

## Always A First Time

by debbiechan

Disclaimer: Still don't own Dbz. Still compelled to tell this story.

A/N: Thank you, readers, for your patience. Herein follows my list of excuses for stopping dead in my tracks updating this story: I got a damn cold that lasted a week, then my sister came to visit, then Hurricane Katrina smeared our city and we had to deal with the aftermath of New Orleans refugees, and then I got very ill again.... But honestly, the main reason this story was stalled was that I was having a tempestuous affair with another fandom (Bleach!) Never fear, though, my love of BV is infinite. I'm not certain when I'll update again, but I have every intention of finishing this story. dchan 11.13.05

### Chapter Twenty-eight: A Final Confrontation

*"I am so glad that I was able to live my life to the fullest." --the Namekian Elder, episode 105*

Vegeta flew at a coasting speed above a range of green mountains. It was late spring and rotting flowers were giving off a very strong scent that he had come to associate with ... *human females* for some reason. He had been concealing his ki on his brief visits to Earth, but no one from the Son household bothered to hide theirs.

The boy with the Saiyan blood was charging at two other powers. Vegeta felt the Namek's strength flare--detectable but miserable. Kakkarot--*was he holding back?* If he wasn't, then Vegeta's strength surpassed the other Saiyan's easily; if Kakkarot was holding back for the sake of training his son, then his true weakness was manifest: *He cares for others.* What a joke of a Super Saiyan!

*Power is everything; power knows no compassion and cares for no one. Because if you are all-powerful, you **need** no one.*

Rounding the mountaintops and switching directions, Vegeta flashed on a memory of the Boy from the Future and Kakkarot--there had been such hope and idolization in the boy's eyes. Why did the boy idealize Kakkarot so much? Why did *everyone?*

*That purple-haired Pretender Saiyan will witness **my** glory. They **all** will.*

There was not the tiniest wrinkle of doubt in Vegeta's brain that he was the *strongest* now. The Legendary Revealed. A perfect warrior, the true *Super Saiyan of Super*

*Saiyans* emerged from the royal bloodline. He could do whatever he pleased, bring kings of star systems to their knees and rule over the entire galaxy!

But that would come later, much later. First there was fighting. Destiny had handed the Legendary the worthiest of opponents--androids, powerful creations prophesized to be his killers. How miserably Vegeta would shame them! Neither Gero nor the Boy from the Future knew the story's true end. Vegeta would re-write the so-called prophecies in fire and blood.

Then he would deal with that ridiculous pretender, *Kakkarot*. The Saiyan who had fought Frieza and had *let the lizard live*. Vegeta would tear Kakkarot's limbs off and grind his face under heel. The other Super Saiyan--if the Boy from the Future wasn't an illusion or some cosmic trick played by the gods, then he would serve Vegeta or die.

In his all-powerfulness, Vegeta flew, skimming across plains and cities in the direction of Capsule Corporation. His energy hummed just enough to maintain life functions, and he wasted no unnecessary ki accelerating his flight. He was the *secret* Legendary. He was biding his time.

There were two humans whose whereabouts he had been tracking on his occasional visits to Earth. Two weaklings with no fighting ability but with some not-to-be-discounted intellectual strength.

Bulma and that worm scientist human were up to something. Vegeta was certain now that the two did not have a sexual relationship, but they were *most definitely up to something*.

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"It's complicated," the handsome ball player said. "Bulma and I have known each other since we were kids. We've been through a lot. We're like family, really."

Miaka noted that Yamcha was more likely to talk about personal stuff with his mouth half-full of pasta than not. They were on their third date now, and Yamcha was proving to be as distracted and detached a date as Wolfgang had been. Sometimes though, especially over Italian food, he warmed up and revealed a little emotional information.

*Men are so dense. It's like they don't want to be understood....*

Miaka swigged the last of her Chianti. "So, are you going to help raise her child? Is that out of *family* obligation? Isn't that going to be weird--I mean, because you wanted to marry her at some point?"

Over a forkful of ravioli, Yamcha's eyes met Miaka's eyes. She had to admit that she liked his eyes. She liked it that they seemed incapable of avoiding her, but it bothered her to no end that Yamcha seemed to be hung up on his ex-girlfriend.

“Well, that whole marriage thing is way in the past,” Yamcha said. He ate the ravioli and his voice was mumbly again as he chewed. “There was a time in my life when I thought that having a wife and kids was the end all and be all, but I’m not so sure anymore. I’m just sort of waiting to see what life throws at me nowadays.”

At that moment, Yamcha’s cell-phone warbled “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, and he sounded so sincere that Miaka’s annoyance melted right away. “I only gave this number to one person. It’s got to be something important!”

“Don’t tell me--*Bulma*.”

Yamcha smiled weakly, scooted his chair away from the table, and turned his face away from his dinner companion to say “yeah?” into the phone.

*I can’t believe this*, thought Miaka. *It’s like Bulma Briefs goes on every date that I do.*

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Bulma was holding Trunks like a football under her right arm and balancing a palm computer with her left. The phone was squashed between her shoulder and ear. “Can you talk, Yamcha?”

“Well, yeah, if you called that means I have to. What’s up?”

Bulma gave Trunks a little bounce under her arm. “I’m multi-tasking like nobody’s business. What I mean is *can you talk in private? Are you alone?*”

There was a small pause. “Actually, I’m on a date.”

“Shit,” Bulma muttered. “It’s Miaka, right? That was supposed to happen this weekend, and I totally forgot.” She felt herself weigh a decision a second time, and this time she decided that *no, Yamcha doesn’t need to know, and Miaka, especially, doesn’t need to overhear*. “Forget it. I’m sorry. It’s not that important to take you away from your date.”

“Bulma? Are you sure?”

“It’s the postpartum hormones. I don’t know what I was thinking. I’m sorry. It was really nothing, and I’ll talk to you tomorrow. You have a good time, sweetie. Bye.”

Bulma clicked off the phone and set it down on the dresser. Trunks was still in the football hold, attached to Bulma’s breast and nursing placidly through the slot in her nursing blouse. Bulma looked from the computer in one hand to the baby in the other and back again.

Postpartum hormones! How lame! Bulma had been taking advantage of people's naivete in biological sciences and had been using that excuse for weeks now. *Did you ever write a thank you for Auntie's shower gift? Oops, postpartum hormones. Is something troubling you, dear? Oh no, postpartum hormones.* Even her father didn't know anything about lactating females because Bulma had been a formula-bottle baby, and so Dr. Briefs or anyone who could have possibly been on the scent of Wolfgang's schemes could be easily distracted by either Trunks baby cuteness or Bulma's claiming that her hormones were fluctuating.

At the moment though, Bulma was wondering if indeed some sort of hormonal insanity had seized her since Trunks' birth and that was why she had actually followed along with Wolfie's plans.

Bulma tapped a few keys on the palm computer and felt heartsick. The communicator searches had not been turning up any new information for weeks, and Wolfie was convinced that Gero had foreseen their scheme and invented some sort of resistance to tracking technology. Bulma had said it was too early to lose optimism, but Wolfie had insisted that "time is not a limitless resource" and that Plan B would have to be implemented before the predicted date of the Android attack drew too close. "The androids are built," Wolfie had said, "I can't believe that he isn't going to test them. Why won't he test him already? Unless he *has* and our technology just can't detect it."

A document appeared on the tiny screen in Bulma's left hand. Bulma had read the letter several times already today, but she knew that she had to be overlooking an important clue:

*... I do not wish to speak to any RR operative other than Gero himself. I may have inherited my father's corporation but not his sense of allegiances. I have only ever thought of Capsule Corporation as a tedious business and Dr. Briefs as a dotty, shortsighted fool. The possible applications of my neurocommunicator extend beyond the narrow vision of most scientists, and I seek Gero to offer him not only my technology but also all my genius to work towards achieving his desired ends.*

*If Gero will look at the postsynaptic data of his latest creations for March 15, he will find evidence of my creation's capabilities...*

Bulma shut the top of the palm device closed with a loud snap. She narrowed her eyes and summoned all her deductive logic to the forefront of her brain. **THINK!** Wolfie was not the sort to leave clues unless he intended them to be found....

She needed someone who could track ki. She needed someone who could track *insignificant human ki*. She needed someone to help stop what she was *certain* was Dr. Wolfgang's Shroedinger's suicidal course.

Bulma shut her eyes and allowed the enormity of situation to frighten her for a moment. What she really needed was to confess to someone how stupid and dangerous the whole

plan had been from the beginning, but it was too late for that now. History was going to have to judge Bulma Briefs.

The possibilities forked into all directions. Bulma imagined her own timeline fraying at one end, and then the image reminded her of the sparkling butt of a fuse.

Time was running out, and the bomb was set to blow.

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Dr. Wolfgang Schroedinger sat in the empty conference room on the top floor of a moderate-sized building in downtown West City. His laptop was open on his table. He took a sip of his Mountain Dew with a lemon garnish and continued to type the letter to Bulma that--due to some fancy rigging on Wolfgang's part--she would not be able to open in her own files until tomorrow.

*I'm at Lookview Restaurant now, and although Gero is late, I have no doubt that he will show. In the event of a newsworthy occurrence on the top floor of this building, please check the back pages of volume V of the Cybernetics Anthology journals I left in your lab. The chips you will find there contain random research data you may find useful as well as a copy of my last will and testament--should my lawyers need to contact you regarding its verification.*

Wolfgang's plan was contingent on Gero's accepting him as a disciple. The old man's very *mad scientist-ness* was his vulnerability. Because Gero was so fixated on details of the past such as Goku's humiliation of the Red Ribbon Army, Wolfgang had no doubt that Gero would leap upon the opportunity to mentor his former rival's son. *That*, more than the postsynaptic data in Gero's Androids that showed the killer creations being scanned by neurocommunicator technology, was what Wolfgang expected Gero would find irresistibly fascinating.

"May I get you anything else, sir?"

The waiter's presence reminded Wolfgang of the whole issue of innocent by-standers. Bulma was the sort to be obsessed with such issues, but Wolfgang wasn't. Nonetheless, if someone could be spared being put in harm's way....

"I'm fine, thank you. And when my colleague arrives, we would like the utmost privacy. No need for someone to be popping up here every few minutes to refill our glasses, is that clear?"

The waiter nodded and disappeared.

Bulma, Miaka, all the Capsule Corporation employees--Wolfgang had made certain that they would not be injured or linked to the assassination easily, but sometimes casualties

could not be helped. In his mind, saving the entire world from the threat of Gero's creations outweighed a waiter or two being blown up... if indeed things came to that.

Wolfgang closed the laptop, returned it to his briefcase and then pulled out the precious neurocommunicator. The dumb thing just hadn't been able to locate the killer Androids, but no matter...

Plan C had been to lure Gero out of his lab with Wolfgang's communicator technology and assassinate him. While the androids themselves would not be destroyed this way and this plan still held the risk that an assistant or preprogrammed mechanism could unloose the monsters on the designated date, cutting off the head of the RR operation was second-best to destroying *both* the doctor and his lab. Once Gero was dead, there would still be time to search for the lab and destroy it as well.

Wolfgang thumbed the smooth metal surface of the palm-sized communicator. He was betting that Gero already had this technology, and if so, Wolfgang was holding useless bait. Plan B was trickier--to somehow get Gero to accept the lure of Wolfgang himself and then to have Gero lead Wolfgang to the lab.

"You resemble neither of your parents," said a soft hoarse voice.

Wolfgang looked up to see a man dressed in a business suit, a tie, and a very incongruous pirate-looking bandana around his skull. The man was standing directly over Wolfgang. He must have moved very quickly from the door to the center of the conference room without Wolfgang's noticing.

"Dr. Gero, I presume?" Wolfgang stood up and extended his hand.

The pirate businessman shook it lightly. "In the flesh," he said, and he smiled one of those mad scientist smiles that somehow reassured Wolfgang. The man was not at all psychologically well-balanced. Such people make for easy marks, no matter how brilliant.

"I take it you checked the post-synaptic data?" Wolfgang sat back down and tried to look as breezily confident as possible. "You would have to admit that while I do not resemble my father, I *did* inherit his ingenuity."

"Yes, yes," said Gero. He looked exactly like the photo Wolfgang had showed Bulma. "You seem to have inherited his talent for literary allusion as well. It did not escape me that you uploaded all that data into my creatures on the *Ides of March*."

"I wanted to get your attention." Wolfgang smiled. "And to remind you that, like Julius Caesar, you are indeed vulnerable."

"*Et tu Brute?* You're starting to sound more like your father by the second." Gero cocked his head, and Wolfgang noticed the incredible length of the old man's hair. The

white locks fell past his shoulders to the seat of his chair. “Tell me, Schroedinger the Younger, how did you find out about my lovely creations?”

“This communicator.” Wolfgang held up the device. “I programmed it to search for intelligent machines, but the truth is that the only intelligence I was seeking was *yours*.”

The old man was easily flattered. He smiled again, looking as if he was starved for company (*and he had to be, right? Secluded in that mountainside laboratory for how many years?* ), and Wolfgang had to assume that Gero did not suspect him of understanding the power or purpose of the Androids. *Smile away, old man.* Wolfgang sipped his Mountain Dew and began to feel his heartrate even. There was going to be no need to engage Plan C, the quick assassination of Gero. *Good thing. There are really quite a few other things I would like to accomplish short of saving the planet. Living to an old age, for one.*

Wolfgang’s assassination weapon--a bomb in his own body cavity set to be triggered by a series of vocal commands and the removal of a toothcap should Gero seem about to bolt the meeting--would probably not have to be used today.

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Bulma had made up her mind. There was no way she was going to locate Wolfie without the help of someone who could track ki. No sooner had she spoken the words over the phone to her father’s secretary: “*Marilyn? Will you connect me to Son Goku?*” when Vegeta materialized, resplendent in white armor, right before her eyes.

Bulma was so shocked she almost dropped Trunks.

“Tell me,” said Vegeta without so much as a nod of greeting, “what do you want with Kakkarot?”

Bulma felt the phone slipping out of her left hand. With the right, she instinctively held tighter onto Trunks, who was fast asleep. “You... *you’ve been spying on me!*”

“You and the worm. I know you’ve been plotting something. You and he still believe you can win this battle with gadgets, right?”

“How long were you outside the window?” Bulma began to feel angry. The sense of her privacy having been violated was overriding her shock and fear. “You’ve been watching us? You’re supposed to be training in space!”

“Shut up,” said Vegeta and he stepped closer. “I told you that I would kill you if you tried to interfere with this battle. Answer me now or I will kill you as you stand: *what do you want with Kakkarot?*”

Something about that cold, hard face told Bulma that Vegeta wasn't going to buy an easy lie or any babbling about postpartum hormones. "I'm scared about something, Vegeta," she said. "I wanted Goku to help me." She felt her voice shake and her eyes moisten, but nothing about Vegeta's face softened.

"Help you?"

"Yes. I've made a terrible mistake, Vegeta. I wanted to stop the battle before it ever even started, but now I think... I *know* that someone's life is in danger and it's not worth it--it's not worth assassinating Dr. Gero at all, and I have to stop Wolfgang." She felt her breath catch, and a brilliant idea came to her. The idea killed her anxiety in an instant and took the trembling sound out of her voice. When she spoke again it was high, excited voice. "*Vegeta! You and I can stop Wolfgang!*"

Author's note: Thanks to LisaB for helping me out of my Dbz slump and threatening to kidnap my Bleach bishies if I didn't get cooking on this story.

This chapter is dedicated to King of Braves who ties the knot with his beloved on December 19. *May you be blessed with many children and lots of laughs along the way!*