, the Tomorrow’s Tea incident, defeating the Overlord (twice), the invasion of the Cursed Realm, Wu’s disappearance and Garmadon’s reappearance, and finally the battle with the Oni.

“…and that’s the last thing I remember before waking up here.” His eyes had adjusted to the light by now, and guided by the colored masses he reached for what he hoped was a cup of water.

Wu was silent for several moments while Lloyd let the cool liquid soothe his throat. “Very interesting indeed. I have heard legends of the Oni before, but the other things… For you to have had vivid dreams of such things must be an omen. I will need time to look into this for myself.” The white shape rose and came closer to him, and Lloyd felt a hand rest on his head. “You really don’t remember anything that happened before you woke up?”

The green ninja shook his head. “No. It’s like everything before the dream doesn’t exist anymore. When I hear stories of things that have happened, I feel a sense of recognition and other emotions toward the events, but nothing ever brings up a memory. Like last night when mom was here! She told me a story of the time I came home from school with a participation

ribbon, and I felt pride and smugness and anxiety connected to the moment, but no memory attached itself to it."

The old man hummed before lightly ruffling Lloyd's hair. "I will do everything I can to find out what these dreams mean. In the meantime, heal well nephew." He removed his hand from the boy's head and began moving to the door. With a mirthful tone, he added, "Although it seems you've already taken that initiative."

Then the door closed with a soft click and Lloyd was left in silence once again.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Lloyd finally gets to explore this unfamiliar world.

The days flew by quickly. Every time he slept, he woke up a little bit better than before, and he was miraculously out of the hospital within a week. His eyesight had fully returned and the gash on the side of his head had closed up with only a slight scar, but the dream world was still the only memories he had of before the accident. Thankfully his friends had been more than willing to share stories of their exploits as both high school students and the Secret Ninja Force.

Yeah, apparently they were supposed to hide their identities. He was just glad he hadn't accidentally revealed anything to his mom during his hospital stay.

Speaking of his mom, she pulled him out of school—under the reason that he was still recovering from the accident, which wasn't entirely wrong—until he figured out what he wanted to do. That was a huge load off his chest, because he had no idea how he'd do relearning his routine while also dealing with high school drama. The other ninja expressed their disappointment at his absence, but they understood the reasoning.

Maybe he would try going back to school eventually, just not now.

His first day back at home started out pretty normal. He got up at the crack of dawn, to which his mom expressed surprise at. Apparently he normally slept at least another hour, so he told himself that he would try to be more "normal" about that tomorrow.

And how sad was that, that he had to find out what was "normal" for him. Yes, his friends and family were different to him, but now he was different to them too. With knowledge of who they were but not of their history with him, he might as well have been a completely different person.

Based on the dream memories, he could actually be a different person.

The rest of the morning was uneventful. His mom had fixed up some eggs and sausages for breakfast, and they sat together and made small talk until she left for work. Once she was gone, Lloyd familiarized himself with the small apartment. The kitchen was neatly organized and well stocked, and he had no trouble locating anything he might need in the way of meal preparation. The small living area between the front door and his mom's bedroom was also tidy and put together, ever ready for guests.

His bedroom, however, was a different story. While his loft bed was…passably neat, the rest of the room seemed to have no organization at all. Random piles of papers littered the desk beneath his bed, clothes were strewn out over a well-worn beanbag chair, and the little space he had in his closet was taken up by more haphazardly put away clothes and shoe boxes filled with random items.

He had his work cut out for him, for sure.

Choosing the desk as the first area of attack, Lloyd began to make order out of the chaos there. He sorted through the papers—most of which were school assignments—and put them inside an empty binder he found on one of the shelves underneath. The few papers that weren't school related were set aside for him to look at later.

The desk was a relatively quick task, so he kept it clear for use as a staging area and moved on to the closet. He removed the precariously stacked boxes and set them on the desk, then went through them one by one. There was a wide variety of items spread between the boxes; one contained several well-used toy cars, another contained pieces to a racetrack for the aforementioned cars, and yet another contained a black training gi. His favorite box, though, was filled with an assortment of individually wrapped candies; best of all, wintergreen pillow mints.

And if he were to pop one every now and then while he worked, who was to stop him?

He sorted the boxes into a useful pile (the candies) and a less-useful pile (the toys). He debated on throwing some of the less-useful boxes away, but something inside him told him he shouldn't yet. He decided he would come back to them at a later date and kept working.

Stacking them back in the closet in a much more stable way, he finally began putting the clothes on the beanbag away. The primary colors of his wardrobe were green and black, and aside from a few random t-shirts, he took special note of the comically large amount of green jackets and black jeans.

How often were his clothes ruined that he felt the need to own so many? He didn't want to think about that right now.

As he folded and shelved the last pair of pants, he grabbed one more mint and stepped back to admire his handiwork. The small room was much tidier and looked more open, and everything now had a place. He plopped into the beanbag chair and stared at the sky out the window next to him. The sun was high in the sky, indicating the midday mealtime was near. That, accented by a growl from his stomach, prompted the boy to drag himself off the cozy beanbag and into the kitchen.

After a quick lunch of a ham and cheese sandwich, he decided to explore the city. He was supposed to meet the other ninja at their warehouse base once they all got out of school, so he had some time to kill before then. He grabbed a green jacket by muscle memory, and then armed with that and his phone GPS, he headed out into the big wide world.

Getting out of the apartment building was simple enough, but once he was outside, he realized just how big this Ninjago City actually was. There were skyscrapers everywhere,

monorail lines crisscrossed between buildings, and a river ran straight through the middle of the city.

Still staring up at the ginormous buildings around him, he started walking in a random direction. His gaze slowly lowered to the smaller buildings along his chosen path, and he could pick out some familiar names among the businesses here.

Unfortunately, the one good thing about being disliked by an entire city of people was that he never had to walk in the middle of a crowd. The sea of people parted for him as everyone gave him the widest berth possible. It was kind of nice, if he didn't think about why they made way for him. In addition, several shops and businesses had signs hung on them that explicitly said "NO SERVICE TO LLOYD GARMADON." That was fine, he was just taking a walk right now anyways.

…okay, maybe it was a little less than fine.

The further he walked, the more frustrated he became. How were so many people against him? A kid, whose worst offense was getting a D on a report card in Middle School? (If he ignored the whole 'releasing the Serpentine' thing, which apparently didn't happen here.) What if his mom got sick and he needed to pick up medicine for her? What if his mom needed him to run errands sometimes? …what if they treated his mom similarly?

That thought alone officially ruined what was supposed to be an enjoyable stroll. He shoved his hands into his jacket pockets and kept walking, trying to ignore the stares and glares he received as he passed by people. Eventually, he pulled up his hood to block out most of his peripheral, and at that moment he understood why all of his outerwear had hoods.

He was so worked up that he hadn't been paying attention to where he was going, and when he became conscious of his surroundings again, he realized he had found his way to Ninjago High.

After realizing where he was, he nearly turned and left immediately. However, his curiosity got the better of him and he decided to scope out the place.

He ducked into an alleyway and jumped up to the top of the tallest building nearby. He didn't have binoculars with him, but his phone camera had a pretty impressive zoom distance which he used to look around the campus instead.

It was a relatively small campus for the size of the city, with only three buildings and a couple of sports fields behind it. Compared to Darkley's, however, it was pretty impressive.

The building he was on was positioned on the side, so he used his camera zoom to try and see if he could find any of his friends. Unfortunately he couldn't, so he decided to head back the way he came. He didn't see a point in exploring the city anymore since there wasn't really anywhere he would be able to go except to the warehouse, which was the opposite direction from his apartment.

He also debated using the rooftops instead of the sidewalk to get around, but it was already risky just being on top of a building in the middle of the day. If anyone were to see him

bounding through the top of their concrete jungle, his secret identity could be compromised.

Begrudgingly he leapt down off his perch and retraced his steps, setting the GPS endpoint to the warehouse. The trek to the Secret Ninja Force's base of operations was long, and compounded with his newfound (re-found?) reason to be disappointed in the people of the city, he was not in a very good mood by the time he arrived.

He walked around the seemingly-abandoned building trying to get in, but none of the doors were unlocked. Made sense, seeing as the others were still at school, but surely there had to be a way for him to get inside, right?

…a way that he would have forgotten after the accident. Right.

Scanning the surroundings, he saw a dock leading out to a boat that looked suspiciously like the Destiny's Bounty. As he was currently locked outside the warehouse with no other options, he figured that would be as good a place as any to go. Maybe his uncle could tell him some more stories while they waited for the rest of the ninja. At this point, even a swim in the bay would be a good distraction from his current mood.

He made his way down the wooden dock and carefully stepped onto the ship. Wandering around the deck, he was surprised to discover that the Bounty was almost exactly the same as he remembered it, and he welcomed the familiarity. There were slight differences such as the design of the railings and the hanging lanterns strung between the masts, but the twin dragon heads, the three masts, and the covered upper deck were all shared elements. He took a moment to just absorb the normality of his surroundings before going back to his original task.

He didn't immediately see any signs of Wu on the main deck, but he might be around somewhere. After a quick check of the bridge yielded no wise old master, he ducked inside the cabin…and was met with a room full of weapons. Big weapons, little weapons, sharp weapons, dull weapons; they really had it all in here. There was even a huge metal cylinder in the center of the room that had a big "DANGER" label across its front. He really didn't want to touch any of this stuff, but he had to poke around a bit before he found the trapdoor leading to the lower deck.

Gingerly, he climbed down the creaky ladder and made his way through the still-familiar layout. Looking through each of the rooms, however, revealed that although the building of the ship was the same, the rooms and furnishings were not. Many of the rooms were filled with storage boxes and layers of dust, as if they hadn't been used in years. Other rooms were only lightly furnished for one or two people at most.

He resurfaced from the depths of the ship disappointed and confused. Disappointed that yet another aspect of his life betrayed his memory of it, and confused as to where in the world Wu was. He climbed back up to the bridge and actually took a good look at everything. All the screens and buttons and other mechanical parts seemed to be in order, but when his eyes caught on the main navigation display, he had to do a double take.

The map shown on the screen was of a single small island. There was no dark island, although that could have just been because it still hadn't been added to maps yet, and the half

spiral shape was nowhere to be found.

Lloyd took a few seconds to examine the details of the map, and then a folded piece of paper sitting on the control panel caught his eye. As he picked up the paper, something slid out between the folds and would have fallen onto the floor had his reflexes been slower. It was a key of some kind.

The note was from Wu, explaining that he was out until the others got off school and giving instructions on where to use the key to get into the warehouse. How his uncle knew that he'd be here before everyone else was beyond him, but he was thankful nonetheless for his foresight.

Having nowhere left in the Bounty to explore, he headed back across the dock to the warehouse. Wu's instructions brought him to a small side door that had clearly seen better days. It took a bit of jiggling the key around, but the lock eventually clicked and the door slowly creaked open.

As soon as he stepped into the huge room, his breath was nearly taken away by what he saw. Surrounding the walls like guards were six gigantic mechs, one for each ninja. The red and black mechs were somewhat humanoid, with the red having flamethrower arms and the black having a single gigantic tire as its mode of mobility. The white mech was a tank, the blue mech was a jet that looked vaguely similar to the Storm Glider, and the cyan mech looked like a water strider bug.

Finally, there was Lloyd's own mech. A massive green tatsu dragon, with random bits and pieces lying on the floor around it as it was still being repaired from its pilot's last fight. The teen picked his way around the debris and climbed into the cockpit, eyes wide with wonder. It reminded him of the elemental dragon he had in the dream world, but where that dragon was made of energy that required focus and concentration to maintain, this was made of physical materials and the only concentration required was for steering the metal beast.

Seeing as there was still plenty of time until the other ninja got out of school and there wasn't much else to do aside from some video game cabinets against a wall, the blond picked a random mech and started examining.

After all, who doesn't like seeing what all a bunch of giant mechs can do?

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

The team trains and Wu assigns homework.

The hours sped by quickly and before he knew it, the sound of multiple somethings popping out of a suction tube pulled Lloyd's attention away from the ice tank he was currently inspecting and over to a row of lockers against the wall that he hadn't noticed before. The doors opened and his friends stepped out of them, faces displaying a wide range of relief and excitement.

"Finally! Base sweet base. Who's ready for-" Jay started, then squeaked and ducked behind his thick orange scarf as the blond slid to the ground and made his way toward them. "Oh Lloyd! I-I didn't realize you were already here. You almost gave me a heart attack!"

Lloyd rubbed the back of his head and smiled sheepishly. "Sorry about that, I just wanted to look at the mechs. They're all so cool! I assume Nya built them?"

The raven-haired girl dismounted a motorcycle (did she ride that through the locker??) and bobbed her head. "Sure did! With help from you, Zane and Jay, of course." She gestured to the other two, and Zane gave his signature cheesy grin while Jay shyly rubbed his head. However, her smile faded a bit as she glanced over to the green mech. "Sorry we haven't gotten yours up and running yet. Garmadon sure did a number on it."

That prompted him to shake his head. "It's fine. You guys were busy helping me, and I say helping a friend is much more important than fixing a mech." His eyes sparkled as he looked at the dragon on the other side of the warehouse. "And besides, I'm good with just looking at it right now. I've never seen a mech so detailed; it doesn't seem right to actually use it." Catching a glimpse of the others' wistful looks to each other, he grimaced. "Er, sorry. I still don't remember…"

A hand was placed on his shoulder, and he looked over to see Cole giving an awkward smile. "Don't worry about it. After all, that's why we're here, right? We're gonna help you remember everything." The black ninja patted his shoulder before guiding the blond over to the clearing by the main door. "Starting with katas. Hopefully you at least have the muscle memory for these."

As Cole began to lead the movements of the first kata, the other ninja made their way over and joined them. Some reluctantly, some more eagerly, but all of them participated for the sake of their friend.

Lloyd was relieved to learn that the kata was the same as one he remembered from the dream world, and he was able to follow along easily. As the son of a dancer, Cole had a natural flow through the different stretches and forms while the others' movements were more stiff and hesitant, making the blond curious as to how long ago they started learning these.

They worked through several katas; most of them were familiar, but a couple of them had slight variations that he didn't recognize and had to adjust for. As the session drew to a close, Lloyd shook out his limbs and did some light cooldown stretching. The others followed suit soon after, and Jay went to a small refrigerator and brought back sports drinks for everyone.

"You've gotten really good at those, Lloyd! Have you been practicing on your own time?" Cole gave him a thump on the back. "Whenever you remember, that is."

The blond shook his head and gave his friend a reassuring smile. "It's all right. Actually, I think I worked through them in the dream world a lot. Sometimes with you guys, sometimes with Wu, sometimes by myself." The smile pressed down into a thoughtful line and his eyebrows lowered. "We did a lot of training together there. Then again, we also did a lot of fighting there too, so I guess it makes sense."

"You know, we've told you a lot of stories about us here, but you haven't said much of anything about us in your dream." Jay handed Lloyd a drink and fidgeted with his own bottle's cap. "What was it like? What were we like?"

Kai gulped down half his bottle at once and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "I'm interested too. There have to be some differences, based on how you reacted when you woke up."

The blond teen's frown grew deeper as he tried to find the right words. "Well, I guess Jay was the biggest difference. I don't think he even knew what shy meant; he was not afraid to speak his mind and speak it loudly. Kai and Nya are pretty similar, but Cole was nowhere near as into music and Zane didn't hide the fact that he's a nindroid."

Zane suddenly looked very scared, and a few moments of silence passed before Cole's voice echoed through the room. "I knew it!"

The two blue members whipped around to look at the black ninja. "Wait, you weren't sure? We've been a team for almost six months and you couldn't tell?" Jay's jaw dropped as he stared.

The raven-haired boy crossed his arms and scowled at the curly-haired brunet. "Well excuse me! No one ever specifically said he was, so I didn't want to assume."

"I just thought he was weird…" Kai mumbled quietly, his eyes wide with surprise. Lloyd watched as the others turned on him too, sparking an argument about the obvious robotic characteristics of their friend all while said friend's face flashed through various expressions of fear and uncertainty.

"Zane? Were we not supposed to know that? I'm sorry for accidentally revealing your secret without permission…"

The nindroid's facial expression finally rested on a concerned look as he made eye contact with the green ninja. "My father told me not to tell anyone I was an android, but he never told me what to do if they found out on their own." He looked around at the other ninja, who had all gone quiet by now. "Can I trust you all to keep this a secret? I would rather my father not have reason to pull me out of school and extracurriculars."

Kai put a hand on Zane's shoulder. "We gotchu, man! Just like with our ninja identities, our lips are zipped." He pulled his forefinger and thumb across his mouth for emphasis.

The others all joined in, sharing their promises to keep his secret. Zane only visibly relaxed once each person had given confirmation, but he looked satisfied at his friends' loyalty and his exaggerated smile came back. "Thank you all for your promises. Although, am I really that obvious? I thought I was doing a good job at normal teenager things."

Lloyd smiled and put a hand on Zane's shoulder. He realized that the nindroid wasn't even simulating breathing, although whether he even could was a different question. "Let's just say you've still got a ways to go."

That got a chuckle out of everyone. Then Jay, tired of standing after running through katas, decided to make his way to the living area where everyone followed him to.

Once they were all seated somewhere, Nya poked Lloyd for more information. "So, now that we've got that out of the way, what else is different? You mentioned we fought a lot. Did we fight any weird aliens?"

"No aliens, although we did go against the eldritch embodiment of a whole realm, so there's that." Ignoring the horrified looks that statement received, he continued. "Well, we fought pirates, Serpentine, ghosts, even the Oni."

"Wait wait wait," Kai started as he held up his hand. "You mean like the Oni from legend? The dark bringers of doom whose presence spells the destruction of a world??"

The blond nodded his head. "Yup, exactly them. In fact, they were the last enemies we fought before I woke up. Master Wu said he'd look into it; he thinks it might be an omen of some kind." Having ended up in the middle of the couch, he stretched his arms over the back and his feet onto the coffee table as he groaned. "Why am I stuck with these memories and not my own? I just want things to be normal already…"

The team sat in silence for several minutes, each mulling over their own thoughts. The sound of a flute got their attention and Lloyd looked over at the now-open main warehouse door to see Master Wu doing a little dance shuffle toward them as he played his staff.

Weird, but okay?

Everyone jumped up from their seats and rushed over to the old man, who put his staff-flute down and started chuckling. "Hello students!" The blond blinked and next thing he knew, a flash of black and green was being plopped into his arms. "Lloyd, your gi and hood have been cleaned and mended. They should be ready for your next fight. Cole, thank you for leading training while I was absent."

The black ninja gave a quick nod of the head, and Lloyd briefly looked over his suit before tucking it under his arm. “Master Wu, were you able to find out anything about my dream and the Oni? Or any of the other villains for that matter.”

The master shook his head. “I could not. The Ninjago City Library had nothing more than the fairy tale stories used to scare kids with, and even my own collection at the old dojo is sorely lacking.” An expression of annoyance flickered on his face for a bit as he plucked off a feather that had stuck on his robes. “That obnoxious chicken didn’t make looking any easier…”

Deciding to ignore the whole chicken thing, Lloyd gave a single firm nod. “I’m sure there’s something out there about them. We’ll just have to look harder for it.” He regarded the other ninja, who all nodded in agreement.

“We’ll dig up every ancient library there is if we have to,” Kai added. “If it completely replaced my lil’ bro’s memories, it’s worth finding out why.”

Jay’s soft voice piped up not long after Kai’s promise. “Hopefully there’s also a shot at getting his own memories back too…”

The others all nodded or hummed in agreement with the blue ninja. It seemed Mission: Lloyd’s Memories was far from over, and training was likely just one part of it.

Before anyone could suggest a next activity though, Master Wu tossed a bundle to each ninja. “Since you have already warmed up, it’s time to start with some new training: weapons.” A groan escaped half of the ninja while the other half gave excited gasps. “You cannot always rely on your mechs to fight. In those situations it is important to know other fighting styles. Each of you will learn how to use the weapons I gave you and make them your signature weapon.”

Unwrapping his bundle, Lloyd found a dao sword very similar to the one he had used in the dream memories. The curved silver blade shone brightly in the ambient sunlight, and the handle was wrapped in green leather strips. As he made to grab the handle and test it out, it was pulled from his hands and replaced with a wooden version of the sword. Sounds of disappointment filled the air and he looked around to find that the rest of the ninja had the same happen with their weapons.

“Only when you master the wooden weapons will you earn the right to hold these. They are not toys, and must be treated with care.” After rewrapping each of the weapons, the ninja master put them into a large duffel bag which he slung over his shoulder.

As he walked back out of the warehouse, six books flew into the air and landed by the ninjas’ feet. “Read and learn!”

Zane reached down first and picked up one of the books. “I for one do not see the purpose in learning additional weapons. We are three hundred percent more effective with our mechs. Why would we ever be without them?”

An excited smirk spread across Cole's normally laid-back expression as he tested the weight of his giant wooden hammer. "I dunno, man. It might be kinda fun to smack around some shark generals with this thing."

Jay let out a little pout as he held out the chain of what appeared to be some sort of flail. "That's 'cause you got a good weapon. What's this thing even supposed to be?" He experimentally shook the weapon a couple times before grabbing the book with the corresponding weapon on its cover.

"It's a spiked flail. You swing it around and people either back away or get hurt." Nya piped up as she started testing out her wooden spear with slashes and jabs. "Honestly, I think it suits you."

The curly-haired brunet turned around so fast that Lloyd was worried he'd get whiplash. He stared at her with an expression that danced between offense and admiration until it finally settled on shy awe with a slight blush. "Really? Uh, w-what makes you say that, Nya?"

The girl, not even noticing his gaze, brushed by him to grab the book that went with her spear. "It's ranged. Well, sort of. It at least has enough length that even if you just swing it around randomly, you'll give yourself a small bubble of space. And because you're so timid, that bubble is gonna help you in close combat." Cracking open her manual, she began flipping through the diagrams. "Against ranged attacks it's a little less effective, but it's easier to swing around as a shield than, say, a sword."

"Doesn't that only really work in movies though?"

That made Nya pause. "Y'know what? That's a good question; I don't actually know."

"You know what I want to know?" Kai spoke up, glowering at the twin katanas in his hands. "Why Master Wu thinks we need more work to do. We've already got school homework on top of stopping Garmadon. We don't have time for more homework…"

"Maybe that's exactly why, though," Lloyd said, voice making the hothead go quiet. "We don't have to worry about Garmadon for a while, if I understand my mom's fury well enough." He had already been running through some of the sword drills he learned in the dream, his movements jerky and off-centered as his muscles got used to the unfamiliar weight and effort of precision. "It's not a bad idea, either. Say we have to abandon our mechs because a bomb got attached or something; we'd be toast."

"Easy for you to say; you got cheat code training." Still pouting, Kai experimentally swung one of the blades to get a feel for wielding the weapons. He soon was hit on the forehead by a crumpled paper ball, and his peripheral caught his sister with a hand on her hip. "Hey! Rude!"

"Come on guys, quit complaining already. Besides, Kai, you know you'll look super cool double-wielding katanas and slicing through Garmamechs like butter." Kai scrunched his nose at that but still paused to consider that statement while Nya shook her head then nodded it toward the other side of the warehouse. "I'm going to go practice over there. Where it's

quieter. You boys can just…figure things out on your own or something. Lloyd, Cole, with me."

Lloyd shot the red ninja a sympathizing look as he walked past him to follow the girl. If there was one thing he knew about Nya, it was that you don't make her more mad when she's already frustrated.

Jay and Kai both started freaking out, Kai begging her to come back and help him and Jay looking like he wanted to do the same but staying silent. Zane, however, had begun flipping through his book and apparently found a website link because an instruction video for archery appeared on the TV screen after a short while. As soon as the red-blue duo realized there were videos, they scrambled to pull them up on their phones.

Once Nya and her entourage had resituated, Cole whipped out his own phone and started through his hammer's training videos. Nya was still using the physical book as her reference, which she spread out on the floor as she worked through the movements illustrated on the pages. During a lull in the activity on the other side of the room, she decided to ask one more question from the conversation earlier. "Did we all have weapons in the dream too?"

The blond nodded. "We did. They're all mostly the same, but not everyone started out with the weapon we each have now. Zane actually started out with shurikens then switched to a bow later, and Jay never had a flail; his weapon of choice was always nunchucks. Out of all of us, I think you were the one who used the most weapons until you finally settled on the spear."

Intrigue flashed across the cyan ninja's face as she hummed in acknowledgment. Silence fell among them as they each fell into a rhythm with their weapon, although Lloyd did eventually have to go over and help the other group as he noticed Kai having some issues with form.

The training went on until Kai, Nya, and Jay all got texts from their parents. The blond had completely lost track of time and the sun was already quite low in the sky; his mom was probably wondering where he was at. Maybe. He wasn't sure what time he usually made it back, but if his friends' parents were texting now, his mom likely wouldn't be far behind. He decided to beat her to the punch and let her know he was on his way, smiling a little when she sent a relieved emoji and a short "love you, see you soon" message.

They all parted ways for the day; red, cyan, blue, and green leaving first while Cole and Zane stayed behind to lock up. The others went with him as far as the warehouse compound gate, and then Kai and Nya took off on her motorcycle toward their home. Jay had the same path for a few more blocks, but then he also had to part ways, leaving Lloyd alone with his phone GPS for the rest of his journey.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

> Lloyd gets traumatized by guys on motorcycles and has a hard time separating dream from reality.

The long walk back started out great. There were very few people on the streets, allowing him to look around and try to map out rooftop routes without needing to hide beneath his hood. The sky lit up with twilight, and a soft breeze pleasantly ruffled through his hair. All in all, it was looking to be a pretty relaxing walk home.

…for all of 15 minutes. At some point his phone battery died and he was left to wander with whatever vague memory he had of his trip that afternoon, which itself wouldn't help much unless he was trying to get back to Ninjago High. Most of the shops around were closed already, and the few still open likely weren't willing to lend him a map of the city that he was supposedly helping to destroy.

And that was exactly how he found himself in the completely unpopulated industrial district at you-shouldn't-be-out-in-the-dark o'clock at night. His mom had to be freaking out by now, and he hoped there were people out looking for him. Even if those people were just his mom and his uncle, that would give him some shred of comfort.

As he kept moving—now speed-walking at this point—he felt a strong sense of unease bubble and grow inside him, causing his heart rate to increase until it was pounding in his ears. Building after building disappeared behind him, until after one particular turn his body suddenly froze up and his breath left him.

In front of him was a rather nondescript factory building, seemingly abandoned by the looks of it. Nothing about it sparked anything in his memory, but here he was, terrified.

A singular thought echoed loudly in his mind: *Get out of here, NOW!*

He caught a glimpse of a shadow moving in his peripheral, and he forced himself to take a step back in the opposite direction. His limbs felt heavy as lead as he struggled to control his movements, but sluggishly he managed to turn himself around and take a few more steps before a somewhat familiar voice caused his muscles to lock up once again.

"Well, well. Look what wandered into the spider's nest."

He knew exactly who this was. The last few weeks of the dream timeline were so freshly etched in his mind, and the scars they left so permanently attached to his soul: how could he

not know? His body involuntarily turned to face her, and his voice, soft and hoarse, squeaked through a suddenly-dry throat before he could stop himself.

“H-Harumi?”

The moonlight wasn’t strong enough for him to make out more than a vague silhouette, but from the long pause and shift in posture he could tell he’d said the wrong thing. Her voice bounced off the surrounding buildings, enmity dripping from her tone.

“Looks like someone did his research. Does daddy Garmadon know the identity of the Quiet One yet? Or did you come to collect my head first before the big reveal?”

He tried to defend himself, to assure her that he meant no harm and was just passing through, but nothing came through his lips. He couldn’t even force himself to raise his hands in a show of innocence. What once moved like tree sap had now hardened like amber, and with feet rooted to the spot, all he could do was stare as the girl lazily approached him.

“Nothing to say, spawn of evil?” She let out a cold, heartless laugh. “No matter. Fate has dropped you into my lap, and you will play your role.”

Her footfalls were even and calculated as she worked her way across the pavement. A quick hand motion from her summoned a mob from the shadows, each person wielding some sort of weapon. This finally broke the freeze response and allowed him to start moving again, but Harumi’s next announcement kicked his flight response into full gear.

“Sons of the Oni, I believe we have our ticket to the Realm Crystal.”

He took off sprinting as an order of “After him!” was barked. He had no idea where he was going, but he knew he had to get out of there somehow. Frantically looking around for a rooftop escape, he was horrified to find that he was effectively trapped in a high-walled maze. None of the buildings had any sort of handholds within 10 feet of the ground, and the roads were completely clear of climbable objects, their width preventing any wall jumping or parkour-ing upwards.

He ran for what felt like hours. Even after taking several tumbles and receiving a few cuts and bruises in return, the sound of angry shouting was never far behind him yet never upon him. He wondered if they were corralling him somewhere; the twists and turns all looked the same and he was certain he’d gone in several circles already, but he hadn’t run into anyone yet. At some point the roar of motorcycle engines joined the noise of the mob, and he pushed himself to run harder than he’d ever ran before.

Suddenly, from out of nowhere a flash of black sped by him then quickly swung around to stop in his path. A dark figure on an equally dark motorcycle hastily motioned for him to mount the bike. “Hurry, bean sprout! Get on!”

A near-crushing wave of grateful relief caught him unawares and he was jumping onto the seat before he realized what he was doing. As the bike peeled out, he wrapped his arms around the stranger’s midsection and clung on for dear life.

Only belatedly did he wonder if this was a trap.

As his rescuer weaved through the concrete maze and lost any intersecting pursuers with practiced ease, Lloyd began to question his decision. Why was he so quick to trust a fast getaway anyway? He's a ninja, for crying out loud. He should know better than that. His relief—and therefore confusion—only grew when he noticed that they had finally made it out of the industrial district altogether.

Once they were finally on a straightaway, the driver slowed to match the speed limit and spoke up. "What were you even doing way out there, kid? You should've been home already."

In the dim light of the street lamps now lining the road, he could see that instead of being completely black like he'd originally thought, there were accents of green along the driver's full face helmet and motorcycle. The shoulder-length hair that kept blowing into his face was dark as well. He didn't recognize the masculine voice though, so he chose to stay silent.

Seemingly accepting his lack of words, the mystery man continued. "I hope you know how long I've been out looking for you. When Koko decided to call me, I figured something was up, and I was right." Several curses were thrown around before the man tapped Lloyd's arm with his own. "If they did anything to you, I swear I'll tear them apart."

That got his attention. Name-dropping his mom and swearing vengeance for him implied a close relationship. A family friend, maybe? Despite the wind whipping around them, he managed to croak out a short "They didn't hurt me" before the bike finally slowed to a stop in front of an apartment building. His apartment building, if he remembered correctly.

Dismounting was a bit of a process; his limbs had gone stiff from holding on so tightly and he had to let them relax so that he could first release the driver's waist, and then slide out of the seat. His heart was still pounding from the adrenaline of the night and he was beginning to feel lightheaded.

He hobbled onto the sidewalk and tried to lightly stretch his stiff legs, but when the driver finally removed the helmet and he came face to face with the very familiar frown and green hair streak of Morro, the blond felt his knees buckle and everything went black.

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Lloyd's consciousness was a jumbled mess as he came to. He could tell that he was being carried bridal style, not restrained, and traveling upward, which brought many questions to mind. What was Morro doing here? Was he being taken to a second location? But the guy had just rescued him… The conflicting feelings of intense panic and intense security caused his stomach to churn queasily.

The ding of the elevator and the creak of the doors sliding open signaled an opportunity, which he took to roll from the man's arms and stumble down the hallway.

"Lloyd?! Hey, what are you doing??"

The sound of running feet pounded through the hallway. If he could just get to his apartment, his mom would protect him! Right?

His stomach finally lurched and he fell to his hands and knees as what little he had leftover from lunch decorated the hardwood flooring. The footsteps behind him slowed as his pursuer let out a mumbled "ohhh," but they did not stop until the man was right next to him. Stooping down, Morro let out a long sigh and placed his hand on the blond's back, rubbing small circles into it. Lloyd tried to flinch away, but another twist hit and he was left coughing up stomach acid.

"Never a dull moment with you, is there?"

He wanted to both laugh and cry at that. Because honestly? That felt pretty true right about now. Instead, he pushed himself up, swatting away Morro's attempts at help in the process, and propped himself against the wall as he shut his eyes and let his insides take their time unknotting themselves. The man stood and knocked on the nearest door—he had ended up this close to it?—and it near-instantly flew open.

"Morro?? Where is he? Did you-" His mom's words suddenly cut off and he looked up to see her looking at him. He couldn't imagine how bad he must look after everything. Her shocked expression melted into sorrow as she gently pulled him into a hug. "Oh honey…"

He carefully returned the hug and did his best to hold back the tears that threatened to pour from his eyes. He didn't want to let one of his greatest enemies see him in a moment of weakness (even though the little voice in the back of his mind kept trying to remind him that this wasn't the Morro from the dream). "I'm okay, mom. Just a little shaken, that's all."

He purposely avoided the knowing frown Morro was giving him.

Koko pulled out of the hug first and held Lloyd out at arm's length to look him over. Noticing the mess on the floor, she sighed and guided him into the apartment. "Go get cleaned up. We'll take care of this." As he made his way to the small bathroom, he heard his mom ask, "Morro, can you grab me the cleaning supplies from under the sink?"

So Morro visited often enough to know where things are stored. How well was he supposed to know the guy?

By the time he finished washing up and swishing his mouth clean, the two adults had finished their task and were just sitting down in the living area. Koko motioned for him to come sit next to her on the couch and he hesitantly obeyed, giving Morro's recliner a wide berth.

"Lloyd, I don't know if you have any memories of him, but this is your cousin Morro. When I couldn't get ahold of you, I asked him for help."

His heart dropped to his stomach as his eyes darted between the dark-haired man and his mother. “…c-cousin?”

Morro’s face warped in confusion, and Koko continued before Lloyd could say anything more. “Morro, as a result of Lloyd’s injury after the last Garmadon attack, his memory was affected…”

As she kept talking, Lloyd’s head began to spin. Morro was his cousin? Wu must’ve adopted him then, so maybe he was a better person here? But Morro wasn’t supposed to be good! … was he?

He abruptly stood, accidentally startling Koko in the process. “Sorry mom, but I-I’m still not feeling too good. I’m gonna head to bed now. G‘night!”

As he hurried through the kitchen and into his bedroom, he heard Morro get up from the leather chair. “I’ll go talk to him.”

Great.

Cursing the door for not having a lock, he climbed onto his bed and prepared the army of plushies that had been undisturbed by his cleaning spree earlier. The door opened sooner than he was expecting though, and he let out a little shriek before pitching a chubby dolphin at his unsuspecting cousin. “Go away!”

Morro took the stuffed animal to the face like a champ but continued his advance, arms raised in innocence. “Hey! I just want to talk, okay?” Lloyd pressed himself as far back against the wall as he could, heart rate increasing and hands armed with another plush. The dark-haired man evidently saw the terror on his face and stopped in his tracks, expression morphing into a frown of concern. “…Lloyd? What happened?”

The blond had to take a few minutes to steady his quickened breathing (~~*this isn’t him This Isn’t Him CALM DOWN THIS ISN’T HIM*~~), during which another creature flew through the air and thumped Morro on the chest. When his voice did finally come out, it was on the edge of breaking. “I do remember a Morro, okay? But he… wasn’t a great guy…” He watched his cousin’s face change to horrified understanding as he continued. “I-I think I can tell you’re not him, but I just… need some space right now…”

The silence in the room suddenly felt tangible as the man’s posture screamed a mixture of grief and silent rage. He slowly began working his way back to the door, telegraphing his movements as if not wanting to startle Lloyd further. His mouth opened several times but closed just as quickly as he couldn’t seem to find any words to say. Finally, as he backed through the door, the words came softly, almost inaudible. “For what it’s worth, I’m sorry you had to go through that.”

As Morro disappeared around the corner, Lloyd slowly clambered down from the bed and started to shut the still-open door when the voices started again.

“How is he?”

A few moments passed before Morro gave a reply. “I don’t think it was a dream.”

“…how so?” His mom’s voice had a worried timbre to it that he had heard oh-so-many times whenever she would dance around telling him about certain things from his life.

“He said…that the Morro he remembers wasn’t a great guy.” Some of that silent rage from his posture was now leaking into his voice as it increased slightly in volume. “He was terrified of me, Aunt Koko. Terrified! Backing himself into a corner, throwing his plushies at me, and now looking back at his dash from the elevator and the reaction outside. The way he looked at me, with an expectation that something bad coming; that kind of trauma response isn’t something you just pick up from a dream.” The man let out a sigh of frustration and Lloyd heard the leather chair squeak as weight dropped into it. “If there’s anything I’m certain of, it’s that Lloyd somehow actually lived in that other world. It’s the only thing that makes sense.” Another pause elapsed, and Morro’s next words were so soft and muffled that he almost couldn’t hear them. “He lived in that other world and the me there did something to him…”

Whatever conversation happened afterwards was blocked out as Lloyd finally shut the door. He slid down against the wall and there, in the solitude of his room, the flood of emotions that he’d worked so hard to hold back finally broke free. The silent sobs wracked through his body, morbidly lulling him into a restless sleep filled with nightmares of ghosts and wind.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

In which Nya wins a bet and Lloyd just wants to enjoy his ice cream.

The next day was Saturday, and Lloyd's mom had informed him that he would receive a visitor sometime after breakfast. As soon as the knock was heard at 10:30am exactly, the blond opened the front door to reveal his nindroid friend, exaggerated smile nearly blinding him with its cheeriness.

"Good morning Lloyd! We were not able to get ahold of you through text, so I have come to tell you in person to, and I quote, 'get ready for the best weekend hangout ever.' We have a whole plan of fun, normal teenager activities for the day."

Lloyd rubbed the back of his head. "Oh, yeah… sorry about that. Last night was really crazy and I think my phone is still dead." He glanced back at the table where his mom was still seated, then back at Zane. "Let me go grab my phone and a charger real quick. Wait right here," he said as he pulled his friend into the apartment and shut the door. "I'll be right back. Don't move!"

As Lloyd rushed to grab his phone from where it had been left on his bed, he caught sight of his reflection in a mirror on the wall. His eyes were still a bit puffy and red from the night before; all he could do was hope that nobody commented on it.

Picking up an extra cord and charging block, he headed over to Koko and gave her a hug from behind. "Don't worry mom, I'll be with my friends the entire time. Promise."

Koko slid out of the chair and firmly returned the hug. "You know I'd rather you didn't go out today, but some time with your friends is probably a good idea after what happened." Her eyes began to glisten as she hugged him even tighter. "As soon as your phone is charged, make sure your location is on so I can see you, okay?"

The blond squeezed into the hug one last time before separating. "Yes mom." His smile took on a hint of sadness before he turned away and joined his friend. "Alright, where're we going?"

The nindroid's smile seemed to get bigger as he turned and opened the front door. "It is a surprise! You will see when we get there."

Kind of suspicious but still intrigued, Lloyd shrugged and followed his friend. As they made it outside, he pulled his hood over his head and fell into step next to Zane.

As they walked, he learned that the nindroid was actually pretty excitable. He could get very animated about things, talking quickly when discussing something interesting and using dial-up tones when recounting arguments or imitating annoyances. He didn't understand any of it, but it got the point across and made him chuckle a little. Not enough to completely stop him from startling at the occasional car whizzing down the street, but enough to distract him from everything else.

Zane led him down the street he had taken to get to the high school, but they turned down another road that he hadn't been on yet. There were shops lining the sidewalks, many of which displayed the sign he had seen the previous day.

Before he could question his friend on why they were here, they stopped in front of a small ice cream parlor that notably did not have a sign warning him away.

That didn't keep him from becoming uneasy about entering.

Seeing his hesitation, Zane gave his shoulder a pat of reassurance. "Do not worry, you are allowed in here. We come here often, and the proprietor knows you are a regular visitor." He then opened the door and held it for the blond. "The others should already be inside."

Lloyd took a deep breath and held it as he stepped through the doorway, bracing himself for a scolding or worse. When nothing happened, he blinked and looked around the open room.

The walls were a pastel blue with accents of white and yellow swirls, making the small room feel more open. White tables and chairs dotted the dining space, and two large windows let in the sunlight from outside to give the space a cozy feeling.

His darker-clothed friends weren't that hard to spot amid the light-colored decor of the place and lack of other customers at this time of day. They were all gathered in front of a glass-covered counter that likely held the ice cream. Nya glanced back and motioned for him to join them, which he slowly obeyed as he slid back his hood and tried to convince himself that he wasn't going to get thrown out. He heard Zane's footsteps following him and he relaxed a little bit. The nindroid wouldn't let anything happen, right?

"Glad you could join us! I hope Zane didn't talk your ear off too much?" The girl smiled as she pulled him up to the glass and gestured to the tubs of frozen goodness behind it. "Let me know what kind you want, and then you can grab a table while we order."

So the situation was a "tolerate him in the building but won't serve him directly" kind of deal. That put him more at ease, even if it still stung.

"I guess I'll go with a mint chocolate chip bowl," he finally said after examining the plethora of options.

Nya's smile grew wide and she nudged her brother. "One regular, coming up!" The brunet then groaned and handed over a crumpled wad of bills, and Jay followed suit soon after. Cole just watched the two, bopping his head to whatever music he had blasting through his headphones, but a ghost of a smirk flashed over his lips for a second.

The exchange put a confused frown on Lloyd's face. "You guys were betting on what flavor I'd get?"

"Yep! Whoever lost has to pay for your ice cream." Nya chirped as she smoothed out and counted the cash. "These two were sure you'd go for something different because of the whole different memories thing. I thought differently though; the body remembers things the brain doesn't. Of course you'd still have a taste for your favorite."

That…kind of made sense, actually. He hadn't even considered that, but it did explain why certain things felt familiar even though he had no memories attached.

As the others compared the merits of each different flavor, Lloyd picked a booth along the side wall and plugged his phone into the closest outlet. While he waited for the battery to charge, his mind subconsciously turned to the events of the previous night.

He would never in a million years have expected Morro, the vengeful ghost who had a grudge against the Green Ninja and tried to destroy Ninjago, to be his cousin. And seemingly a nice one at that. Morro, the one who trapped him in his own mind and used his body to hurt the people he loved. Morro, the-

His hands went up and slapped his cheeks. No need for spiraling right now. That would probably come later when the others dragged it out of him. His luck was never good enough to expect otherwise...

And on top of the whole Morro thing, he hadn't even begun to scratch the surface of his thoughts on Harumi's existence here.

Too many thoughts mulling around in his head, too many people that he would rather not have to think about or deal with ever again, too many unexpected situations-

Oh look, his phone was on.

Thankful for the distraction, he unlocked it and checked his location settings, making sure to send his mom a text with his current location and a sniped picture of the rest of the group ordering at the register. He got a response a few seconds later: a thumbs up reaction on the location link and a heart reaction on the photo, then a wish of "Have fun and stay safe!"

While his focus was on his mother's text, Nya approached and set the bowl of minty ice cream down in front of him.

"Mind if I sit here?"

Her question caught him off guard, but he managed to stumble out an answer. "Oh, uh, sure?" He scooted over to the wall and the girl slid onto the bench, holding her own pralines and cream cone.

"We try to come here at least once a month or so, depending on Garmadon attacks or other… unfortunate events." Her smile dipped slightly and he could read between the lines that said

unfortunate events included his being bullied. “Since you’re still trying to get things back to normal, we figured some fun activities would be a good thing to check off sooner than later.”

He stared at the slowly melting dessert. Finally, he grabbed hold of the spoon in the bowl and stuck a scoop of ice cream in his mouth. The cool of the mint burst onto his taste buds and he savored the bite, letting the flavors of fresh mint and rich chocolate both relax and energize him.

“Good call. Yesterday was a bit much…” A warm feeling spread through his chest and across his face, and he blinked back the tears that were trying to form. While he stared at his ice cream trying to get his emotions under control, Nya had apparently noticed his distress and pulled him into a side hug.

“You’ve always been the strongest of all of us, but you’re not alone anymore. We’ll get through this together. Right, Nya?”

Lloyd looked up to see Kai standing next to the table with a confident grin on his face. The brunet then looked at Nya and the girl nodded before sliding out of the seat, motioning for Lloyd to follow. He obeyed and was immediately wrapped in a warm hug. The familiar embrace was comforting in a way that made him want it to last forever, and he hugged back tightly, letting it melt his distress away.

But alas, all good things must end, and Kai released the blond from his grip. “Once the others get over here, we’ll talk about the plans for the day. But until then…” Kai gave a smile to Nya. “Lloyd sandwich?”

The dark-haired girl nodded with an equally large smile. “Lloyd sandwich.”

He was relieved to discover that a Lloyd sandwich simply meant being squished between the two protective siblings. Kai sat by the wall while Nya took the outer edge, prepared to ward off any external threats if necessary.

Too bad it wasn’t as effective for internal ones.

Still, it was comforting to have his friends by his side. The two started a conversation with each other, leaving opportunities open for Lloyd to jump in and make comments if he so chose. Probably some sort of practiced grounding routine to build off the seating arrangement, if he had to guess. Though at some point the siblings had started bickering, roping in the others as they sat down.

“I’m just saying, Lady Iron Dragon had the greatest impact of any general in the Battle of Nine Armies.”

Kai slapped his hands on the table with a passion, causing the whole thing to shake. “Oh come on, sis. You’re completely leaving out the unsung heroes! What about Sir Flamberge? Madame Hawkingjay? The Light Knight, for crying out loud!” He turned to the nindroid who had just taken the last seat in the booth, eyes pleading him for support. “Help me out here, Zane!”

The nindroid shook his head, giving the red ninja a quizzical look. “While I do admit that the Battle of Nine Armies had many influential participants, did you not say that we would explain to Lloyd the day’s itinerary once everyone was present? I believe I am the last person to be seated.”

Kai’s annoyance quickly fizzled out at his friend’s words, his face lighting up with a cheesy grin. “Oh yeah! The best weekend ever plans!” He pulled a map out of his pocket and spread it out on the tabletop. A map that Lloyd had sorely needed last night… “Obviously we’re starting the day here with ice cream. We figured next up should be the arcade over here.” A finger landed on a spot that was uncomfortably close to the area marked Industrial District, and the blond’s heart started to race as the memory of last night came to the forefront. “Gotta see if you’ve still got the skills…”

Kai kept talking, but Lloyd could no longer hear him. A tightness gripped his chest and all he could focus on was his heart pounding in his ears, Harumi’s frosty voice, the shouts of her gang chasing him, the wind-

He didn’t even realize he was hyperventilating until he became aware of someone gripping his shoulder. “-eep breaths. Follow me, alright? In through your nose, out through your mouth…”

It took his brain longer than it should have to process the words, but soon he found himself copying the voice and his breath soon evened out. When he became aware of his surroundings again, he winced at the fact that everyone was staring at him.

“You back with us, green machine?” Cole asked cautiously, his normally lax brows furrowed deeply and his slice of chocolate ice cream cake untouched on the table. If Lloyd hadn’t just come out of a panic attack, he might have teased the black ninja about the cake.

He took one more deep breath before attempting to speak. Getting the words through his dried-out throat felt awkward, but something finally squeaked out. “I… I think so…” He reached for a cup of water that Nya had set in front of him and took a few sips to rehydrate, letting the water sit for a few seconds before swallowing.

The pressure on his shoulder lessened as Kai released his hold. “It’s been a while since you freaked out this badly. Was it something I said? Should we save all this for another day?” The brunet let go of Lloyd’s hand and pulled out his phone. “I can text Miss Koko that we’re bringing you back home-“

“No!” Lloyd flinched at the volume of his own voice but started again. “No, I still want to hang out with you guys! It’s just… can we do things back at base? I’m not too eager to be out and about today…”

Kai deflated slightly at the request but nodded. Slowly folding up the map again, he pretended to kiss it before putting it back in his pocket. “Farewell, best weekend plans ever. The world was not yet ready for you. May you be resurrected soon in all your fun-tastic glory.”

As he finished the short funeral, everyone else stared at him deadpan until the theatrics were done. Then Jay coughed awkwardly, and the moment was over. “Sooo, we head out once we finish our ice cream?”

Five heads all nodded in agreement, and the room was silent for a few minutes before Kai started up the history discussion again, causing the table to erupt with voices. Lloyd shook his head as he hid a small smile behind another bite of ice cream.

Some things never change.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

A mech is repaired, theories are discussed, and motives are suspected.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The ice cream was finished rather quickly; the heated discussion, however, took longer to wrap up and Cole and Jay eventually started corralling everyone out of the booth and onto the sidewalk outside. The street roared with midday traffic as the lunch hours were already in full swing, nearly drowning out any conversation still going on. Lloyd looked around anxiously anytime he heard the rev of a motorcycle; with Harumi actively trying to abduct him the night before, there was every reason to believe that he was still in danger.

If anyone noticed his jumpiness, they didn't comment on it.

Nya had been grounded from her motorcycle for taking it out before she officially had her learner's permit ("It's literally a week away," she had complained to him earlier. "Basically already time anyway. I don't regret it."), so they all ended up walking. Not that Lloyd minded; having all of his friends surrounding him made him feel safer.

The conversation bounced between several different topics, but eventually the topic of Starfarer came up and this was not a discussion he was going to miss out on. By the time the group arrived at the warehouse, Jay and Lloyd were deep into comparing nuances of the different storylines.

As soon as they entered the building though, the blond caught sight of the dragon mech still in pieces on the floor and he got an idea. "Hey guys, do you think we could work on fixing my mech?"

"YES!" The shout from Nya was almost ear splitting, and before anyone else had a chance to respond she had practically started bouncing. "Absolutely! No offense to anyone else's mechs, but yours is my favorite of them all to work on." Lloyd could almost see the stars shining in her eyes as her voice took on a special tone exclusively reserved for talking about her projects. "Plus, that'll give us a chance to see how much master builder skill you still have."

"Master builder?" Lloyd's brows lowered as he scanned through his memories for any references of the term. "I'm not familiar with that. Is it like an elemental power?"

That earned him a look of confusion from the girl as she ran to the tool cart and started wheeling it over to the dragon. “Huh? No, it’s like…the ability to build anything without instructions. Like you just look at a bunch of pieces and instantly come up with your own blueprint for a build.” As he followed her, she stopped the cart in front of the dragon’s face where a large part of the damage had been done and gestured to the mech in general. “I mean, you master built this all by yourself!”

It was his turn to get starry-eyed for a bit as he saw the green mech in a new light. “…I did? By myself?” Then he shook his head and laughed. “That may take me a while to figure out again. You and Pixal were the ones who always built everything in the dream, but not in a master builder-y way. At least, I don’t think so.”

He picked up a random brick from off the ground and turned it this way and that, trying to see…whatever master builder things he was supposed to be seeing.

“Who’s Pixal?”

The blond paused, brick still clutched in his hand. “She was a friend of Zane’s who became part of the team. I thought I hadn’t seen her yet because she was just too busy or something, but maybe the dream made her up…” He hesitated, mind suddenly remembering what Morro had said the night before, and decided to test the waters a little. “Hey, what do you guys think about alternate realities?”

Both Jay and Zane perked up at the question and started excitedly rambling off streams of words that got lost in the overlapping vocal chaos. When they realized they were speaking at the same time, Jay sank into his scarf and deferred to the nindroid.

“Alternate realities and the multiverse are fascinating concepts. The idea that there are other universes that could potentially contain alternate versions of ourselves is a topic scientists have debated for centuries.” Zane’s excitement dampened a bit as his eyes widened in realization. “Ah, you’re curious as to whether your unique situation is the result of an alternate universe rather than simply a dream.”

Jay couldn’t keep quiet anymore, his investment in the topic clear as he practically vibrated in place, brown curls bouncing as he began making animated gestures. “I’ll bet you and another you got knocked out at the same time and somehow your memories got swapped. Oh oh oh! Or, maybe like in that one Starfarer arc, you and the other you unknowingly shared memories through your dreams! Oh! Or, or…” His voice trailed off, face twisting with discomfort as he had to take a few moments before hesitantly speaking again. “I once read a theory about alternate selves that speculated when a version of you dies, you have a chance to get their memories…” The boy nervously fiddled with his scarf, twisting it around and picking at random pills of fabric. “…d’you think he died?”

That last theory hit a little too close to home, and Lloyd winced. Master Wu’s warning that performing the Tornado of Creation carried a significant risk of danger shone to the forefront of his mind, and a pang of grief twisted in his chest as he found himself mourning with the dream—no, alternate ninja. What if his counterpart had died? How badly would the team fall apart this time after losing not only their brother, but their leader?

“I dunno, Jay. I don’t know.”

A somber silence fell over the space. Each of the teenagers wore a look of discomfort, and Jay continued to fidget with his scarf, looking as if he wished he had never spoken up.

Eventually they all remembered the task at hand, and Lloyd climbed up onto his mech while the others grabbed random tools and brought them over to help.

The majority of the time he just watched Nya as she worked, piecing together the insides before having Lloyd replace the external armor. Everyone else had found something to do to assist with the repairs, and the black-haired girl started explaining to him different details about how the mech was put together or designed. All notes from himself, she assured him. That didn’t make him feel any less awkward about it, but it was cool information to know.

Soon the mech began to look like the tatsu it was modeled after. Like Nya, Jay and Zane had been working on internal parts, though farther down along the body. Kai helped weld on the armored plating, and Cole was ferrying tools and plating between the piles on the ground and the ninja along the mech. All in all, the job only took a couple of hours. Jay especially seemed relieved at the short completion time, expressing gratitude that they had been able to do some of the repairs the previous week.

Once everyone had clambered down and the leftover scrap was moved to the junk pile, they stood back and admired their work. If Lloyd thought that the dragon looked cool when he first saw it, that was nothing compared to seeing it finally whole.

It had a majestic air to it, the detail still somewhat reminding him of his elemental dragon, and a sense of pride and accomplishment swelled in his chest. The number of parts that doubled as a missile was slightly concerning, but the others reassured him that he had designed it carefully.

Suddenly he was pulled away from the tatsu (Jay was making known his irritation that the blond had been staring at it for several minutes, but it was just so cool!) and dragged to the living area between the fire mech and the ice tank. He allowed himself to be plopped into the faded red couch as Jay handed him a controller and bounced onto the cushion to his left. Kai wheeled the TV over and turned it on, grabbing a few game cartridges from a drawer in the stand and holding them out to the group now gathering around them. “What are we feeling today? We’ve got Beat-‘Em-Up Battle Buddies 2, Lava Zombies, Pik Pak, and Galamorph X-Post.”

When Lloyd shrugged, the brunet popped in a random cartridge then took a seat on the blond’s other side as the upbeat yet epic music of what appeared to be a PvP fighting game began blaring through the TV’s built-in speakers. Lloyd didn’t recognize the game as one he knew, but the controls weren’t too difficult to learn and the colorful cartoony characters made things more interesting and chaotic.

It started out as just Kai, Jay and himself playing, but the game allowed for all of the ninja to play at once, so Nya joined in after the second round, followed by Cole and finally Zane.

They were in the middle of an intense sudden death match when there was the bang of a door and a shout rang through the warehouse. “Helloo~?”

Lloyd involuntarily stiffened at the voice while the others perked up excitedly. “Over here!” Kai called out, still focused on trying to shove Nya’s character over the edge of the map.

What was Morro doing here?

His apparent cousin soon came into view from behind the ice tank, stopping next to the couch to spectate the rest of the round. As soon as the victory screen appeared and Kai had thoroughly rubbed his win in his sister’s face, Morro stepped into their line of sight with his arms crossed. “Sorry guys; I need to borrow Lloyd’s attention for a bit.” The blond’s discomfort must have been clearly written on his face, because the man quickly made eye contact with him and added, “They can stay if you want, but we need to talk about what happened last night.”

An awkward hush fell over the group, and Lloyd could feel their concerned stares before he even saw them. He had managed to get this far without having to talk about it, and from their reactions he gathered that it was a group effort. He figured someone would make him spill it eventually, but he really didn't want to be stuck alone with Morro...

Thankfully, he was saved from having to answer immediately by Cole's blunt inquisitiveness. “Why exactly do we need to talk about that?”

Morro sighed as he hit the power button on the TV and plopped himself onto a nearby folding stool. “You guys know I'm a ninja too, right?” When they all nodded (minus Lloyd), he continued. “While you guys are the public face, going against Garmadon and the more visible threats, my role is more…behind-the-scenes. As part of my day job I gather info on suspected criminal activity, and then my ninja job is going after those leads.”

"So that's why you're the Ghost Ninja!" Jay exclaimed a little too loudly in Lloyd's ear, causing him to wince from both the volume and the information. “You're like a real secret agent!”

That earned a small laugh out of the man. “Something like that, yeah.” Then he looked back at Cole. “But in other words, aside from just wanting to be a good cousin and put whoever tried to hurt him in their place, it's literally my job to go after underground gangs like this one.”

“Ew, I always forget you're an old man with a real job.”

The others started to snicker while Morro sputtered indignantly at the red ninja. “Excuse me? Twenty-four is still young, thank you very much. You’re like, what? Two? You're not allowed to call me old."

Kai's smirk grew wider. “Plus fifteen, but you're excused. I know your memory isn’t what it used to be.”

As Morro let out another offended sound and the two continued squabbling, Lloyd couldn't help but be conflicted about the scene in front of him. On the one hand, the name Morro still carried a significant sense of unease and discomfort. On the other hand, everything he had seen from this human version was the opposite of what he had experienced from the ghost.

The fact that the other ninja were comfortable around him helped a little, but-

"Lloyd, can you believe this slander?" Morro's sudden comment interrupted his train of thought and his mind stalled as he tried to figure out if he was supposed to actually answer. After a few seconds with no response, Morro realized what he had done and his smile fell, replaced by flashes of anger and sadness before settling on determination. He cleared his throat and the laughter quieted down. "Going back to why I'm here, the area I found you in last night is the territory of a biker gang that calls themselves the Sons of the Oni. I've been keeping track of them for some time now, and while they haven't really done any sort of organized crime yet—mainly just random robberies and vandalism—they've been awfully quiet the past couple weeks."

Cole's eyes widened. "And you suspect that there's something bigger going on."

The man nodded. "Exactly. So," he said as he turned back to Lloyd, "are your friends staying?"

Looking around at his friends one more time, he sighed and resigned himself to his fate. "Yes please."

Morro readjusted himself in his seat and took out a pencil and small notebook. "Let's start with how you ended up there."

And so the story began. He explained how his phone had run out of battery while trying to find his way home, causing him to wander through the city until he ended up in the industrial district. "Then I got really panicky around one of the old factory buildings and Harumi showed up."

Morro blinked at the sudden name-drop. "You got a name?"

"…not exactly. I kinda already knew her from the dream. Er, the other world. Uhh…" His hands flopped around in exasperation as he struggled to describe the origin of the knowledge. "From the other memories. Sure, let's go with that."

Pencil scratched something out onto paper as the dark-haired man motioned for him to continue.

"Yeah, uh, she really didn't like it that I knew her name. But if she's anything like the one I remember, she's the leader of the group." He could feel his face getting warmer as he thought about the white-haired manipulator. He would never forgive himself for letting his guard down around her.

Jay then perked up and turned to him, thankfully keeping his voice at a non-ear splitting volume this time. "Wait a minute! If you know her from the other memories, then maybe that

could help us figure out what she's trying to do here! Like a weird time traveler's knowledge situation or… something like that…"

Lloyd tilted his head, trying to puzzle out how effective that would actually be. "It doesn't really fit right. In my memories the group was called the Sons of Garmadon, and Harumi's goal was to resurrect the evil side of Garmadon." Not for the first time since the accident did everyone stare at him with horror and more-than-mild confusion. "…it's a long story. Anyways, her goal there was to get revenge on us ninja for a giant snake that left her an orphan-" the horrified stares got stronger somehow, "-and unless there happened to be a Great Devourer incident here too, I can't really use it as a precedent. Everything's too different."

"Maybe it does work a little bit, though." Nya's voice cut through the air as all eyes landed on her. "If the Sons of Garmadon wanted to bring back Garmadon or whatever, what if the Sons of the Oni are trying to bring back the Oni?"

That revelation sent the blond's mind reeling. It did seem to track, hiding their goal in plain sight like that, and if it hadn't been such a terrifying thought he might have laughed at the stupidity of it. His heart rate began to quicken as the last piece of the puzzle clicked into place, shattering all hope he had in…well, anything. "W-well, she did call me their ticket to the Realm Crystal…" Images began flooding his mind; the black fog, the trip to Borg Tower with that twisted version of his father, the shattered crystal that did nothing to stop the invasion. Something was clawing at his throat, making every word a fight. "…and in the memories, that's what the Oni used to…get into Ninjago…"

A pair of warm arms wrapped around him and pulled him close. "Don't worry, lil bro. We got your back. Whatever's going on, it's not happening without a fight. We're ninja, after all!"

Lloyd let his head rest against the red ninja's chest, soaking up the comfortable heat. The rhythmic thumping of his brother's heartbeat was calming, and the tightness choking off his voice was already disappearing. "And ninja never quit."

He looked up and saw Morro staring at the fire mech, his hands clenched tightly. The blond felt a little bit guilty for shying away from his cousin, but trust took time to build. Especially when that trust had already been shattered by an evil version of him from apparently another realm.

That didn't mean he liked seeing that hollow look on the man's face. An expression that the ghost had never worn; never had a reason to wear.

He gently pushed away from Kai and opened his mouth to say something to Morro, when all of a sudden a blaring alarm reverberated throughout the building.

Everyone else jumped up and immediately went over to a computer console tucked in the corner next to the lockers. The green ninja held his hands over his ears and awkwardly stumbled after them. Zane pushed a button and the noise stopped, but the tension in the room had not let up. "What was that?"

Six voices echoed the same phrase, and every syllable brought chills to his spine.

“Garmadon’s back.”

Chapter End Notes

Random funny (see the artwork on Tumblr):

"They call themselves the Sons of the Oni."

Lloyd gave a small amused smirk at that, prompting Morro to look at him funny. "Oh, it's just that if you turn it into an acronym, it spells Soto, which was the name of a pirate I fought in the dream." His smile grew wider as he smacked a hand to his forehead. "Great, now pirate Harumi is gonna be stuck in my head all day."

Morro just stared blankly at him before rolling his eyes. His cousin was strange indeed.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Garmadon has a weird army and Lloyd's not quite sure what to think about it.

The remnants of the now-silent alarm rang in Lloyd's ears as the room exploded in a flurry of activity.

"I thought Miss Koko said that Garmadon wouldn't come back!" Jay had balled the end of his scarf up and was squeezing it like a stress ball as he scurried to his locker for his gi. "We were supposed to have more time! *I'm not ready!*"

The blond automatically followed the others to the lockers and slipped his own gi on over his casuals while Zane tried to placate his freckled teammate's anxiety. "On the contrary, I would say that three weeks is an extremely long time for Garmadon to wait. His previous record between attacks was only four days, nineteen hours, twenty-two minutes, and fifty-three seconds, after all."

The thump-thump of ninja rushing around and the mechanical whir of mechs powering up sounded in the background, and Cole lazily pulled his mask over his face before pausing to stare at the nindroid. "Y'know, you make so much more sense now."

"Cole! Zane! Get moving!" Motion by the computer caught the blond's attention as Morro's voice cut off any response the white ninja might have had, his tone authoritative and urgent. "Lloyd, you're going with them. I'll be here on comms to guide you through everything. Each mech has a live feed I can tap into, so I'll be seeing what you're seeing." The man's fingers flew across the keyboard like the wind and an image of the warehouse soon appeared on the screen. "Now go!"

Lloyd ran across the room and vaulted into the cockpit of his mech. Nya had shown him the basics of the controls while they were doing the repairs, but he still had a bit of trouble getting the tatsu into the air. Once he was finally airborne though, a combination of Morro's instructions and vague muscle memory helped him weave almost gracefully through the open sky. His mind took him back to when he first manifested his elemental dragon and he smiled a little at the familiar rush of wind on his face.

The communicator crackled as his cousin began giving orders to the team. *"Nya, take care of the waterways. Jay, Lloyd, and Zane, keep the sky and streets clear. Kai and Cole, pair up and go after Garmadon."* A chorus of affirmations followed, and they each headed to their respective positions.

It wasn't long before Lloyd got his first glimpse of Garmadon's ocean-themed army. There were so many of them! Rows upon rows of crab mini mechs scuttled down the roads and on the sides of buildings, and manta ray jets buzzed through the sky like a swarm of flies. It was a little overwhelming for a first mission, but with Jay's and Morro's assistance he managed to get into the swing of things.

Jay pulled up alongside him, helping to blast several jellyfish-like mechs out of the sky before they could attack the monorail train. *"How're you holding up, Lloyd?"*

Before he could answer, one of the jellyfish exploded near him, raining debris onto him and his dragon. "Aside from questioning why I designed this to be an open cockpit? Not too bad actually." Suddenly jerking at the controls, he spiraled around a stray missile and led it to crash into another airborne sea creature mech. "Having a mech to help with crowd control is so much easier than doing it hand-to-hand. I would've loved to have this when we were up against the Stone Army and the Vermillion."

The flow of battle kept Jay from responding as he repositioned himself to assist Zane with some of the earth-bound troops. Lloyd kept up the fight above the skyline and was able to push the aerial perimeter farther toward the beach.

Then suddenly, he heard it.

A rough baritone voice boomed through the city, apparently performing some sort of call and response routine. Thankful that he had already been warned about the warlord's…quirkiness, he maneuvered himself between the skyscrapers until he had a visual.

His mind swirled with turmoil once he finally caught sight of Lord Garmadon himself.

The man responsible for the city's hatred of him.

The man that was doing a terrible job of being his father.

Perched on top of a metallic gray lobster mech, he looked every bit like the version that Harumi had resurrected; the same obsidian skin, same four arms, even the same jagged helmet. The only addition was a dark navy cape that draped down to his ankles. His voice was unfamiliar, but that had been consistent with pretty much everyone so far.

Splashes of red and black color popped into his line of sight as Kai and Cole began their attack. The earth mech blasted sound waves at the crustacean's shell while the fire mech concentrated its flamethrower on one particular spot, seemingly intending to overheat the alloy to the point of cracking. Just a little more…

"Lloyd, look out!"

A couple of ray jets had begun circling him and one was firing a stream of…live crabs at him? He flew his mech out of the way above the jets and pushed one of his dragon's many buttons in an attempt to launch one of its many missiles into the fray. Instead, he ended up shooting out a flare, which didn't do much damage but did distract them. In the end, he

smacked them down with the dragon's tail, watching them careen to the ground while he sighed in relief. "Thanks Morro."

"Keep your head in the game. I don't know what you remember about Garmadon, but do notunderestimate him." His cousin's voice had a sharp edge to it, and he thought back to what his friends told him had caused his hospital stay. *"He may seem like he's got a few screws loose, but he's cunning. You never know when he'll try to pull something unexpected."*

Lloyd hummed and nodded, turning his attention back to crowd control. He was silently thankful for being tasked with something other than Garmadon, because between the different memories, his feelings about his father were still rather complicated. Though, it did feel a little strange to not be leading the charge.

The aerial dance continued for a while, and between ice, lightning, and dragon fire the enemies on the streets were thinning out, and he started wondering if the battle was close to its end until the comms exploded with shouting.

"The fire mech is down! I repeat, the fire mech is down!"

"A little help, guys? I can't keep this up without Kai!"

"What do we do?!?"

Before Morro was able to give instructions, Garmadon apparently had decided who he wanted to fight next. "Oh Green Ninja~! Come out, come out wherever you are!"

Lloyd took a look at the waning troops and made a split second decision. "Zane, hold the line here. I'm going after Garmadon." Without waiting for a response, he made a beeline for the warlord.

Garmadon and his own teammates soon came into view, the fire mech dangling uselessly from one of the lobster's massive pincers and the red ninja on the ground restrained by several people with pufferfish helmets. Cole's mech was being held in the air between the other claw, immobilized but undamaged for the moment. When Garmadon saw the dragon, he cracked a grin and tossed Kai's mech to the side. "There you are! I was starting to wonder if you were too chicken to face me again."

The blond didn't slow down, instead flying right over the warlord and snatching the earth mech out of the lobster's grip. Cole, thankfully unharmed, landed safely on the ground and prepared to go another round until Lloyd stopped him. "Go take care of Kai, then help Zane! I'll keep Garmadon distracted."

As the black ninja moved to help his teammate, Lloyd maneuvered himself to the other side between Garmadon and the beach, forcing his father to turn around in order to see him.

"Y'know, you ninja are really lucky. If it weren't for my ex we would've done this song and dance already, but *nooo~*, apparently Luh-Loyd got a boo-boo or something last time I was here and she freaked out." The warlord gave an exasperated flap of his arms and threw his head back like a whiny teenager. "Ugh, the past two weeks were *agony*! Not being allowed to

go anywhere under threat of harm from your ex-wife is no joke, let me tell you." Then two left arms gestured up and down in sync toward the green ninja. "And now look at you! You're already better! I had all these insults for the other ninja about you not showing up, and now I can't even use them."

Well. He was not expecting Garmadon to be this…chatty. He gave a sharp glare to his father, making it obvious that he wasn't there for banter. "Is there a point to this conversation?"

Glowing red eyes widened suspiciously at him, clearly offended. "What, don't like a little back-and-forth anymore?" He shook his head and tsked. "Kids these days, no respect for tradition." Sighing, Garmadon moved his hands to a set of levers in front of him, which caused Lloyd to ready himself. "In that case, let's cut to the chase, shall we?" His eyes sharpened and a wicked grin appeared on his face as the lobster's claws suddenly—and literally— shot out and smashed into the nearest building, barely grazing the dragon as Lloyd struggled to move out of the way in time.

The blond aimed green fire breath at his father as he hovered over the warlord, but a bubble shield appeared around him and he laughed maniacally. As the claws retracted to the crustacean-themed mech, Lloyd caught sight of the weak spot Kai had made and an idea began to form in his mind. "Change of plans, guys. Zane! Is there any way you can make it over here? I think I know how we can beat this thing!"

"Affirmative! The troops in this area have almost fully retreated. Estimated time until arrival: two minutes and nineteen seconds."

Perfect. "Great! Cole, go take over Zane's position. Now all I gotta do-"

A claw smashed into the side of his mech and sent him hurtling straight into the side of a nearby building. His vision went white and starry for a few seconds as his head crashed against the wall. "-is not get hit. Ow."

One of the jet rockets then sputtered and choked before finally giving out, causing the mech to tilt farther into the wall, and Lloyd had to duck into the cockpit to keep from being injured worse. He somehow managed to keep his hands on the controls and fumbled around with them for a bit until he finally found a way to give the other rockets more power to counterbalance and right the mech again.

Garmadon's laughter and the pain from the crash made his head spin, but he pushed that to the side, sat up, and—finally finding the right buttons—released several missiles at the lobster. The shell deflected most of them, but one managed to crash into the base of a claw before it could fully return, severing it completely and giving him time to recover.

During that short break, an uncomfortable itch started to form in the back of his mind as if he were missing something. He wanted to just chalk it up to the newly-earned head trauma, but recent events had him questioning everything now.

Garmadon tried to take advantage of the pause and push forward down the street, but a shout from above grabbed his and Lloyd's attention. *"Heads up!"* A shadow flew overhead and the

water strider mech came down and bounced off of the lobster, smashing it into the ground. *“The cannon fodder is all taken care of, so I figured I’d come help out.”*

Lloyd let out a relieved laugh when he heard the girl’s voice. “Nya, I could almost kiss you right now.” However, before the cyan ninja could respond, his mech chose that moment to fall from the air, and the street rumbled with the heavy thud of the tatsu. More dazed than actually injured, he absentmindedly heard the rumble of a large vehicle barreling down the street as the itch in his mind grew stronger.

“I brought you here to say thank you for all you have done.”

Before he could process the sudden appearance of this new memory, a path of ice made a beeline for the crustacean mech, freezing it to the ground and immobilizing the remaining pincer. “‘Protocol: Put Garmadon on Ice’ has been executed!” The ice tank skidded to a stop right in front of the warlord. “I am present and ready!”

The green ninja had to keep his hands from moving up and cradling his head as the itch became static in his mind and he winced through his words, grateful for the coverage his mask offered. “Za-…uhhh, Ice Ninja!” His father being within hearing distance wasn’t ideal, but he could work with this. “I need a little fire-freeze action. You with me?”

An endless sea of green. Beautiful blue skies edged with clouds. A smattering of yellow flowers here and there. “But…I don't understand...” His own voice; hesitant, confused.

“Always!” The chipper voice of the nindroid gave him something external to focus on as he shakily controlled the dragon to walk closer to the offending shell.

Finding the weak spot from before, he focused the dragon breath on heating that spot, then when the metal turned red Zane froze it over and the process repeated.

“Endings are never really endings, only new beginnings.” An old man mounting a dragon. “You will understand soon... if you choose to come with me.”

Reheat, freeze. Reheat, freeze. Garmadon frantically tried to escape the icy prison to no avail. His mouth moved, but Lloyd heard nothing from it.

The static grew louder.

“Or, you can continue your duties as the Green Ninja.”

Finally, the metal cracked under the extreme temperature changes and the inner workings of the mech were revealed.

“There is another life on the verge of extinction even as we speak.”

Green sparks danced through Lloyd’s fingers and enveloped his hands, and in a brief moment of focus he threw two emerald orbs that slammed into the exposed mechanics.

“You will wake up to a world not your own, to a family not your own, but they will need you.”

An explosion ripped through the lobster and the ice trapping it shattered, leaving the hull motionless in the center of the road.

The First Spinjitzu Master extended his hand. “It’s your decision, Lloyd.”

An unnatural silence fell over the area, the only sound he could hear being his own heavy breathing.

…until Garmadon broke it with a laugh. “Oh man, you’ve been holding out on me, Green Ninja! Whatever those weird powers were, I’m excited to face them again!” The warlord pressed a button on his control panel and several jellyfish mechs emerged from the ocean. As they hooked tow chains around the lobster and carried it away, his voice echoed through the air. “Don’t worry, I’ll be back! Fight ya later, ninja!”

The stress of the fight finally caught up with him and Lloyd collapsed, flopping unceremoniously over the dragon’s navigation screen. The static had dissipated, leaving behind a terrible weight that sank into his chest and stomach.

Work on getting back to the warehouse, he told himself. Deal with the implications of the memory later. The middle of the street is not the place to have an existential breakdown.

Cole and Kai soon came rolling up in the earth mech. “All clear. Garmadon’s goons have officially retreated.” The black ninja then surveyed the damage done to the pavement and surrounding buildings. “Must’ve been quite the fight, huh?”

Lloyd’s only response was a groan. He pushed himself up, arms shaking slightly from the exertion. “…and this is how it goes every single time?”

“Well…” The red ninja spoke up this time, hand rubbing the back of his head. “It’s not always this intense, but pretty much. Believe it or not, this was actually one of the shorter fights.”

A strong wind pushed through the corridor as the lightning jet lowered itself to the ground. Jay quickly jumped out and ran to the damaged green mech, panicked eyes darting over the scene with lightning speed. “Is he okay?!? Please say he’s okay!” When the green ninja turned his head toward him, he stopped and put a hand over his chest, deflating like a soufflé as the anxious tension left him. “Oh thank goodness. I don’t think I could’ve handled another scare like that.”

The green ninja rolled his shoulders back and did some simple stretches to test his range of movement. “No worse for wear than usual, I think? Although, I would like to get back to base sooner than later.” Between the possible second concussion and the jarring reality of the remembered conversation, a headache was building and he just wanted to lay down.

Unfortunately, life never gave him what he wanted.

Lloyd ended up hitching a ride with Jay as the lightning jet carried the out-of-commission tatsu, and Cole grabbed the fire mech with his own as they finally headed back.

The ride to the warehouse was quiet and uncomfortable. He would have to tell them all. Now that he knew the truth, he couldn’t keep up the charade and break their hearts further.

But…the First Master had said they would need him. Why?

By the time they arrived at their destination, he was no closer to answering that particular question than when he started. Cole dropped the fire mech off in its spot before detaching the dragon and doing the same, allowing Jay to park his jet in its spot on the railing. As Lloyd dismounted and landed on the floor, he began steeling himself for the unwelcome announcement.

He needn’t have bothered.

His mask was suddenly ripped from his face and a pair of hands forcefully grabbed him by the collar of his gi, sharp gray-green eyes burning with rage and boring holes straight into his soul.

*“Who are you, and **what have you done with Lloyd?!**”*

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

> Things blow up at the warehouse, and Lloyd gets a Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Idea™

"*Who are you, and **what have you done with Lloyd?!***"

Morro's roar drew everyone's attention, and next to the blond, Jay flinched and took a few steps back. "M-Morro? Wha-"

The man shot a lingering glare at the blue ninja, instantly shutting him up. When no one else tried to challenge him, he turned back to Lloyd, his fury somehow more fierce than before. "You tipped your hand with that final attack. Whenever Lloyd finally unlocks his element, it won't have a physical manifestation. So I'll ask again: who. Are. You?"

Murmurs questioning elements and what the older ninja was talking about buzzed through his teammates who had now gathered behind Morro.

Of course the moment he needed those steeled nerves was a moment too late. Nevertheless, Lloyd took a deep breath and somehow managed to hold eye contact with Morro. "My name is Lloyd Montgomery Garmadon. I…don't exactly know how old I am because of the Tomorrow's Tea incident, but I think I would technically be somewhere around your Lloyd's age." The words caught in his throat as the man slightly loosened his grip on the gi, and the blond averted his gaze while he struggled to articulate everything. "I-I promise I didn't realize until after Garmadon smacked me into that wall, but… I'm not from this Ninjago. Back in my realm, in order to defeat the Oni, we had to make the Tornado of Creation; a dangerous spinjitzu technique that harnesses the power of creation itself."

Chancing a look at Jay revealed the brunet staring wide-eyed at him, and Lloyd winced at his own words. "Jay, I-I think you were right. I think I *did* die," he said as the other's face went white, "because I met my grandfather—the First Spinjitzu Master. He told me that someone was dying in another world, and gave me a choice between staying with him or coming here and helping. Obviously, I chose here."

The silence that followed was suffocating. A quick glance around revealed various intensities of shock on the ninjas' faces; Jay looked ready to fall over, Zane seemed to be stuck in an endless error loop, the siblings had hints of sadness and horror to their surprise, and Cole just kind of stood there, detached from reality. Morro's face still carried a scowl, but his eyes flashed with many different emotions that Lloyd couldn't possibly hope to identify.

"Where's Lloyd."

The man's voice came out much quieter than the blond was expecting, and he could feel the fist holding his uniform tighten and tremble as the green in Morro's eyes was completely overtaken by silver-gray and a breeze started to weave itself through his hair. "WHERE'S LLOYD?! You expect me to believe that *the First Spinjitzu Master himself* sent you here, to what? Take his place?! What did you do with him? *WHERE IS MY BROTHER?!?*"

Lloyd's eyes widened at the revelation, and if the heaviness in his stomach could go any lower, it would be on the floor right now. He'd figured they were supposed to be close, but for Morro to consider his Lloyd a brother… His heart shattered as his next words were choked out, burning through his throat like fire. "…I don't know."

The wind exploded through the warehouse, entering through the main doorway and swirling around the room—around Morro—causing the beginnings of a small tornado. "*Liar!* Why would he send you here and not even tell you *how* to help him???" The man let go of the black and green gi and shoved him backwards a few steps.

Lloyd threw his arms out in frustration as he regained his balance, his own anger beginning to rise. "I dunno! Being annoyingly cryptic seems to run in the family or something! What am I supposed to do, find his ghost and ask him?!"

A small shift in the atmosphere apparently gave Kai the courage to try an intervention. "Dude, stop it! Leave him alone!" He pushed toward Morro and reached out to grab him. In response, a burst of wind slammed into him and the brunet went tumbling across the floor, stopping only when he crashed into the earth mech on the other side of the room. Nya screamed his name and ran to check on her brother while the others struggled to stand through the miniature windstorm that was growing ever stronger.

"I'll leave him alone when he finally decides to answer!" The man stalked closer to Lloyd, making him back up even more. His face was twisted with a fury that was very similar to the ghost's, and the blond did his best to keep himself from shaking with his own fear and anger at the increasing parallels between the two Morros. He barely noticed when his element protectively wrapped around his frame, prepared to absorb damage like it had during the fight in Kryptarium.

The black and white ninjas tried following Kai's efforts to intervene but the wind repelled them like a wall, keeping them from getting any closer. When they couldn't break through physically, they tried to get Morro's attention verbally.

"Calm down Morro! This isn't you!"

"This course of action has little chance of a positive outcome, and I do not believe that is what you want!"

Morro hesitantly stopped his advance and studied Lloyd's posture and expression. He must have seen something, because the storm around them lessened slightly and a hint of grief flickered into his scowl.

Then the two locked eyes, and Morro's widened in realization.

The temperature in the room suddenly dropped several degrees and with it, Morro's expression took on an icy sneer. "I see now. You died. You're a ghost, and you're lying through your teeth!" He lunged at the blond, who barely had time to duck and roll out of the way.

If Lloyd had been horrified before, it was nothing compared to the sickening feeling he got from hearing that. "*W-WHAT?!?*" He moved to dodge again but underestimated Morro's wind-enhanced speed and the two went toppling to the ground, wrestling each other and taking turns dominating the fight. "I'm not a ghost! Get off-" He caught the black-haired man off guard and rolled both of them over, grunting as he tried to use the leverage of the floor to stand up and push himself out of the strong grip. "-of me!"

His advantage was short-lived as the wind master turned the tables yet again, pinning the teen's wrists to the floor. "Only after you stop possessing Lloyd!"

A bitter scoff escaped his lips before he could stop himself. "Real rich coming from you, since *YOU* were the one who possessed *ME!*"

Morro *froze*.

The storm abruptly stopped as more indecipherable emotions danced across the man's face. Cole and Zane took the opportunity with the wind's absence to rush forward and separate the two, the taller teen pinning Morro's arms to his side while the nindroid stood as a shield in front of Lloyd. "Hey, chill! We'll figure everything out somehow, but not like this!"

The contact brought the master of wind out of his shock and he struggled against the teen's exceptionally strong grip for a bit before relenting and going still again. "You can let go of me now."

Cole gave a tentative look to Lloyd, who slowly nodded, before releasing Morro. The man shook off the lingering arms and shoved a finger in the blond's direction. "Don't think this is over." And with that, he stormed out of the warehouse and they heard the sound of his motorcycle driving away.

In the stillness of the aftermath, Jay fell to the floor, trembling. His mouth opened and closed voicelessly, and the air filled with Kai's voice instead. "Okay, someone explain *what in the world just happened?*"

"It appears we just witnessed a family quarrel." Zane's cheesy smile was eerily absent, a blank stare that could pass as a look of shock or concern currently making its home on the nindroid's face.

Cole rolled his eyes and crossed his arms. "No duh, Sherlock. Pretty sure he's talking about the weird wind powers and the…other stuff." He paused, as if unsure how to continue. "… Lloyd?"

The blond clenched his fists and stared at the floor as he felt all eyes fall on him. "I never asked for this…" Frustration filled his voice as his breathing stayed heavy and labored. "I never asked for any of this!" He carefully lifted a hand in the air and watched green sparks

crackle along his arm, leaving a faint green glow to mingle with the natural sunlight that was quickly dimming behind cloud cover. “Stupid ‘green ninja’ garbage, stupid prophecy, stupid *destiny*; what’s the point if I just royally mess up everything no matter where I am?” The strange glow disappeared and his hand limply dropped back to his side.

He looked up briefly at everyone, and before any of them could speak up he moved past them toward the warehouse door. “…sorry guys, I-I’ve gotta go…”

By the time they snapped out of their shock and started calling after him, he was already outside and speeding away from the base as fast as his legs would carry him.

He stumbled out of his gi and tossed it against the fence as he continued his escape.

He needed to get away. He needed space, he needed air, he needed…

He needed his family.

The blond climbed on top of a nearby building and kept moving, jumping from rooftop to rooftop while being mindful of the quickly changing weather. The wind had picked up significantly with a storm blowing in from the ocean, and Lloyd absentmindedly wondered if any of this was Morro’s doing. Eventually the rain began to fall and he took shelter under a random rooftop awning. With the strength of the wind, the storm blew the increasing deluge into his shoes and pants and waterlogged them.

He paid it no mind.

In fact, he didn’t even register it. He couldn’t feel anything except anger and guilt. Anger at the Oni, at his grandfather, at himself; guilt over his presence in this world and his lack of knowledge about his purpose here.

He closed his eyes and leaned his weight against the wall, letting the numbness envelop him like a veil of static.

What could he do? He was being sarcastic when he mentioned looking for the ghost of the First Spinjitzu Master, but honestly that might be more feasible than looking for a self-shaped needle in the haystack of Ninjago. And that was if he was even alive and still in this Ninjago!

…now *there* was a thought. If he was here, what if his doppelgänger was in his Ninjago? And if that was the case…

No.

Bad idea. Very bad idea.

But…

No! It’s stupid, there’s no backup, and there’s no guarantee she even actually knows where it is!

…there’s still a chance…

No!!!

Lloyd argued with himself for some time, working through the pros and cons of his half-baked spur-of-the-moment plan. Several times he thought about going back to the warehouse and roping the others into helping him, but unfortunately the idea had already taken root and the logical thoughts were easily drowned out by the impulsive ones.

And so, Mission: “Get Harumi to tell Lloyd where the Realm Crystal is so he can use it to find other Lloyd” began.

…he should probably find a better name for that.

Briefly bemoaning his terrible naming skills, he stepped out from under the awning and into the full fury of the storm. The wind and rain whipped around him and finished soaking his clothes, but he ignored it as best he could and, as much as it made his stomach twist, made his way toward the industrial district.

It took him some time to actually get there, but eventually he started seeing signs of past activity on the empty streets below. He slowed his rooftop jumping and finally stopped on a random building as he realized a very important flaw in the plan: he had no idea how big their territory stretched, meaning that he had no idea where to actually find Harumi. Frantically looking around, he caught sight of a large side door that had not been shut all the way and quickly made a beeline for it. Once inside the shelter of the factory building, he let out a sigh of relief as he looked around and saw no hostiles.

The good thing about heavy rain is that it covers a multitude of sounds. Unfortunately, it also makes things slick and slippery, and Lloyd had a hard time finding a way to climb into the rafters without sliding back down. Eventually though, he did make it up to a large enough beam that he could stop and rest on. The rain water still weighed him down, rolling off him and creating a puddle on the floor below. He peeled the sopping jacket off his skin and hung it on a protruding nail in the wall, bidding it a final farewell before heading off on the next leg of his journey.

The rafters led him to an air duct that he quickly crawled into right as someone entered the room below. Breathing a sigh of relief, he allowed himself a few moments to be still and watch the newcomer as they walked toward the entrance he came in at. They stopped at the partially open door and pulled out a walkie talkie, saying something that Lloyd couldn’t make out. He didn’t want to take the chance that it might be about someone getting in, so he took off deeper into the crawlspace.

He lost all sense of direction while inside the ducts, and he crawled around for what seemed like days through several different buildings before he finally spotted his target.

Peeking through the grating, he found Harumi in a small room with a cluttered desk, a cork board covered in papers and string, and a chalkboard that was in the process of being filled with diagrams. He couldn’t tell from his position what was on the boards or desk, but there was only one way to find out.

Carefully, he removed the vent cover and slipped through the hole into the room, his feet landing silently on the floor. Harumi had her back to him, making it a simple matter to sneak up on her, but as he got closer he realized once again that he hadn't thought things through as well as he should have. He had no way of properly threatening her, let alone "encouraging" her to actually tell him what he needed to know. A quick riffle through his now-mostly-dry pockets revealed his only weapon to be his cell phone and he internally groaned. He'd have to hope that a bluff would work long enough to get the info and get out, because otherwise he was a dead man.

Clutching the phone in his left hand, Lloyd's right shot out and clamped itself over the girl's mouth while his elbow pinned her shoulder to his. She let out a muffled scream and clawed at his arm until he pressed a corner of the phone into the small of her back. When she stilled, he summoned his most villain-sounding voice and let it out in a low whisper. "I'm going to let go of your mouth now. Make any loud noises and it's over."

Harumi slowly nodded and he moved his hand from her mouth to her other shoulder, lightly pressing his arm against her neck to try and maintain the illusion of danger. "I didn't expect to see you again so soon, son of Garmadon, let alone on your own terms. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Tell me where to find the Realm Crystal."

A snide laugh escaped the girl. "You? Looking for the Realm Crystal? And what would you do with it once you had it? You couldn't possibly understand its purpose."

Lloyd gave a bitter exhale. Believe me, I understand more about it than you think, he thought to himself. To Harumi, he said, "What I need it for is my own business. Just tell me where to start looking and I'll let you go free." His eyes then caught sight of the chalkboard in front of them and what he saw made his heart skip a beat. Schematics and notes on something called the Lost Realm filled much of the black surface, and a crude drawing of the Oni was smack dab in the center of it all.

"So you are trying to call the Oni…" His grip on her loosened before tightening again. "Why would you do this? Don't you know how dangerous they are??"

Harumi squirmed slightly as his arm pressed harder on her neck. "I've done my research, and I don't care!" Venom entered her voice as her tone lowered menacingly, and she suddenly snapped her fingers. "I have no attachment to a city that never cared about me."

Without warning, Lloyd felt something sharp prick his upper arm and he yelped in pain, releasing his hold completely. His phone also slipped from his hand and clattered uselessly to the floor. He spun around to see Mr. E—who he hadn't heard enter the room; was he already inside then?—placing an empty syringe into a storage compartment in his arm, and his now-unoccupied hand flew to the injection site. "What did you do?!"

However, the girl paid no attention to him as she picked up the device that had fallen beneath her feet. "The rumors are true." She straightened and stalked toward Lloyd, forcing him backwards until he was against the wall and pressing the edge of his phone to his chest. "You're a coward. You couldn't hurt a fly, let alone a person."

The blond's heart rate increased as he realized that more gang members were slowly filtering into the room, cutting him off from the only door and forming a semicircle around him and Harumi. He could feel his element pulsing underneath his fingertips, and he abruptly crouched and slammed his hands on the ground, causing a shockwave of green energy to expand out and knock over the surrounding hostiles. Taking advantage of the opening, he sprinted through the door and out onto the raised catwalk.

His vision began to blur as he ran down the length of the walkway, and what he had thought was a stairway leading down turned out to be a dead end. A thin metal railing was all that stood between him and a two-story fall, and a tightness in his chest made itself known as he finally registered the extent of the trouble he'd gotten himself into.

Heaving for breath, he squinted down the hall at a black and white splotch that was getting closer by the second. His hands clumsily gripped the railing and he was in the process of psyching himself up to jump when his world unexpectedly t i l t e d. The sudden, intense dizziness nearly brought him to his knees, but his grasp on the bar tightened and kept him upright for the most part. Whatever he'd been injected with was doing its job well, no matter how hard he struggled to push past it.

He vaguely heard the thump of footsteps as he tried to breathe through the accompanying nausea, and a biting voice sounded close his ear. "You are much too valuable to the cause to be roaming free, Green Ninja."

As his vision finally went dark and he crumpled to the floor, only one thought ran through his mind.

This was a very stupid idea.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Lloyd is getting tired of dreams and plays with oobleck, and Harumi makes some connections.

“Well, this seems familiar.”

Lloyd groaned as he was awoken by a sharp pressure in his head. He was completely surrounded by darkness, and in a strange way he could sense that he was in a large empty room. As he sat himself up, he noted that he was not tied up or restrained in any way, and now that he was upright he could see himself perfectly fine, just not his surroundings.

A dream, then?

A second wave of the strange pressure hit him, but this time it felt…directional, somehow, like it was coming from somewhere nearby. Rising to his feet, he began walking toward where he thought the feeling came from.

This dream space was weird, he noted to himself. He could sense himself making progress and moving forward, but it didn’t feel like he was going anywhere. The only way he could tell that he was even headed toward anything was the small, steady pulsing of whatever that pressure was. As he got closer, the discomfort grew strong enough for him to finally put a name to the sensation.

Anxiety.

There was something else in here that was radiating the emotion. Except, he still sensed that this insanely huge area was completely empty.

The farther he walked, the more the emotion built up until he started feeling undertones of other emotions: sadness, anger, loneliness, faint hope. Sometimes these would fluctuate until another emotion was the dominant pressure, but anxiety always stayed steady and consistent. At one point the weight of it all got so overwhelming that he hesitated, wondering if it was even worth it to keep pursuing the source. But with literally nothing else around but himself, his curiosity got the better of him and he pressed on.

After what felt like an eternity of walking, he stopped in front of an unusual wall that had materialized in front of him, stretching as high and as far as he could see. It was an opaque gray-blue-purple color that shifted and swirled in iridescent fashion, and the surface physically rippled with small waves that seemed to originate from a particular spot near the ground to his left.

According to the storm of emotions, whatever was emitting them was on the other side, but there were no visible doors anywhere along the length of the barrier. He put a hand on the wall in an attempt to feel for any hidden buttons or indents underneath the ripples, but he recoiled instantly.

Images. The wall had started to show him images.

He hesitated, hand hovering over the shimmering surface for several seconds before taking the plunge and replacing his hand.

The scenes spread across the wall again as if playing a movie, and he recognized several of the locations displayed. A snippet of Kai and Jay goofing off in the ice cream shop, an interaction with some cheerleaders in what looked to be a school, a flashing knife by the factory building. “These must be his memories…”

Suddenly the images stopped again and the ripples disappeared from the bottom of the wall, moving exclusively to his own hand, and he noticed that the emotional pressure had mysteriously disappeared as well.

“…hello?”

That wasn’t from an image.

The masculine voice sounded distorted, almost like it was underwater, and Lloyd realized that it was probably the source of the emotional turmoil. “Hello? Who’s there?” His palm had started pushing into the wall, so he removed it and watched as the ripples completely stopped.

“Are you here to finish me off?”

That got Lloyd to pause. He didn’t like that tone of voice. “Why would I be here for that?”

“I mean, I’m already stuck in this wherever it is, trapped and helpless to do anything except watch this Monty me live my stolen life. For all I know, you’re some random business owner who’s finally done with my existence.” The voice sounded like a hollow shell of a person, resigned to his fate. “Just, please make it quick? I don’t want mom to suffer knowing I was tortured to death.”

“Suffer? A mom’s going to suffer knowing her kid died no matter the method! What are you thinking??” The blond started looking harder for a way through the wall as a bad feeling about the other person started gathering in his stomach. “I’m gonna help you get out of there, okay? Just have to figure out how to get through this wall.” He poked several spots on the wall trying to feel for a button or latch, then when nothing came of his search he tried summoning his element. Panic started to seep into him when it didn’t respond and eventually he slammed his fists against the shifting surface. Instead of sinking into the goop, it hardened and repelled the force, causing him to cry out in pain.

“The wall works like oobleck. Light touches are absorbed but anything with more force makes it go stiff.”

Lloyd cradled his hands to his chest and scowled at the wall. “Yeah, I kinda figured that out.” Dream or not, everything about this whole situation was just…wrong. First the wide open room, then the freaky physics-defying wall, and now this guy who just casually talked about his own murder as if it were inevitable? “Who are you anyway?”

A long silence stretched between them before the voice spoke again. “…you won’t like it if I tell you…”

That was all it took for the mental gears to finally click in place. How had he been so blind? The memories should have been the obvious answer, on top of the disturbing expectation of hatred and harm toward himself…

“Morro’s gonna kill me,” Lloyd murmured as he stared at the wall blankly. All this time, and he had blindly thought that the inconsistencies were the result of a messed up memory.

He shook his hands out and stepped back a bit. “Alright, listen. You’ve been here for a while, right? What else have you figured out about this wall?”

A faint grunt of confusion escaped the other before he complied. “W-well, it isn’t completely oobleck. There’s some sort of hard surface about…half a finger deep underneath.” His voice hesitated a bit as circles began rippling out across the surface for a few seconds, and a small burst of uncertainty hit the blond. “I dunno, maybe if you can figure out how to scoop some of the goop off, you can make a clearing to see if the inner wall can be broken somehow.” He was silent for several seconds before speaking again, much quieter than before. “…This is the first time I’ve heard a voice from the other side, so maybe things are different over there.”

Lloyd began to grab and scrape at the strange material in earnest now. “Try the same thing on your side. Maybe with two of us it’ll do something new.” He watched the waves of his prodding spread out along the wall until a second set of ripples joined them only a couple inches away. Nothing else happened for a few seconds, until suddenly the ripples began to synchronize, causing a pale light to form spiderweb cracks in the elastic surface until a shower of iridescent goop rained on his head and faded away.

All that was left was a clear glass-like wall that stood between him and a perfect copy of himself.

They both stared at each other for a couple seconds before Lloyd quickly pulled his hand away and shook it out as if it had been burned, while his doppelgänger stumbled backwards before tripping over his own feet and falling to the ground. “You! Y-you’re Monty!” The other teen just sat where he fell, eyes wide with confusion and fear. “What are you doing here?!”

“Believe me, I’m just as-” He paused, slowly processing the other’s words. “Wait, what did you just call me?”

His doppelgänger blushed slightly and averted his gaze. “W-well, calling you Lloyd is just weird, and Montgomery was too long, so… Monty.” Green eyes snapped back to focus on him again, exuding apprehension.

Lloyd tested the name in his mouth a couple times before shrugging. “I can live with it.“ He then experimentally pounded on the transparent barrier, trying to determine whether it could be broken or not. “Alright, now that the goop is gone we need to get you out of there. Come put your hand on the other side of mine; I wanna see how thick this thing is.” He paused when he noticed a weight of frustration settle over him and his double’s expression morph into something more wary. “What?”

“Stop confusing me! First you take over my life, and now you’re trying to give it back? Make up your mind! Are you a bad guy or not?”

The blond wanted to sigh when suddenly a feeling of weightlessness washed over him and the ground beneath him fractured into pieces. As those pieces one by one broke off and fell into a bottomless pit below, he caught a glimpse of his counterpart’s alarmed face before falling into the hole himself.

“…I’m just a kid who wants to go home.”

- - - - -

Lloyd opened his eyes to a dark, blurry assortment of grays. His vision still swam, making it hard to pick out shapes from his surroundings, but from the sounds around him he could tell that other people were in the same room.

He moved experimentally to get a feel for his situation, and even without his messed up senses, he knew escape would be difficult.

Using his powers was out of the question. Something touching him, likely the chains keeping his hands behind his back, was made of vengestone. He could feel the weakened pulse of his element in his veins, and unleashing it would be impossible until the element-blocking mineral was removed from his person.

The chair he was tied to was digging into his back, so he shifted slightly to reposition himself. As he did so, the beeping of a large vehicle backing up blared in his ears and he smelled the musty scent of petrichor. Blinking his eyes cleared up some of the blurring and he started to make out the outline of a cargo truck on the other side of the large room, accented by its rear lights.

Someone behind him started roughly tugging on the chains around his wrists, startling him. “Hey!“ The chains released from the chair and he was lifted up and set on his feet.

“You either walk or I drag you,” a gruff voice snapped at him, and the blond looked up to see Killow glaring down at him. The big man gave him a shove forward that almost knocked him to the floor, but he somehow managed to stay upright as he clumsily stumbled in the direction of the truck.

The red lights shone brightly in his eyes as they got closer and he had to squint to lessen the harshness of them. Once he was able to see the details on the paneling of the truck, its loading door opened and an inner light revealed two rows of seats against the walls. They reminded him of ones that would be found in a limousine, except much more utilitarian.

Killow ended up lifting him less-than-gracefully into one of the seats and Mr. E readjusted the chains, using their length to attach them to a ring on the floor. As soon as the silent nindroid finished, the Quiet One herself stepped out from behind him and dismissed the two underlings. The door slid closed behind them and the girl positioned herself in front of Lloyd. He resisted the temptation to glare at her as she bent down to meet him at eye level.

“You are a curious one, Lloyd Garmadon.”

A nervous unease washed over him as he felt his counterpart’s emotions again. Deciding to come back to that later, he let his own anger at the girl rise but stayed silent. She seemed to accept that he wouldn’t be talking and took it as her cue to continue. “It seems a lot can change in the span of a couple weeks. After all, it’s not every day one comes face-to-face with an elemental master, let alone a newly awakened one.” She put her hand under his chin and lifted his head, forcing him to make eye contact with her. Now looking her in the face, he noted the comparisons of this Harumi versus the one from his realm. The largest difference was the lack of red makeup covering the top half of her face, and while her hair was long and white like her counterpart’s, it was styled in a simple braid that hung over her shoulder.

“But that’s not the only difference, is it?”

A cold chill moved down Lloyd’s spine as fear began to accompany the anger. “What are you trying to say?”

A familiar cruel smile twisted her lips as she stepped back, allowing gravity to take over and forcing Lloyd to hold his head up on his own. “For a stranger, you’re awfully familiar with me. Not even my own people knew my real name, and yet when the son of Garmadon finally crossed my path that was the first thing you said.” She sat down in one of the seats opposite him as the truck started moving and began casually inspecting her nails. “And the fact that the Realm Crystal, despite it being a relic of legend that has practically no literature remaining about it, is important enough to you that you would infiltrate our base of operations and threaten me to try and gain access to it is more than a little coincidental.” Harumi then picked up a small device from a seat pocket next to her and examined the screen. “Whether your father allowed it or you acted of your own accord, you have traveled between realms and gained the power of an elemental master.” A quiet laugh escaped her as her eyes flicked back to him, glinting maliciously. “Fate truly did bring you to me. You will teach me how to use the Crystal.”

Lloyd’s brain screeched to a halt. It didn’t help that the truck drove over a particularly bad bump at that moment, jolting away any thoughts trying to form. “I’m sorry, what?” It was just too much information at once. She had pieced together that he’d done some realm traveling before, and now she wanted him to help her learn to use the Realm Crystal? She mentioned his father… was it with Garmadon?

‘*She’s creepy. Is she like this in his world too?*’

Huh. Getting rid of that wall must have allowed for him to actually hear his counterpart. He thought out a simple "*unfortunately, yes*" in answer, but paused when he didn't get a reply; could he not hear his thoughts? Would he have to respond out loud every time? Harumi was still staring at him and he couldn't think of a way to test that out without making it seem like he was talking to her. Waiting to acknowledge his counterpart until later, the blond returned his glare to the girl. "And why would I do that?"

"Because I'm sure you wouldn't want anything to happen to your ninja friends, would you?" She pulled his cell phone out of another pocket on her person and held it next to the first device as it began to beep. "Or maybe I should get in touch with your poor, sweet mother. I'm sure she's worried sick about you by now…"

That struck a nerve with the blond and he tried to stand up against the restraints, his vision flashing with red. "If you dare touch even a single hair on her head, I swear I will make the rest of your life a living nightmare!"

Harumi simply laughed as the little device did its thing.

The rest of the ride was relatively quiet aside from the occasional random comment from his doppelgänger and the steady beeping of whatever Harumi was doing with his phone, leaving him to stew in his anger. He tried not to be surprised by the girl's cruelty, but a part of him had hoped that she would be different in this world.

Eventually the vehicle slowed down to a stop. Harumi unstrapped herself and put on a white and blue kabuki mask before suddenly throwing the cell phone to the floor, shattering it completely. She stomped on it for good measure before pocketing the other device. "I have everything I need. Wouldn't want your little club interrupting, now would we?"

The cargo door soon slid open and the girl jumped out of the truck while Mr. E unchained Lloyd from the floor and rewrapped the links around his wrists.

If he could time this just right…

The nindroid released his hold on the chains for just a second to readjust, and Lloyd pounced on the opportunity. He sprang from the seat, kicking his captor out of the truck and sprinting outside. It was dark out, but he could see the outlines of several sharp rock spires silhouetted by a giant volcano in the distance. He didn't allow himself time to see much more than that before immersing himself into the situation.

The gang members were scattered around in a sort of haphazard group, but someone was close enough to have seen Lloyd's escape and yell warnings about the escaped prisoner. Taking advantage of his smaller size, he pushed his body to the limit as he ran under, leaped over, and overall evaded the Sons of the Oni. He finally made it through the loose perimeter of the group and took off in the only direction left available: toward the volcano.

Thanks to the rough terrain, the only way anyone would be able to follow him was on foot, and they were still trying to recover from the chaos and reorganize.

Once there was a considerable distance between him and his captors, he started trying to unravel the chains that were already hanging down and threatening to trip him up. “Hey Lloyd? Keep an eye on our surroundings for me. I’m gonna try to get these off and get us away from here.”

A feeling of surprise hit him as his counterpart fumbled for words. ‘*W-wait, you can actually hear me now??*’

“Yup. Found that out on the ride over.” He unwrapped two, three loops before reaching the final snag. “Aaagh! I need a knife or a stick or something pokey-!” An idea formed in his mind and, taking a quick glance back to make sure no one was on the verge of overtaking him, he stopped briefly to take advantage of a stone spike jutting up from the ground nearby. Using the tip to push the chain around, the knot loosened until the whole thing finally slid off his wrists. “Finally!”

He left the vengestone in a pile on the ground as he started running again, experimentally summoning a green ball of sparky fire before quickly extinguishing it. With a full moon out, he couldn’t exactly hide in the darkness very well, but he could at least not make himself more obvious.

‘*How’d you get those powers? Is it like a secret ninja technique?*’ A pause elapsed before a small gasp escaped the other. ‘*…or are you like Morro?*’

Before Lloyd could answer, the ground gave way from under him and he yelped as he was suctioned through a strange transport tube. Moments later, it ejected him into a dark room with windows along one wall and a grated floor that revealed the hot glow of lava underneath. At the other end of the room, in front of a stylized fireplace filled with flowing lava, stood the other person he least wanted to run into.

“Luh-Lloyd?”

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Lloyd gets emotional whiplash like, three separate times within the span of half an hour.

Just another Saturday.

“Luh-Loyd?”

There on the hearth stood the four-armed warlord himself. His red eyes widened as he stared at the teen with a…concerned expression? “You shouldn’t be here. Where’s your mother? Why aren’t you with her?” He moved forward and helped Lloyd to his feet, then almost-gently guided him off the grated flooring and onto the solid obsidian brick. “Scratch that, how are you even here? We’re in the middle of the ocean. Not exactly close enough for a casual swim over.”

Blinking at the absurdity of the gesture from the man, Lloyd scrambled out of his grip and searched for something to say. “Y-yeah, well it wasn’t exactly my choice to be here. Some creeps kidnapped me and dragged me out here against my will.” He frowned as he glanced toward the window. “They’re probably on their way now.”

In a moment of sick coincidence, two SotO members fell through the ceiling and landed in the middle of the room. Before they could even stand, Garmadon pushed a button and a couple of the floor panels opened up beneath them, swallowing them whole before returning to their proper positions. “Oh, I already knew they were coming. That’s why I’m waiting in here for them.”

Lloyd stared at the floor in disbelief before frantically turning to his counterpart’s father. “You just killed them!”

A scoff escaped Garmadon as he rolled his eyes. “I didn’t kill them, I fired them. It’s like an amusement park ride but with lava. I do it to people all the time. They’ll be fine.”

While Lloyd floundered for words to even describe the wrongness of those statements, the warlord quickly moved toward the wall. “Come on, we need to get you back home before Kokes finds out you’re here and really kills me.” He pulled a lever and grabbed a hidden microphone that lowered itself from the ceiling. “General Number One! Take over for me in the firing room, will ya? I have some…other business to attend to.” After reversing the lever, he grabbed Lloyd’s wrist and half led, half dragged him out of the room.

In the hallway they passed a soldier with a crab helmet who was just a little too starry-eyed as he entered the firing room.

Strange leader, strange underlings.

When trying to squirm out of the strong grip didn't work, the teen let Garmadon lead him through several dimly lit corridors before finally coming to a halt, the resistance causing the man to stop also. "What are you doing? Don't stop now! We have to get you out of here!"

"How do I know you're not kidnapping me and taking me to your dungeon where I'll never see the light of day again?"

The warlord dared to look offended. "Did you not hear me? It is in my best interest *not* to kidnap you, because Koko *will* kill me otherwise. If there's anything she fights for harder than she did for the side of good, it's you." Scoffing, he shook his head. "And besides, what kind of dad kidnaps their own kid? Like, seriously? They'd have to be some sort of monster to think of doing something that messed up."

Lloyd felt the warmth of admiration coming from his counterpart, although whether it was for his mom or his dad he didn't know. He himself was somewhat impressed that Garmadon had any standards at all. It almost reminded him of his own father, back before the venom was purged from him…

A warning alarm started going off, and the warlord stiffened. Turning toward a nearby door, he and Lloyd pushed through into a random lab and Garmadon immediately started tapping at a screen on the wall. Security camera footage soon appeared, and he scrolled through several different views until he landed on one that showed him what he was looking for. His eyes blew wide open and he opened his mouth to say something, paused to cautiously look down at Lloyd, then put one set of hands over the teen's ears as he cursed. "Of course it'd be him!"

The man broke away and started pacing anxiously back and forth across the room, while Lloyd took the opportunity to examine the footage. A small sleek aircraft was making its way across the ocean toward the island, but it was too far away and too dark for him to see the pilot.

"The Secret Ninja Force may be annoying, but Ghost? Forget annoying, that guy is a straight up nightmare." Garmadon stopped in the middle of the room, one hand on his chin and two clasped behind his back. "Okay, new plan. You'll have to make it to the docking bay on your own while I keep his attention away from there." He walked back to the door, guiding Lloyd through it as he pointed down the hallway. "Just go down this hall, make a left, go down three doors until you see the one with a giant trophy on it and make a right, straight some more then two more lefts, a right at the green door, and you're there. All the doors have fancy DNA scanners on them so you should be able to get through. Got it?"

The blond's mind was reeling with so much information. The directions already made him dizzy; he figured the biometric locks were why Harumi needed him, but what was Morro doing? Did the wind master know he was here? He couldn't possibly, unless…

His phone! He had made sure to turn on location sharing that morning; of course Morro would have access to that! But wait, if Morro knew his location, then surely Koko also knew by now-

“Good!” The warlord’s voice cut through his thoughts as he gave Lloyd an almost-gentle push forward. “Now get going! Daddy’s got a ninja to deal with.”

As Garmadon left down the opposite side of the hall, the blond started making his way to his own destination. As he tried to remember the directions he was given, he had to ask a question. “Is he usually like that with you? ‘Cause that was… um…” His voice trailed off as he turned into another corridor, amazed at how many times the warlord had left him speechless in the span of a few minutes.

‘*…I don’t know. Outside of fighting him as the Green Ninja, I‘ve never actually met him.*’ His counterpart’s voice felt conflictingly neutral, and Lloyd could sort of relate with how he felt about his mother before meeting her. He hummed in acknowledgment and returned his focus to the task at hand.

Slowly but surely he made his way to the docking bay with the help of Other Lloyd reminding him of the directions, and once the final door slid open they both gasped. It was huge! There was an inlet inside the volcano that housed dozens of docks and hundreds of mechs. Manta ray jets, jellyfish subs, crab mechs; any sea creature that could be imagined, there was a mech version of it. Running to the closest manta jet, he unlocked it with another DNA scanner and cautiously climbed into the cockpit. The control panel had so many buttons that even his counterpart had trouble deciphering what even half of them did.

Working together, they eventually managed to get the jet into the air and out of the docking area mostly intact. However, it wasn’t long before there was an explosion behind them and Lloyd turned to see fire and smoke coming out of the archway he had just escaped from with Morro’s jet—perfectly silhouetted against the burning yellows and oranges—heading his direction at full speed. In that moment, Lloyd came to a horrible realization.

“He thinks I’m one of Garmadon’s soldiers. He’s gonna shoot me down!”

So much for keeping Morro’s attention away from the docks.

Laser blasts sailed past the manta jet way too close for comfort and Other Lloyd tried to guide him through evasive actions, but his opponent was much more experienced in aerial combat. Several shots started hitting the glass and the wings, leaving smoldering indentations across the surface of the craft. “How do I get him to know it’s me??” A few seconds went by before the natural answer came to him.

Oh. Duh.

He gathered his element in his hand, letting it fill the cockpit with its bright green glow and hoping the wind master would get the message. Unfortunately it was too little too late, because shortly after a shot hit one of the engines. As it sputtered and cut out, the jet began a spiraling nosedive straight toward the rocky beach of the small volcanic island and both teens started panicking. Neither of them could remember where the button that controlled the canopy was, so Lloyd smashed his energy-filled fist into the glass and used the momentum to jump out, just barely rolling away before the aircraft slammed into the ground and exploded.

Tumbling out of the roll rather ungracefully, he let himself lay sprawled out on the uneven ground as he caught his breath and mentally checked himself for injuries. His ankle hurt a little and his back and shoulders were sore, but nothing felt broken or out of place. Bracing himself, he tried to roll over or stand up or do something, but exhaustion held him in its grip even as he heard the sounds of fighting steadily grow nearer.

Not long after, Morro's jet landed on the beach near the crash site and the man quickly dismounted and stalked over to the prone form on the ground, announcing his presence with a rather colorful string of swears. "What were you *thinking*?! I could've killed you!!! What kind of budget imposter are you that you don't even care about your own safety??"

Lloyd tried moving again and managed to sit up, arms placed behind him on the ground for support. Sighing, he attempted a glare at Morro. "Well, excuse me for not expecting you to show up while I tried to get out of here." There was no bite to his words. The practically non-stop psychoemotional roller coaster of the past day and a half was starting to fly off the tracks, and he just wanted everything to leave him alone for the next millennium or so. His not-glare moved to the side as he heard Garmadon's voice finally join the rest of the battle sounds in the distance. "His mom's already going to have words for me when she finds out; I don't need it from you again."

When nothing but silence responded, he looked over to see Morro searching his face with one of his unreadable expressions. "…I don't know if you actually stole his body or if you just look eerily identical to him, but you can't… I just… aaAUGH!!" The wind master threw his head back and tangled the fingers of one hand in his hair. "I made a promise… and you're making it extremely hard to keep it."

'*Tell him I'm here!*' A small pang of desperation poked at his heart as Other Lloyd's voice filled his mind. '*Tell him he* can *still protect me!*'

His eyes brightened slightly before sheepishness took over and he averted his gaze again. "Speaking of your Lloyd, I found him." He tapped his head with a finger and let out a snort. "Completely not where I intended to look, but it worked out somehow."

"So you *are* possessing him."

"It's not…" Lloyd winced, trying to compartmentalize and not to fall back into old memories that didn't apply here. "Don't call it that. It's more like… we're two people sharing different parts of the same brain. I've got the motor control and he's got the emotional control. Mostly."

"How do I know you're not just saying that to get me off your back about him?"

His counterpart hummed for a moment before piping up. '*I know! Ask him about Veggie Man! Or the emu thing! There was also that one time we accidentally ordered waaaaaay too many pizzas, or…*'

"Wait, stop! Too much at once!" Lloyd squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head lightly. "Let's just… one thing at a time? I have no context for any of those." His counterpart quickly

stopped, apologizing for the rambling, and Lloyd opened his eyes to look up at Morro. “He said to mention Veggie Man and an emu thing?”

The man raised an eyebrow but otherwise kept his frown. Before he could say anything however, the fighting finally reached them and a woman that looked like Ultra Violet stopped to squint at them before pointing. “I found the kid! Get the Quiet One over here!” Not long after, a group of the gangsters rushed their direction with a pack of Shark Army soldiers following closely behind.

“Well, that explains things.” Pulling a dark gray ninja mask over his head, Morro helped Lloyd to his feet and stepped into a fighting stance. “We’ll continue this later. The Sons decided to make good on your supposed “key” ability?” Receiving a simple nod from him, the man continued. “Then we have two options here. One, deal with them before they can get to the crystal, or two, grab it ourselves. And personally, I’d rather the first option.”

As the two groups of enemies closed in on them, Lloyd squared up and positioned himself next to the wind master, ignoring the twinge in his ankle. It had been a while since he’d had to fight hand-to-hand, but with Garmadon nearby he couldn’t use his element without revealing Other Lloyd’s identity.

‘*Didn’t you mention that you trained with weapons in your world? Morro might have something you could use.*’

After asking as much of the man, he was given a retractable bō staff. Now armed, the two began fending off the coming onslaught. Wave after wave of them tried to overwhelm the ninja, but the wind would trip them up while Lloyd’s bō and Morro’s shurikens knocked them right out. It was chaos everywhere as Garmadon’s soldiers chased after the SotO, who fought back against the shark army, who both attacked the ninja.

Which, as it turned out, was actually the whole team, having arrived shortly after Morro did.

“Ghost? You’re here too?” Kai had joined them at some point, and was now fighting back to back with them as their foes surrounded the trio. The red ninja was currently wielding a katana and Lloyd was impressed at his decent grasp on swordsmanship, awkward and clumsy though it was. “If we had known you were going after him, we wouldn’t have gone to Miss Koko. Although, she did give me a ride over, so I guess I can’t complain too much.”

Several shark army soldiers rushed at them and subsequently fell on their faces as Morro subtly manipulated the wind to push them off balance. “Koko’s here? Like, right now?” He ducked under a thug’s right hook and returned with an uppercut of his own, then turned around and kicked a couple more who were trying to sneak up on Lloyd. “That ought to be fun. Has she made it to Garmadon yet?”

Looking past the immediate enemies, Lloyd could see a slew of shark soldiers flying through the air as someone carved their way through the midst of them. Kai saw the same thing as he replied, “Not yet, but I think she’s about to.”

And sure enough, the warlord’s screams were soon echoing across the battlefield as an armored figure threatened him with a sword. The red ninja threw an exasperated look at

Lloyd as he slammed the handle of his katana into the stomach of a thug with a mohawk. “We’d better get you over there before anything serious happens.”

“Aw, come on. Let him squirm a bit longer,” the wind master snarked before promptly being ignored as Kai and Lloyd fought their way to the other side of the island.

They had almost made it to their destination when he suddenly got a bad feeling from his counterpart. ‘*Look out behind you!*!’ Whipping around, he saw too late the blade that came slashing down across the red ninja’s back. Kai stumbled forward and fell to the ground, revealing a clean gash that stained the surrounding fabric a darker shade. ‘*NO, KAAAIIIII!!!*’ The other’s panic and fear overlapped with Lloyd’s own horror and anger once he fully registered the masked culprit.

“So they came anyway. I should have destroyed the phone earlier.”

In his periphery, Lloyd could see Kai struggling to get up, but he couldn’t turn his back on Harumi. The girl kept the shortsword trained on the downed ninja, stance confident and infuriatingly casual. “What will it be, Lloyd? Will you make the right choice, or are you going to let your friends suffer for something that you could easily resolve?” With her mask on, he could all but see the sneer on her face.

Lloyd moved into a defensive stance, gripping the bō tightly. His eyes darted between the mask and the sword as a fire raged inside him. “I won’t let you hurt anyone else!” Rushing forward, he switched to offense and swung at her with his staff, forcing her several steps away from the downed ninja. She moved with the grace of a dancer, dodging backward as he missed strike after strike until eventually he made a stupid mistake. A swing too wide that left him open for too long. Harumi used that moment to kick his legs out from under him, the impact falling on his injured ankle and pushing it far outside the “only hurts a little” zone. He landed hard on his back and lost his grip on the bō, seeing stars as his head crashed against the stones that made up the ground.

Before his vision could clear, the girl’s sickly sweet voice bit through the air. “I don’t suppose you’ll be needing your legs to operate the Realm Crystal, will you?” She pinned his ankle under her foot and he screamed at the white hot pain that shot through it as she increased the pressure. She raised her weapon in the air above him, and he shut his eyes to brace himself.

But Harumi's blade never touched Lloyd. The ring of steel against steel echoed in his ear as he looked up to see the orange-haired warrior parrying with her own sword. “NO ONE touches my son!” The pressure on his leg disappeared as the girl was forced to find better footing.

‘*Mom…is Lady Iron Dragon?*’

Lloyd breathed a shaky breath of relief as confusion and awe practically radiated from his doppelgänger. ‘*I can’t believe it! Mom’s a ninja!* The *Lady Iron Dragon!*’ His excitement soon devolved into incoherent mutterings, and Lloyd hoped the enthusiasm meant that Other Lloyd couldn’t feel the searing pain radiating through the surely-broken ankle. The weapons above him finally separated and he did his best to focus on moving out of the way of the fight.

Compared to her confidence when she cut Kai down, Harumi's posture was much more tense now. The two women circled each other, sizing each other up; Koko was like a mother bear ready to protect her cubs, while Harumi was like the mischievous child with a stick.

Harumi let out a roar and made the first strike, rushing toward the older woman with a frenzy that was not present before. In turn, Koko parried and deflected with ease, a dangerous dance learned only from the experience of a hundred battlefields. The skill difference was a gaping chasm, and the girl knew it.

While they clashed, Lloyd took the opportunity to carefully crawl over to his friend who had given up on trying to stand and was currently lying on his stomach over the semi-smooth pebbles of the beach. "Kai!! How bad is it??" His eyes couldn't help but drift to the wound, and he noted gratefully that it wasn't as deep as he first thought.

The brunet grimaced and hissed as he lifted his head slightly. "I think I'll be all right. It just stings, like a lot." He moved the arm not affected by the injury and brought his hand to his ear. "Guys, we need backup. Lady Iron Dragon is holding off the boss of the other group, but the rest of them won't stay away for long." He waited a bit for the responses, then let his head fall back to the ground. "Y'know, after six months of being a ninja, you'd think I would carry around basic first aid supplies…"

As the red ninja gathered up his strength and finally pushed himself off the ground, Lloyd's eyes moved from his back to the fight behind them, the smoldering anger in his chest beginning to ignite. If he had just been quicker, Harumi wouldn't have been able to hurt Kai. If he had been smarter, he wouldn't have gotten caught and ended up in this situation in the first place! Punching his fists into the ground, he managed to stand himself up and balance on his good leg. He tried putting weight on the other one only to nearly fall over as his vision darkened from the burning sensation.

Before he knew it, Kai caught him and was keeping him steady. "We need to get you back to the mechs. The others will-"

"No!" He tried to shake the taller one off of him, only to slip and crash into his chest. "That should be my fight! I just need to get the staff and I'll be good to get back out there!"

"But your mom's already taking care of it-"

"I WON'T WATCH HARUMI DIE AGAIN!!!"

The world seemed to slow as Lloyd felt warm tears gather in his eyes. "…I couldn't do anything but watch last time. But if I'm the one to take her down, then we can just take her to jail, and maybe…"

"Lloyd, look at me."

Scrubbing at his eyes with one hand, he looked up into his teammate's softened amber eyes. "Nobody here is going to kill her. Koko and Morro know what they're doing, and Harumi will be brought to justice." At the mention of the master of wind, he turned to find that Morro had joined the fight and was helping to corral the girl. "I know we're not your team, but that

doesn’t mean we don’t care about you. You don’t have to do everything alone, you know.” Kai gave a little chuckle and squeezed his shoulder. “You Lloyds and your hero complexes.”

A warmth of embarrassment soaked into him from his counterpart, cooling the internal fire slightly. Staring at the ground, he allowed himself to be led away from the scene as the other ninja one by one joined up with them, giving varied reactions and scoldings over their injuries. Nya escorted them back to her strider mech and helped him (and Kai, much to the brunet’s annoyance) inside while the others kept working on incapacitating the enemies.

He really hated sitting out of the fight, but with a Nya-appointed babysitter he was effectively grounded. All he could do was watch whatever action happened near the mech and listen to Kai struggle—and fail—to find medical supplies behind him. After radioing the rest of the team with a strong reminder to stock up on bandages and antiseptic when everything was over, he and Lloyd made a game out of watching an enemy’s movements and pointing out countermoves. Other Lloyd joined in too, which thoroughly confused Kai until he explained their situation.

After a while the enemies thinned out until there were only shark soldiers left, who had apparently made some sort of truce with the ninja and were helping to round up the SotO members. The rest of the team came back shortly after with the good news that Harumi had been restrained and her gang was temporarily held in Garmadon’s dungeons until they could come back with transports the next day.

The battle was officially over.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Medical treatment is received and the Lloyd situation is revealed.

The first thing Koko did when she saw Lloyd was squeeze him in a tight hug. “My poor sweet baby… you nearly gave me a heart attack!” Releasing the hug, she pulled away and looked him over, holding onto his shoulders. “Two incidents in two days is enough. You’re not allowed to leave the house…”

Her voice trailed off, and it took Lloyd a few seconds to realize why until he felt something wet slide down his chin. A dam of shared emotions that he hadn’t even realized was building up finally broke and tears began pouring down his cheeks. “I’m so sorry…” He hesitated, his breathing shuddery and erratic, and he found himself being pulled into another hug. The two of them sat there for quite some time, Lloyd trembling with an occasional sob and Koko massaging his scalp with her fingertips as she held him close. “You don’t… I’m not…” He tried to tell her but the words stuck in his throat, burning like an unquenchable fire.

“Shhhh, we can talk later.” The woman gave his head a little scratch and gently smoothed his hair down. “First, let’s just focus on getting that leg of yours patched up, okay?” After he wordlessly nodded, she began carefully helping him out of the mech before looking up at the cockpit. “Fire Ninja, you’re coming too. I don’t think your teammate would appreciate you bleeding out all over her mech.”

Kai mumbled something about just getting comfortable, but followed them down to the ground where they made their way to a makeshift triage and treatment area set up by Garmadon and some of his medics. The warlord himself was fussing over a cot with a mountain of pillows and a stuffed teddy bear, and as Koko helped Lloyd down onto the rough surface, she and Garmadon eyed each other, having a silent conversation that Lloyd could only guess the contents of.

After a few seconds, Garmadon turned away and left to bark orders at some of his soldiers while a medic came and examined him. “Your ankle is pretty swollen, but I don’t feel anything broken or out of place, which is mostly a good thing. Unfortunately that doesn’t necessarily mean there isn’t a hairline fracture. I can give you a temporary splint right now, but to do any x-rays or casting I’d need to get you inside.” The woman gave a tentative look to Koko, who nodded briefly.

After the splint was applied, a couple shark soldiers picked up the cot and followed the medic into the volcano. The trip to the medbay was…an experience, to say the least. Garmadon had found out what was going on and kept trying to help carry the cot, while Koko shooed him

away. After his fourth try, she pulled him aside and Lloyd could hear her trying to explain something to him as they continued on.

“So weird.”

Other Lloyd hummed in agreement. ‘*Definitely. And kinda creepy, coming from him. My own father is my worst enemy and he’s trying to play helicopter dad.*’ He let out a small awkward laugh as pricks of amusement and sadness hit. ‘*Sounds like the name of a bad web novel or something.*’

Eventually Koko rejoined the train, and they finished the journey without issue. When they finally entered the room, Lloyd couldn’t help but stare at how enormous the room was. There was a separate room at the end that housed the radiology equipment, but everything else was in this one room. There were hospital beds, IV poles, phlebotomy machines, and many other things that he couldn’t even name. One of the soldiers apparently saw his surprise, because the voice behind him suddenly spoke. “Lord Garmadon is surprisingly particular about the health and wellness of his troops. As he likes to say, ‘There’s a huge difference between being undead and being almost dead, and if you’re almost dead then you’re no good to me.’ Though sometimes I think he wishes he had his Skulkin army back…”

Despite his counterpart’s questions about what Skulkin were, Lloyd decided to not comment as the medic assigned him to a bed that was as far away from the other shark army patients as possible. “Garmadon’s orders. He wants to, ah…” She dug a piece of paper out of her pocket and uncrumpled it, reading the words straight off the page. “‘Keep him as far away from those potty-mouthed bad influences as he can get.’”

Lloyd shrugged as he was transferred from the cot to the hospital bed. “It’s not the weirdest thing that’s happened today.” He absentmindedly grabbed the forgotten teddy bear, letting the texture of the fur occupy him while the soldiers took the cot away and the medic went to grab some other doctors to prep the x-ray machine.

“That was your father’s very first gift to you.”

At the sudden comment, he turned toward Koko, who had a sad nostalgia to her smile as she continued. “He was so excited before you were born, wanting everything in the world for you. Watching him run around like a headless chicken while getting your room just right was dizzying sometimes, but it was a sweet gesture.” He could feel the conflicting emotions of his counterpart as a small laugh escaped the woman. “And then when you finally came, he didn’t know what to do with you. He wore mittens for the first month whenever he held you because he was so scared that you would shatter at the slightest touch. Seeing you two together like that was so precious…”

His cheeks burned with guilt as he listened to the story, each moment of admiration from Koko a brick of shame piled onto his heart. As soon as there was a break in the story he made a decision. “…actually, I need to tell you something.” He swallowed, trying to wet his dry mouth, and took a deep breath. “I’m not your son.”

“*Excuse me?!*”

Realizing how bad that sounded, he fumbled his words as he tried to backpedal a bit. “Nonono, I’m not disowning you or anything! What I mean is, I *am* Lloyd Garmadon, just… not *your* Lloyd Garmadon.”

Koko’s frown softened ever-so-slightly as she looked him straight in the eyes. “Explain.”

And explain he did. He told her about the Tornado of Creation and his conversation with his grandfather, making sure to gloss over the Green Ninja-related details of this world. He described freaking out and running away, getting caught by Harumi, and discovering Other Lloyd before ending up there on the island.

When he finished, the ginger-haired woman was silent for several moments as a strange look grew on her face. “So the forgotten memories…“

“They were never mine to remember in the first place.”

Her eyes became glassy as tears started collecting in the corners. “…I was scared. I worried so much, and yet you were the answer all along.” She sat on the bed next to him, her armor clanking lightly at the movement. “It was at the two week mark that your uncle and I got a call from the doctor. He told us that because of the severity of the injury, a two week coma was expected, but the longer you- he went with no signs of improvement… the chances of recovery would go down significantly. I was so scared that my baby wouldn’t make it.” A tear finally rolled down her cheek and she quickly dabbed it away, taking a deep shuddery breath. “And then a few days later, you woke up. Not the usual gradual progression, just straight into consciousness. You were awake, you were responding to questions, and that was almost just as scary as before, because I had no idea what had changed. After Wu’s visit, he told me he sensed a strong but strange new element working in you. I assume you have an elemental power of your own?”

Lloyd nodded. “I don’t know exactly what it is, but it’s some combination of energy and the four elements of creation—fire, ice, earth, and lightning.”

“Whatever it is, I’m quite sure it’s responsible for your quick release from the hospital. Lloyd has always healed quicker than most, but a near-full recovery only a week and a half after coming out of a coma that long is unheard of.” Taking one of his hands into her own, she squeezed it tight. “You saved my son’s life, and I am extremely grateful.”

He…had saved Lloyd?

They will need you.

The First Spinjitzu Master’s words echoed in his mind. The people here—his counterpart’s family, his friends, Other Lloyd himself—had Lloyd to thank for his recovery.

“I… I don’t know what to say…”

Koko smiled and squeezed his hand one more time before letting go. “Then don’t say anything, and just let me show my appreciation.” Slowly, she opened her arms. “May I?”

He nodded and was immediately enveloped in a warm hug. He let himself relax into it as he returned the gesture, and he felt warmth and gratitude spread through him from the inside also.

‘*Thank you.*’

They sat there for several seconds before Koko pulled away, a thoughtful look on her face. “Do you have any way to go home? I’m sure your family is worried sick about you too.”

Lloyd hung his head dejectedly. “There’s the Realm Crystal, but I don’t even know if I can go home… Even if my body somehow isn’t dead over there, I wouldn’t know how to leave this one.”

Just then, the medic came out of the radiology room and began heading their way. The orange-haired woman patted his shoulder and stood from the bed. “We’ll continue this conversation later. After all, we haven’t addressed the whole Green Ninja thing yet.” His counterpart’s nervous anxiety settled in the pit of his stomach as she left the room, and he could only hope for Other Lloyd’s sake that the conversation would go well.

The medic came over and helped him off the bed, handing him a pair of crutches to help him walk. They made their way to the side room and another medic assisted him onto the exam table, fitting him with a radiation-protectant apron while a doctor adjusted the x-ray machine. After listening to an explanation of the process, Lloyd was left there to sit as the machine took its pictures.

At some point during the procedure, Cole entered the medbay with a very irate Ghost Ninja slung over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes, and Lloyd could only imagine the obscenities Morro was screaming at the earth ninja. They were soon followed by Zane, a bandaged up Kai, Nya, and then finally Jay. Cole ended up plopping the wind master on a bed nearby, and then he and Zane physically restrained the man with practiced ease while a medic gathered up some small tools.

‘*I wish he wouldn’t be so stupid about letting us help him,*’ Other Lloyd muttered in frustration. ‘*Wu says he’s been like that since he was a kid. Stupid “accepting help is a sign of weakness” mentality.*’

The blond frowned in response. If he was going to be stuck here, he’d have to learn to get used to Morro, familiar and unfamiliar traits alike, and that pride and self-reliance were unfortunately *very* familiar traits.

He didn’t want to think about staying, but without a way to split themselves there wasn’t really any other choice. He couldn’t just selfishly steal Other Lloyd away from his mom.

…though that didn’t mean he couldn’t visit his own world sometimes, right? It would definitely freak everyone out the first time, but at least he would get to see his family again. Maybe he could convince them to visit here every once in a while when they weren’t too busy.

He was brought out of his thoughts by the machine finishing its job, and soon the doctor came out to explain the results.

The good news was that there were no breaks or fractures. Unfortunately, it was still a pretty bad sprain and he would need to wear a boot for a while. His counterpart expressed relief at the injury not being any worse, which he fully agreed with.

He was helped back to his bed in the medbay so a medic could wrap his ankle. Morro ended up being on the bed right next to his and was currently pouting, grumbling under his breath while a terrified medic sewed up a pretty nasty gash on his upper arm.

'So much for being the role model.'

The comment caused Lloyd to turn his attention to the man. With the ninja mask on, his piercing gray-green eyes were like daggers, and he couldn't help but feel pity for the man treating him.

Seeing his gaze, Morro's fury shifted and snapped to him. "What're you looking at?"

His expression turned sheepish as he averted his eyes, smoothing out a random wrinkle on his pants as a distraction while his own medic applied a compression bandage. "Oh, uhh… nothing, he just said, 'so much for being the role model.'" He couldn't bring himself to look back at Morro. Being a middleman was awkward enough without having to deal with being stared at like a small animal being hunted as prey.

However, apparently that was a familiar phrase to Morro, because his voice softened considerably as he turned his head away. "…shut up, bean sprout."

Gasps and confused hums escaped the other ninja at the use of the nickname. "Wait a sec, does that mean-"

Kai nudged the blue ninja, wincing when he jostled his injury too much. "Later." He subtly gestured to the two medics who, to their credit, were more focused on treating their patients quickly and getting away from the Ghost Ninja than listening in on conversation. "How's the ankle?"

"Just a sprain, nothing too serious. It'll probably be better in a few days anyway." The woman finished wrapping his leg and showed him how to strap on the walking boot, then quickly left to the other side of the large room. There was a period of awkward silence as Morro's medic finished up bandaging the wound, but soon he too made his escape and the ninja were left alone.

After making sure there were no personnel lurking close enough to hear them, Zane looked at Lloyd and picked up where Jay started. "Morro called you bean sprout, but you told us you were not our Lloyd. What does that mean?"

All eyes were on him then, and he let out a deep breath. "Your Lloyd never left. He was trapped behind a weird barrier that didn't let us interact until Harumi drugged me, but he's still in here."

“You were DRUGGED?!?” Kai and Morro both exclaimed at the same time, then glared at each other.

“Happens more often than you’d think.” Honestly, it was a fact of life at this point.

The wind and fire ninjas, however, did not share that sentiment. “Kid, that’s messed up.”

The conversation moved on and he explained how they met and the way their coexistence worked as best as he knew.

“So let me get this straight. Lloyd is stuck in your head. And you, Monty, are just kinda holding his body for him because he needed extra time to recover or something?” Lloyd nodded and Nya blew out a whistle. “That’s… wow. Can he hear us?”

Pausing to give his counterpart time to respond, he nodded again. “He says he can, and that it’s really weird ‘cause it’s kinda like he’s watching real life happen on TV.”

Hesitantly, Jay spoke up while fiddling with the ends of his obi belt. “…what does he think about this whole thing?”

He was silent, letting Other Lloyd gather his thoughts. ‘*I guess at first I was confused and kinda thought it was a dream? Someone else was living as me and I didn’t have to worry about the city for a bit. But then when we finally met face-to-face… I dunno, the novelty had worn off I guess and I was just upset and thought you were lying about everything.*’ A myriad of emotions rolled through him as he relayed the words. ‘*I know it’s not your fault, and I’ll be patient until we get things figured out, but I do hope we can get you home soon.*’

“We’ll find a way, I promise. Even if I have to somehow pay another visit to the First Spinjitzu Master, I’m going to make things right.” Lloyd yawned, exhaustion suddenly crashing over him like a wave. “But right now, I just want to go crash in bed for a day or two.”

Several others echoed their agreement, and equipped with the walking boot and crutches, Lloyd made his way with the others to the exit.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

One more conversation and life afterwards.

It took a little bit of time to figure out how to get outside, but eventually they ran into Koko who led them back to the beach. As everyone headed to the Lightning Jet and Water Strider, Morro briefly stopped Lloyd before he could decide who to go with. “You’re riding with me. We need to talk.”

“Huh?” While he knew this Morro was not the same person as the one that had possessed him, he still couldn’t get himself to feel comfortable spending one-on-one time with him. Kai had also stopped nearby, watching them, and Lloyd remembered what he had said earlier about having to ride with Koko. “Oh, uhh, sure, but only if Kai comes with too.”

Morro closed his eyes and sighed heavily, then glared over at the red ninja. “You’re lucky I have room for the both of you… Hot sauce, I know you heard that! You’re coming too, but you’re silent as a mouse. Got it?”

An uncharacteristic solemnity flashed over Kai’s face as he hummed in agreement. When Morro turned away to lead the way to his jet, Lloyd leaned over to Kai with a whisper. “What was that about?”

Kai shrugged and started to follow the man. “I dunno, but probably something to do with his weird protective streak toward Lloyd.”

As Lloyd tried to keep pace with Kai, his doppelgänger explained. ‘*There was an incident when I was little, and ever since then he promised to protect me however he could. Sometimes he gets a little…too passionate about it. He’s a lot better about it now than he used to be, but it’s still a work in progress…*’

The trip to Morro’s ride was a little bit longer than to the lightning jet or the water strider since it was still parked by the crashed manta jet, and by the time they reached it Kai was practically carrying Lloyd. Loose volcanic pebbles were not an ideal surface for walking with crutches. Thankfully they ended up making it inside without more issue, and Morro took off some distance behind the others.

An awkward silence hung inside the cabin for the first couple minutes as Lloyd waited. He wasn’t exactly sure what the wind master wanted to say, but he couldn’t bring himself to start the conversation.

“So,” Morro started with a deep breath. “In your world, I…died.”

Oh. *This* conversation.

"…yeah." Lloyd felt awkward now for asking Kai to be here.

"And you said that I- that your Morro possessed you." The tension was palpable as Lloyd anticipated the inevitable question. "Why would… what happened between us?"

Why indeed, he thought sourly. "We don't have the same relationship there. He was Sensei Wu's first student from years ago, long before I was born. I didn't even know he existed until he came after me."

He couldn't see Morro's face, but the scoff that followed was bitter. "Figures. Typical Wu."

"He…picked me for a couple reasons. The first was because he was looking for the Realm Crystal, and only a spinjitzu master can access the tomb of the First Spinjitzu Master where it was hidden." Lloyd hesitated, trying to push back the unbidden thoughts that were surfacing; he could almost hear the ghost mocking and taunting at his weaknesses. "The second was… because of my title. He trained believing that he would be the Green Ninja, only to be rejected by the Golden Weapons. He ran away and ended up in the Cursed Realm, and when he escaped he found out about me."

It was quiet for several moments before Morro swore. "Your world sounds all kinds of messed up."

"Yeah, kinda." He let out a humorless snort and looked outside. The bright lights of Ninjago City in the distance contrasted harshly against the dark of the night sky, and it made him miss the clear view of the stars they had at the monastery. "…anything else you want to know?"

"I just wanted to see if…" Morro sighed, hands clenching the steering wheel tightly. "I don't want to ever hurt Lloyd like that. We've had some rough patches, yeah—who hasn't?—but… I can't get it out of my head that one day, I could go too far or say too much and become someone like that. Like *him*." His voice trailed off and he cleared his throat. "Yesterday, when we got back to the apartment… I never want to see that face looking at me again."

'*Morro… I never knew…*'

Lloyd was surprised. If not even his counterpart knew this information… "Why are you trusting *me* with this?"

"Because you two are connected, and that means you're included in that now." The man gave an amused hum and shook his head. "Believe it or not, I actually enjoy hanging out with my nerdy baby cousin, and… well, someone has to start undoing what the other me did."

"But back at the warehouse… You're just okay with me now?"

Morro scoffed again, though this time it was much less harsh. "Don't mistake this for acceptance. I will never be okay with your…situation. But I do know how to make the best of a bad hand." They were getting near the city now and the wind master began a course farther

inland. “Consider this a conditional olive branch. You work on finding a way to get back home, and I’ll work on not killing you. Deal?”

That was a very Morro way of saying he’ll be nicer, but Lloyd understood the weight behind it. “Deal.”

The man was willing to give him a chance. The least he could do was show the same trust in return.

An air of relief flooded the cockpit, as if a weight that Lloyd didn’t know existed had been lifted. He watched as the coastline passed below them, sand abruptly ending where the city began.

“One of you will have to call Koko to come and pick you guys up. I am not shoving both of you on my bike.”

The blond blinked and then groaned. “It’ll have to be Kai. Harumi kinda did something with my phone and then smashed it.” He turned to look behind him, where the red ninja sat wearing a pair of earbuds and bobbing his head to whatever music he was listening to.

He heard Morro hit a switch that caused a little red light to flash onto Kai’s face, and the brunet removed one earbud with a questioning look as the wind master spoke. “Kai, you’re free from muteland. Call Koko and let her know she’ll have to come get you guys. She knows where my hangar is.”

Flashing a cheesy smile, Kai gave an exaggerated salute before pulling out his phone. “Aye aye, captain!”

The flight ended without much fanfare. Kai got ahold of Lloyd’s mom and received an estimated time of arrival from her, then made light conversation with the two until they landed. Morro kept them company until Koko arrived with Nya, and then they all went their separate ways.

After dropping the siblings off at their home, the car ride home was mostly silent, though as they turned into the parking garage of their apartment Koko spoke up. “I managed to convince Garmadon into letting me borrow the Realm Crystal.” Lloyd’s eyes grew wide as his attention snapped to her, his heartbeat quickening with excitement. “You’re going to get some sleep first, obviously, but we can try visiting your world whenever you’re ready.”

So many thoughts began rushing through his head. How would the others react? What if time worked differently here and everyone back home was old and gray by the time he got there? Would the Realm Crystal even take him to a parallel realm? He shoved his racing mind aside and focused on what she was asking first. “Wow, um... I didn't expect this so soon. Do I, uh, have to give an answer now? I'm not sure I am ready yet...”

A soft smile crossed Koko’s face as she nodded her head. “Of course not. Get some rest and we'll talk about it more in the morning.” She parked the car and helped Lloyd out, and together they carefully made their way up the elevator to their apartment.

Once inside, Lloyd felt the full weight of the night drop onto him like a bag of bricks. He hadn't heard anything from his counterpart in a while and wondered if he had already fallen asleep.

Lucky.

Koko gave him a quick kiss on the forehead and a good night wish before disappearing into her own bedroom. He followed her example and retreated to his room, and being too tired to climb up into his bed with an injured ankle, he dropped himself into the large beanbag chair in the corner.

He fell asleep near instantly.

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Unfortunately, Lloyd's ankle decided to answer Koko's question for him, somehow managing to hurt worse than it had the day before. Both he and Koko decided it would be best to wait until the injury was healed more before doing any sort of realm travel. This gave him a whole lot of time to kill, and Other Lloyd made sure he used it well. They practiced that awkward middleman communication until it was no longer awkward; he tried—and failed—to learn how to do well in school for his counterpart, which he hated every second of (because no matter what Other Lloyd said, letters do not belong in math, thank you very much); Morro even came over a few times for some impromptu exposure therapy.

Before he knew it, a week had passed and his ankle was feeling well enough to walk on. Currently he was standing in the middle of their kitchen with Koko and Morro, who had been invited along by request of his counterpart. Koko handed him the Realm Crystal, and suddenly he felt very self-conscious. “You both ready? I, uh, don’t know exactly how to direct where we come out at…”

Koko put a hand on his shoulder in reassurance. “If we get lost, we’ll find our way back together. Right, Morro?”

“Don’t worry, kid.” His counterpart’s cousin moved to his other side and nodded. “We’ve got your back.”

‘And for what it’s worth, I’m here too.’

Taking a deep breath, Lloyd held the crystal in both hands and envisioned the Monastery of Spinjitzu in his mind’s eye, then held the crystal out in front of him where a portal formed. “Here goes nothing…” With the two family members at his sides, he stepped through the vortex and hoped for the best.

What he saw on the other side, however, was not the monastery. They had ended up in a hospital room that was currently occupied by a pale figure in a bed and two people sharing a

couch in the corner. At the sudden intrusion, the two jerked their heads up and one of them jumped out of his seat into a fighting stance before the room suddenly erupted with voices.

“Lloyd?!?”

“Kai!!! Nya!!!”

As the portal closed behind him, Lloyd rushed over and practically tackled Kai with a hug as tears started welling up in his eyes. “I missed you guys so much!”

The brunet, on the other hand, was desperately trying to push himself out of the embrace. “Okay, who are you and why do you look like Lloyd?” Nya was also standing at this point, but Lloyd wanted to stay put for a few more moments before he started explaining.

“What are *you* doing here??? You’re supposed to be *dead!!!*”

Okay, maybe he wouldn’t.

“No, wait! Stop! He’s not our Morro!” He extracted himself from Kai and moved between Nya, who already had water gathered around her fists, and Morro, who had stepped into a defensive position in front of Koko. “Please Nya, give me a chance to explain first?”

She hesitantly looked between Morro and Lloyd, in which time Koko used to step forward next to Lloyd. “I apologize for the intrusion, but we’re here for a very specific purpose. Could we have a moment of your time?”

The siblings glanced at each other, having a silent conversation before Kai relaxed his stance and crossed his arms. Nya, more tentative, eventually mimicked her brother and held up her forefinger toward Lloyd. “You have one minute.”

And so, Lloyd spent the next sixty seconds explaining a truncated version of everything from his meeting with the First Spinjitzu Master to the talk with Koko after the fight with Harumi.

“That does sound like the kind of trouble Lloyd would get into… But how do we know you’re who you say you are? Because from our perspective, Lloyd is right there.”

At Kai’s words he turned toward the bed, finally getting a good look at the figure on it and almost doing a double take. Lying still against the white hospital sheets was his own body, hooked up to a ventilator and at least a dozen other wires and tubes. He briefly winced before turning back to the two. “Kai, remember when you saved me from that underground river? And how you wouldn’t leave my side for like a month after the, uh…Stiix event?” He then turned toward his sister. “And Nya, remember all those nights we trained together in the Resistance, after I lost my element and we lost the other guys? You never gave up on me, even when I gave up on myself.”

Kai and Nya were silent for several moments until finally Kai shook his head. “This is crazy. What is our life?” He looked back and forth between the two blonds several times in disbelief. “You're really our Lloyd?”

Lloyd couldn't help but snort. “If I'm not, then my grandfather has a lot of explaining to do.” Out of morbid curiosity, he stepped closer to the hospital bed to get a better look at...well, himself. Blond hair lied neatly against the pale forehead, while different tubes ran through his mouth and nostrils to various accompanying medical devices and an IV line connected to his upper right arm.

He looked almost…peaceful.

On the other side of the bed, Morro stared at the bedridden body before looking back at Lloyd. “You two really do look identical...”

Absentmindedly nodding, Lloyd watched the artificial rise and fall of his own chest as the ventilator did its job, when a question popped into his mind. “Wait, so I didn't actually die?”

“Oh, you definitely did. We're pretty sure your heart had stopped before we pulled you out of the rubble, but your element decided to kick in and restart it.” The brunet reached over and ruffled through his hair. “Guess we know why now.”

Frowning, Lloyd brought a hand up and lit it with green energy. “But I have it right here...”

The next second, a faint green light appeared over the unconscious body's heart, gently pulsing like a beacon. The green in his hand shifted to match the same frequency and his counterpart gasped, feelings of excitement and anticipation filling his chest. ‘*Could this mean...?*’

“Only one way to find out.” He carefully put his hand over his body's heart and watched as the light grew brighter and brighter, eventually washing out his surroundings and obscuring his vision.

The light slowly changed from green to a soft white, and suddenly he found himself in an empty void with Other Lloyd as an ethereal voice began to speak.

“Sons of Garmadon. My grandsons. Death came for each of you separately, and yet despite all odds, together you have lived. Lloyd of the monastery and Master of Life, your increased proficiency with your element allowed it to unlock the healing characteristics of that for which your element is so named, preserving your bodies. Lloyd of the city and Master of Green, your mental acuity and fortitude in the face of great trials became a pillar of support for a weary soul, anchoring your minds.”

“But, I didn't even do anything...” Other Lloyd said as he stared at the ground, fidgeting with his fingers nervously.

The First Spinjitzu Master chuckled softly. “The expectation of living the rest of one's life in an unfamiliar world is not a pleasant feeling. Without prompting, you selflessly took up the burden of preparing him for success in that possibility. So yes, you did indeed ‘do anything.’” His voice paused briefly before resuming, a pleased warmth emanating from it. “You both have done well. I am proud to call you my grandchildren.”

The white around them began fading to black and Lloyd scrambled to ask a question. “Wait! What happens next?"

A spark of amusement laced the voice as it echoed and faded into the distance.

“I will leave that for you to decide.”

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The first thing Lloyd noticed was the heavy weight of exhaustion that spread through his entire body. Whatever he had felt waking up from the coma before was nothing compared to this. But the second thing he noticed as his eyes fluttered open was the fact that he was no longer in Other Lloyd's body.

“It..worked. I can't believe it actually worked! Mom, Morro, I'm back! He did it!!” His counterpart's excited voice bounced around the small room and he tried to do the same before stumbling and nearly crashing headfirst into Koko. “Oh, ow. I was not expecting my ankle to hurt this badly...” Lloyd tried to laugh, but with the ventilator tube down his throat he was unable to make a sound. Still, he gave a small smile and watched as his counterpart's family held their Lloyd tight.

In the meantime, Nya and Kai had gotten closer to his bedside and he moved his eyes over to get a good look at them. Nya already had tears rolling down her cheeks as she carefully squeezed his hand. “You're really alive...” Kai took a quick look at his sister and back at Lloyd then quickly ran out of the room, cell phone in hand. Within minutes, the rest of the team was crowding the room and bombarding him and the Other Ninjago family with questions. Even Master Wu and Misako had come, and he did his best to answer questions around all the hugs with the little mobility he had in his neck and head.

Eventually a doctor came in and kicked them all out of the room for overwhelming the patient, but as more medical personnel arrived and began working, Lloyd couldn't get rid of the teary smile on his face even if he wanted to.

He was home.

Chapter 14: Not Quite a Chapter, Not Quite an Epilogue

Chapter Notes

> This chapter is 100% courtesy of Dancing_Shadow, my basically-at-this-point-confirmed alternate version who keeps giving me ideas every time we chat 😂

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A cloaked woman quietly crept through the streets of nighttime Ninjago City. Carefully picking her way over uneven cobblestones, she soon entered a ruined cathedral, a victim of so many Garmadon attacks that it was deemed irreparable and now had been left to crumble. The light of the moon guided her way through dilapidated halls and ornate rooms with partial roof cover until she stopped inside a small side room and pushed the singular chair on its side, which opened up a hidden cellar door underneath. The steep stairs down were rather musty and the sound of the door slamming shut above her reverberated loudly throughout the stone passageway, but she confidently continued down until she reached a wooden door with a speakeasy window. After a quick succession of knocks, the window slid open and a deep voice spoke.

“The Elements lie cold and dormant.”

“May we return them to the world of the living.”

The voice grunted in approval and the door creaked open. As she walked through, a tall, stoic man nodded at her before closing the door and latching it again. “You returned ahead of schedule.”

“It’s done and that’s what matters. If I ever have to play act allegiance to a child again, someone is getting strangled.”

A few beats of silence passed before the bass voice spoke again. “Where is…”

“The ninja got him,” she bit out annoyedly. “And before you ask more, let me remind you that your job is to guard the door, not judge my mission results.” She pulled back her hood, revealing long black hair and pale skin. “I’m back, the mission is finished, and that’s all you need to know.”

Closing his eyes, the man briefly bowed his head in apology. “Pardon my inquiry; I did not mean to offend. I wish you a successful report.”

“Whatever.”

Removing her cloak fully, she made her way out of the small entry room and into a large open cavern. It had originally been furnished as a disaster shelter up until the building was abandoned, leaving the facilities to be looted and stripped bare. Now, it was connected to a wider network of tunnels underneath the city and was used as a general common room for casual and formal organization meetings.

“Heeeeeey, lookie here! It’s ‘Ultra Violet~’!”

A lanky man intercepted her and casually threw an arm around her shoulders, pulling her in and taking a swig from a glass bottle before offering it to her. “We missed ya ‘round here! Make any new friends while you were gone?”

The woman scowled and hissed at him. “Shut it, Cyrus. It was just a job and you know it.” She shoved the man off of her and pulled a dagger on him. “And keep your booze to yourself. *Some* of us have more important things to do.”

Cyrus backed away with his arms raised, bottle still clenched in one hand. “I get it, I’m going. Sheesh, no need to get all stabby over it.”

When he made no further attempt to approach her, she re-sheathed the blade and warily glanced around the room. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have a report to give. Where is he?”

Another man, a younger-looking one, pointed to a set of stairs. “He’s been in the spire a lot lately. You might start there.”

The inebriated man nodded in agreement. “Yeah, he keeps sayin’ something about how he can feel the time getting near or some garbage like that. No clue what he’s on about, ‘cause we’re still just waiting around doing nothin’.”

She scoffed at his impatience. “Enjoy it while it lasts. I have a feeling things will get pretty busy around here soon.” Rolling her eyes when Cyrus’s face lit up at the news, she turned to the younger man. “Spyder, send out a notice for me. He may call for a meeting tonight, and you know how he hates stragglers.”

He obediently pulled out a cell phone and began tapping out a message, a look of surprise on his face. “Did the mission really go that well?”

“We’ll find out.” Turning to walk away, she stopped with an afterthought. “Oh, and Spyder? Get Mr. Tipsy out of here.”

She left the underground chamber and climbed the wooden spiral stairs to the top of the tower where a broad-shouldered man stood facing a narrow window. Before she could announce her presence, he spoke before turning toward her. “The wolf returns early. Did our little flock go up in flames so quickly?”

Nodding, the woman briefly studied his face. The moonlight filtering through the glass highlighted his graying facial hair while also accentuating his chiseled cheekbones and deep dark eyes, and though he wore a hood over his hair, a metallic headband could be seen covering the majority of his forehead. “The girl became too unstable and got too close to

summoning the Oni, so I had to tip Garmadon off and lead the project to an early end. Ghoultar went and got himself captured with the rest of the rabble, but he's smart. They won't get anything out of him." She reached into a pouch that hung from her belt and pulled out a small black handheld device. "It wasn't a complete failure though. Harumi managed to clone the data from Lloyd Garmadon's phone." A scoff left her lips as she handed the device to her superior. "Apparently the kid is the Green Ninja."

His eyes widened slightly as he took it and began examining the information. The small room was silent for a couple minutes until the man suddenly barked out a laugh. "Our preparations have not been in vain. It seems the master of wind is once again within our grasp." He smiled widely and handed the woman a roll of paper. "Good work, Bansha. I trust you will use your new position well."

Bansha accepted the scroll and bowed before leaving the tower. The man chuckled to himself as he reviewed one specific contact from the device. "Morro Wu. I almost feel sorry for your old man." Picking up a bow that was leaned against the wall, he lit an arrow tip with green fire and let it fly through the open window, watching it arc over the city before disappearing into the distance.

It was time to put the remaining pieces into play.

"After all these years, I will finally claim what's rightfully mine."

Chapter End Notes

To be continued in book 2!!!

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