

My Hero Automata

(Chapters 78-80)

Novus Peregrine

Chapter 78: Enemy Analysis

A slideshow of pictures, snapshots from the memories of the four successful Recon operations, played out in a loop as people took their places around the table. This, of course, was only one of dozens of meetings going on the world over as their intel windfall made its way around the globe as fast as they could spread it. Present physically were all of those who had planned the original operation. Present as digital holograms were All Might and Endeavor, along with a representative of the World Heroes Association. The top two heroes of Japan were both being projected from their field commands at the Yokohama and Osaka Greater Gates, while the WHA rep was one of the few left in Japan and running half of the remaining WHA response even as she sat in on the meeting. Sadly, Japan was doing *good* compared to many parts of the world, and thus the WHA had almost entirely pulled their people out, in order to try and shore up situations elsewhere. The holograms of their three additions flickering to life had filled the last seats, and Dean Nedzu didn't waste any time with pleasantries.

"Everyone knows why we're here. Four of our six Recon teams managed at least partial successes, giving us a first look into our enemy's operations. While detailed analysis will likely take days or weeks, we have a brief overview of some critical discoveries."

The slideshow of images stopped at a pressed key by the chimera, splitting to show just three images in particular. One was a scorched and trampled plain that seemed to extend for dozens of kilometers...all of it absolutely teeming with dozens of different monster encampments. Some were pens, others proper tents, and a fair few more solid buildings were littered in organized clumps. Nedzu pointed at this image first and kept speaking.

"This is the first indication we have about their level of internal organization. While we knew they had to be capable of detailed, long-term plans, given the decapitation strikes on leadership, we didn't know what their logistics was like. This series of camps, unfortunately, shows that their organization level is *high*. Instead of it this just a random rush of monsters, this camp shows that they have themselves separated by unit type and are *choosing* what to feed into the Gates. Worse, we identified at least seventeen types of Monster that haven't been otherwise recorded yet."

There were grimaces all around, even as the Dean moved his claw to point at the second image. This one was a distant shot, one grabbed by Shoji as he'd been able to take in, focus on, and process far more angles than any of the others. The fact that Izumi had thought to equip one of his tentacle-eyes with a purely mechanical scope had farther allowed him to zero in on something none of the others had gotten an image of. Specifically, a *city* in the distance.

"We only have this one shot of this bit, once again thanks to a bit of foresight by Resolution and a bit of luck. That is a *multi-level* ringed city built into a hill. While the wildly different sizes of the enemy make population hard to estimate, we are virtually certain this city represents a

population of at least 2 million. And in this frame we can also see just a snippet of a logistics train following a proper *road* to that city.”

Which meant that this horde had a genuine logistics pipeline. It wasn't going to simply lose steam and peter out by virtue of running through its food or other supplies. None of those present missed the implications, even as the Dean moved on to the final shot. This one was different, in that it showed a vast underground cavern.

“Perhaps the worst news, of course, is that our northernmost Recon success got a shot of this cavern. As all three of the others got views of the Plains from before, this means that even inside our own region, we're dealing with *multiple* locations. Possibly supported by multiple armies and multiple cities. All without any of our scouts seeing signs of the Greater Gates. Meaning that these are all most likely *secondary* armies and locations, whose sole role is to attempt the opening of additional Greater Gates via the Rift, Lesser Gate, Greater Gate expansion process.”

After that brief summary, Nedzu let silence linger for a few moments as everyone chewed on the basic details. Most of them had already gotten this information, though only in isolation. Finally, he spoke up again.

“This information has given us basic, critical data. We know our enemy prepared extensively, that they aren't running out of bodies or logistic needs anytime soon, and that they don't appear to be fighting among themselves. This isn't just a random horde of locusts. It's a *civilization* that is at war with us. Now, we need to figure out what our options are in dealing them a blow that they will actually feel.”

There was silence for long moments, before the General spoke up.

“It's going to have to be that city. Or the logistics pipeline between it and the camps. The only other strategic target would be the entire camp population, and we have no idea if that would even hurt them. The only thing I can think to do, based off the little we know, is try to at least force them to commit some of their forces purely to defense. But we can only do that if we can hit that city or one like it. Doing that might at least take the pressure off.”

The comment caused a stir, both positive and negative. All Might was the first one to speak against the idea.

“We don't know enough for that. For all we know, that's a city of slaves. Innocents being forced at knife point. In that case, we'd only be costing ourself potential allies by hitting it hard. We still don't have enough information to even consider it!”

There were both nods and angry headshakes at that, even as the arguments began...

Izumi was glad to be in the field again, even if the grim reality of fighting to close Rifts was a bloody, sweaty affair. She fully understood that what she'd been doing for the last few days was important. Despite that, however, she'd felt horribly guilty for not lending her strength to the active 'front lines.' The fact that Momo had been out doing just that, leading a reaction team and slugging it out with all sorts of nastiness the entire time, only made her feel worse. Like she'd been shirking

her duty, even if she *knew* that her work with both the siphons and the recon teams had been genuinely critical. More critical than even having a fighter of her caliber helping swat Rifts or close Lesser Gates that got a foothold.

Even as she leapt from a roof, tracking the four-meter-tall orange brute, complete with devilish horns, she sort of hated to admit that she was a bit glad for the confluence of events that had pulled her back out into the field. The brute roared at her, holding up a bronze-colored shield that *most certainly* wasn't actually bronze, given the way it shrugged off the missile she hit it with. The blow had still staggered it, and more importantly got it focused on her fully. Seconds later as he lumbered toward her, *Sonic Pulse*, aka Jirou, unloaded her fully-charged sonic cannon into the side of its head from the rooftop Izumi had jumped from.

Unbelievably, the thing didn't actually die.

It certainly roared in agony, and staggered drunkenly, the left side of its face a complete mess. But it didn't go down despite how much destructive power Jirou could crank out with the newest version of the cannon. Still, the Ogre, as these had been designated, was clearly fucked up, and Izumi switched out to her spear. With the Ogre wide open, she briefly went to full power and charged Virtuous Dignity right in the monster's heart. A pulse of telekinetic power to blow that heart apart inside its body and the Ogre *finally* fell, though it flailed around with its final death throws, wrecking the shit out of both the nearby buildings and its own allies.

Those allies, until now just barely suppressed with ranged fire from the rest of her mixed team of Heroes and JSDF, quickly became the target of a push as melee Heroes waiting in the wings dashed in to mix it up with them. Izumi downshifted to her assault mode, switching to a gatling gun to help hose down the numbers, even as she crunched the numbers on the Ogre. It had, after all, been what brought her back to the field.

For the moment, higher command was paralyzed arguing over the best way to strike back at their enemy, even as other groups and nations managed to repeat a few variants of their Recon efforts to add more data to the arguments. Several plans were being considered, but Izumi wasn't really needed for them. She might be a leading expert in Quirk Energy Fields...but the predictive algorithms were actually starting to get pretty accurate by Day 5 of the invasion. In Japan, at least, most Rifts were being contained by Reaction Teams before they could form into Lesser Gates. Which was *mostly* good news. Except, of course, that as one General had said, 'The enemy gets a vote, too.'

The 'vote,' in this case, was that any Lesser Gate that *did* get opened, was now instantly disgorging at least one or two of these Ogres. As well as a new lesser unit they were calling Bugbears, which showed increased unit cohesion over most other humanoid monsters. Previously seen only at the Greater Gates as foot soldiers for the Elite Units, no one had really realized just how *tough* both the Orges and Bugbears were until Heroes that weren't on the level of All Might or Endeavor had to deal with them. Suffice it to say, they'd lost a few good Heroes, and very nearly had another Greater Gate open yesterday. That had led, in turn, to a reshuffling of 'heavy combat assets' into Reaction Teams that hadn't needed them before. Since Izumi *was* one of those 'heavy combat assets,' and had already proven her ability to command an assault team, she'd been given a team

today and put in the field. Thankfully, the reshuffling had proven effective so far, and there hadn't been any more major scares. But it *did* show that the enemy had their own ability to escalate.

The General had been right. The enemy got a vote, too. He'd also been right that first day, that they needed to find a way to take the battle to the enemy rather than only reacting. Izumi just hoped that the powers that be were busy figuring something out while she and others kept the containment efforts going...

The morning of Invasion Day Seven, Izumi grumbled as she slowly and carefully worked her way out of the snuggle pile of herself, Momo, Himiko and Jirou. She would have very much liked to keep enjoying the fact that Jirou had simply said 'fuck it' and thrown herself into their cuddles in nothing but a pair of panties and a very loose t-shirt. The fact that said t-shirt had *very interesting* imprints that screamed 'pierced nipples,' was something she very much wanted to investigate. Particularly as they had to have been a fairly recent addition if no one had noticed them in the changing rooms at UA.

Unfortunately, she was getting a call she couldn't ignore. A little bit of mental effort diverted enough processing power to fake an image of her already at her work desk while she wiggled free, and that portion of her mind faked her voice perfectly for the call as the mental duplicate of herself answered the joint call from Nedzu and General Utsumi, the JSDF-Hero liaison. She was proud of how calmly her avatar answered, given that she'd just managed to cop a feel of Jirou's ass 'accidentally' while untangling herself. The cute little wiggle Jirou had given in her sleep made her want to squee. She was proud of not showing it.

"General, Dean, to what do I owe the honor?"

The General answered first, something Izumi knew Nedzu allowed mostly as a way to keep soothing the military by letting them have priority whenever it wouldn't get in the way. The man was gruff and blunt as always, which Izumi honestly appreciated. They'd picked the man to minimize political friction during a crisis, and it was working well so far.

"No offense, Midoriya, but I'll skip the pleasantries. After a lot more analysis, we've come to a possible operational plan, but we need to know if it can be done at all. We need to know if you can make a purely organic or mechanical version of the QE detonation you accidentally triggered the first day. It doesn't need to be stable. In fact, the *more* unstable, the better it would be."

Izumi's body and brain both blinked at that, even as she finally made it free of the cuddle pile. She sent a mental query to 2B, even as she accelerated her thoughts enough to juggle the feasibility of the idea with the question of 'why would they want that?' The latter came to an answer first, even as she began adding data from 2B's response to her own feasibility models.

"You want to try destabilizing the portals from the other side? You're thinking about my theory that they are harvesting our QE out of need, I take it. And that the idea of not being able to take tech across is accurate."

It was, predictably, Nedzu who answered.

“Exactly. Farther study and analysis of what international Recon Teams have gotten, sometimes at much higher cost than we paid, showed that active Gates have a *two-way* logistics train. Combined with the way that the Greater Gates seem to pull natural QE too and through them, despite already being fully stabilized, we believe your initial theory was likely correct. They are harvesting QE. Which means that disruption of the QE fields on their side may be more damaging to them than simply disrupting the Gates. It would be even better if we could siphon QE from their world to ours, denying them the resource they want. But seeing how they react to a major QE disruption would be of considerable value on its own.”

Okay, yeah, Izumi could see that. Particularly considering the way a lot of their monsters were mutated. It might well fuck up some of their army entirely if you caused a major flux in their QE fields. She mentioned that to the pair absently, even as she went over ways and means. The General was the one to acknowledge her, even as 2B’s answered the tech question while they spoke. Apparently, the Americans had thrown stupid amounts of resources at confirming that theory. They didn’t yet know *why* technology couldn’t transfer over. Just that anything that used electricity would fry.

“That was one thought. As was the fact that your initial attempt at closing a Gate was extremely violent in its own right. At minimum, if we can replicate something like that, it will disorder their forces. All while offering chances that it might damage their army, or disrupt their ability to form Gates in the location of those armies. At worst, we strike a blow. At best, we seriously damage their logistics train and force them to compensate by outright moving their bases and all the logistics tied to them.”

Izumi nodded, even as the rest of her mind came to a tentative conclusion.

“I...*think* it’s possible. Strictly speaking, our QE energy storage format is a grown crystal. Normally, we use complex computing to manage the drain, or even the siphon effect. But if we don’t care about stability? We’ll need to run some tests, but I *think* a shaped charge of the right type, triggered by a purely mechanical fuse, could create something like a QE bomb. I have *no idea* what that will do to the local area, though. We’ll need somewhere remote to test this. Doubly so since the local QE field will spike and we might accidentally be opening an unguided Rift of our own. If the situation was less dire, I’d be utterly against this. As it is...”

The General nodded curtly.

“You’ll do it. Assuming we can take precautions?”

Izumi nodded.

“I’m going to need Momo for this one. She’s the only one that can charge a QE battery fast enough in an otherwise largely dead zone. Can we afford to have both of us off the reaction teams?”

Nedzu scratched his chin, frowning and clearly running numbers.

“It’s not ideal, but we can shuffle enough other heavy hitters to the reaction squads to cover for a day or two. Three at the most. It’ll run some of the others a bit ragged if we try for longer, or if there’s a major push. But we can do it. If that will be enough time.”

Still thinking and calculating furiously, Izumi nodded.

“It will be enough to at least tell you if it’s possible, for sure. As well as hopefully find out just how bad an idea it is. You want us to start immediately?”

The General and Nedzu both nodded, though it was the General that spoke.

“Yes. There are a number of remote islands we can use for this. I’ll arrange air transport that will take you to one for within the hour. Can you get the gear you’ll need together that fast?”

Izumi considered that, frowned, and shook her head.

“Most of it? Yes. But not some of the explosives...add Bakugo Katsuki to the group. I know that will take another front line fighter out. But the pseudo-nitroglycerin he creates will let us skip several steps on the explosives side. Otherwise, I’ll need days just to synthesize a replacement.”

Nedzu spoke up immediately.

“Done. But that will cut the timeline to three days at absolute maximum. He’s been extremely effective against the Orges. Pulling him will hurt the Reaction Squads farther.”

Izumi’s mouth thinned, but she nodded curtly.

“If three days is what I have, then it’s what I have. And I should be able to release Bakugo before actual testing, anyway. I’ll get it done. Or at least get answers on feasibility and QE field reaction. At the very least.”

Nedzu nodded equally curtly back.

“Good. Make it two hours for the transport then, General. Bakugo is out in the field right now, so it will take a bit of effort to get him back.”

The General quickly agreed, a few more details about space needed on the transports were exchanged, and then Izumi was left to wake up her lover, and possibly steal a Jirou head pat for good luck...

Chapter 79: Risky Business

The island of Gajajima had been inhabited, once upon a time. It had, however, been abandoned even before Quirks became a thing. The 3km long and 2km wide chunk of rock had been hammered by a series of typhoons, clear back in the latter half of the 1950s, then had its local fishing industry collapse just for good measure. The advent of Quirks hadn’t really changed anything for the island. Oh, certainly it was exactly the sort of place that might attract some villain setting up shop. It would have been even more attractive to all sorts of smugglers, given its position in the East China Sea to the south of Japan’s main islands. The trouble, of course, was that the Coast Guard and JSDF were *aware* of that fact, and the island was checked on fairly frequently by patrols.

All of which meant that it was perfect for what they needed at the moment. The closest inhabited island was Yakushima, and even it was far enough off not to be at much of a risk from their experiments. Meanwhile, the centuries-old, abandoned ruins of a power plant, school, admin center, and small town all needed enough of an eyes-on-check that the JSDF had a solid map of

where they could set down and set up. There was, of course, no way in hell that Izumi was going to let anyone be *on* the island when they ultimately tested the crude abomination they were creating. But dropping a few crude military pre-fabs and pulling her equipment out of her digital inventory gave them a quick-and-dirty basecamp-cum-lab to work out of while building said abominations, at least.

With willing hands from the JSDF, plus Momo and Izumi, the whole crude lab was up in a few hours...and Izumi and 2B had spent virtually every second since the early-morning conversation modeling possible options. A disgruntled-but-willing Bakugo had been put to work the whole time, mostly as a way to make him sweat, with that sweat being collected for use in the shaped explosives Izumi needed to make. Few people realized that the reason Katsuki's sweat was compared to nitroglycerin had *everything* to do with how powerful it was. He didn't sweat actual *nitroglycerin*, of course. Doing so would have likely resulted in a lot of dead people around him, either from shock-explosives or from its nature as a contact vasodilator.

Instead, in a display of the usual bullshit-effectively-magic that Quirks were, the biochemical he actually did produce was both a little bit more potent than nitroglycerin, and *far* more stable. In fact, it was far more stable per milliliter than any conventional high explosive of similar yield. The only way to trigger it, aside from Katsuki's own Quirk, was rapid high-temperature shock. Something replicated in the gauntlets he used for more powerful, focused blasts, via a sparker that used magnesium to deliver that heat under controlled conditions.

All of which was exactly why Izumi had requested him. They needed something powerful enough to destroy one of their storage crystals, which were made *tough* in the first place. That something needed to be heavily infused with QE so that the explosive properties affected the QE field rather than just the crystal. Which, given its degree of bullshit, was very true of Bakugo's sweat. And lastly, it needed to be something that they could manually trigger, with nothing but mechanical or chemical means. All, of course, while being malleable enough to rig into a shaped explosive.

It would have taken weeks to produce something equivalent artificially. Possibly months. Thankfully, they had a natural source, even if said natural source was irked about being pulled from the front lines to be little more than manual labor. To his credit, Katsuki had kept the grumbling and gritted teeth to a minimum, fully understanding just how important this could be to the overall effort to save humanity. The fact that he knew both Momo and Izumi hated being pulled from helping themselves likely also helped with his temper. Despite that, there was impatience in his voice as his tolerance finally ran out.

“How much fucking longer do I need to be here?”

Izumi didn't bother to answer him, deep in hypercognition mode, working with 2B on modeling outcomes. Momo fielded the question easily in her place.

“That's going to depend on the numbers of trials we need. From what I can see, Izumi and 2B almost have the first model set done. We're working nearly blind on what the effects of this are going to be, so we're going to need to try incrementing damage and various models. The last thing we want to do is open a Rift *ourselves*. Particularly as we don't know how they work. We could as

easily open one into some sort of eldritch abomination instead of the invader's world, if we get unlucky enough."

Katsuki looked a little leery at that.

"Aren't you two basically the foremost experts on Quirk Energy Fields in the world? You really don't know what this will do?"

Momo shrugged and shook her head.

"No. To give you a frame of reference, we know for sure that high enough concentrations of QE will start a disease-based chain reaction in carbon-based lifeforms that *literally* turn said lifeforms into *salt*. There's some evidence that the disease is actually a form of extradimensional link to *something* that causes active mutation. Something only made more likely by the way we've seen so many monsters with mutations since the Gate opened. Humans managed to adapt to naturally produce the stuff, and our own QE isn't harmful to *ourselves*. But you can actually still cause some pretty horrible, and horribly lethal, cell mutations by infusing someone *else's* QE into another Quirked individual."

Bakugo was far from an idiot. He was, in fact, near the top of their class. Only outshone by ridiculous outliers like Momo and Izumi. As a result, his brow furrowed and he almost immediately made several of the same connections Izumi had on the first day of the invasion.

"That's why the monsters are mutated. The enemy, they aren't just harvesting QE for the Rifts and Gates. They use it to fuel their war machine in the first place. They figured out how to *guide* the mutations into creating specific effects in specific creatures?"

Momo nodded grimly.

"That's the current theory, at least. We also think their own world has a lower QE level, enough so that they have to collect a lot of it slowly, then focus it via various means in order to create effects our Quirks do naturally. In which case, access to far greater amounts of QE might be their entire purpose in invading. Every Quirked human is essentially a QE battery for them to harvest. While the planet itself has more QE as well, due to the ambient QE everyone sheds every day."

Bakugo's face turned grim and haunted, putting together pieces that clearly hadn't occurred to him yet. Understandably so. He'd been fighting on the front since the start, doing little more than fighting, eating, and sleeping, like so many of those with powerful combat Quirks. This was likely the first time he had enough information to consider the *why*.

"Fuck. If we're literally just *fuel* for them...fuck, that's messed up." He shook himself and waved at the handful of QE Storage Crystal present in the crude lab. "And you think *giving them more* QE will...no, wait. The mutation thing, right?"

Momo nodded, seeing he'd gotten to the same mental place as *one* of the options of what could happen, at least.

“One possible outcome is that the QE burst will cause runaway mutations in all of their monsters. Or instabilities in those parts of them already mutated. Combined with the fact it might actively disrupt the QE fields of their world enough to cause them issues opening more Rifts...”

Bakugo nodded, but there was a frown on his face too.

“Even if both things happen, these invaders clearly know as much or more about QE as you do. They’ll eventually absorb what you set off and use it. In the long run, this might just give them more fuel.”

Momo shrugged.

“It’s almost certain it will, actually. Unless the disruption is far worse than we believe. But what we need right now is *breathing room*. If we can even just temporarily slow them down so that we can get on top of the defense...”

Bakugo nodded again, taking a deep breath a moment later. The irritation was gone when he spoke again.

“Alright. Then I’d better get back to making myself sweat. If this works at all, we’ll need a lot more.”

With that comment, he left the lab area, and Momo went back to checking on Izumi’s progress...

There were a lot of eyes watching Izumi as she stood on the flat-top of the helicopter-carrier JMSDF *Koga* the third day after she’d been asked to whip up a miracle or two. The fact that the *Koga* had been diverted for this, pulled away from launching its helicopters in support of anti-monster duty against particularly remote Gates that formed on the smaller islands of Japan, said entirely too much about the danger of what they were doing here. Izumi had almost no idea what was going to happen, even as she sat in front of the console that controlled the remote detonation of their test rigs. The need to get speedy results had meant Izumi didn’t do a single model, test, then remodel. She’d made a full *dozen* different models of their potential weapon, had them all charged, and scattered them as far from each other as possible on the small island. Hopefully, a successful test wouldn’t set off the others. But they couldn’t be at all sure about that.

They honestly couldn’t be sure of much, actually. Izumi herself was only sure that she now fully understood what Oppenheimer and his team had felt like during the first tests of the Manhattan Project. Back when they had been seriously, *seriously* unsure what they were about to unleash. They hadn’t even known if what they were about to do might literally ignite the Earth’s atmosphere or crack the Earth’s crust. They’d only been *somewhat* sure that wouldn’t happen. Just as Izumi was currently only *somewhat* sure that she wasn’t about to cause a repeat of the Shinjuku Event from 2B’s original dimension.

She didn’t *think* the MASO energy about to be released here was nearly large enough to cause that sort of incident. But she couldn’t be truly positive she wasn’t about to cause a chain reaction of some sort. Worse, YoRHa had only possessed *extremely* fragmentary information on the

two entities that caused that event. The origins of the Giant and the Dragon were utterly unknown, but presumed to be extra-dimensional. Meaning Izumi *also* didn't know if she was opening a Rift into some place filled with more monsters like those. Perhaps worst of all, she couldn't even *share* that fear properly. There were, after all, exactly five people alive that knew 2B's entire story. Herself, 2B, Momo, her mother, and 2B's therapist. That was it. The total extent of those aware of 2B's true history, and the only ones she could possibly have confided her full fears in. She'd done so with 2B and Momo, of course. But that made for only three people in the world that knew how dangerous this might actually be.

Well, at least she'd pointed out the idea of Lovecraftian Horrors being possible, and the military were sufficiently *paranoid* about 'alien bullshit' right now that that they'd sent the carrier. A carrier fully loaded with attack helicopters that were ready to reduce the entire island to an afterthought if this went wrong enough.

It would have to be enough.

With one last bracing breath, Izumi raised her voice.

“Test 1, commencing. In 5, 4, 3, 2, 1...detonation!”

There was a flash of violence from the island...but then nothing else. All of those on deck tensed, waiting, waiting, and waiting more...until Momo finally spoke up from where she was monitoring.

“Negative Effect! Crystal is intact!”

There was a sigh, a releasing of tension, but Izumi was grimly determined and moved on.

“Test 2, commencing. In 5, 4, 3, 2, 1...detonation!”

Another flash of fire and flame, this time accompanied by a spike from the QE monitors. A long, slow wait of five minutes, then Momo spoke again.

“Negative Effect! Crystal cracked and seeped QE, but not fast enough. Activating siphons to counter the QE rise.”

There was a much longer wait, almost half an hour this time, during which everyone first relaxed, then re-tensed as the QE levels returned to the baseline they'd established for the tests. A deliberately somewhat low baseline, on the assumption that the invader's world had a lower ambient average QE level. Finally, Izumi triggered the warning lights again, waiting for the signal that the attack crews in the choppers were once more ready, and proceeded.

“Test 3, commencing. In 5, 4, 3, 2, 1...detonation!”

This time, there was an *immediate* difference from the previous destinations. There was only a brief flash of light before that light seemed to *reverse in on itself*, like some greater power had reached into the universe and pressed 'rewind' on light itself. Halfway through that reversal, the light went *chaotic*, looking like someone had smashed ten thousand kaleidoscopes in the middle of a rave. The QE monitors went, for lack of a better descriptor, *psycho*. They wobbled and spiked erratically...then *exploded into visible sound*.

Not sound *waves*. *Visible sound*. For just a moment, as the hypersensitive instruments overloaded with chaotic QE, everyone looking at them suddenly had a haunting understanding of what the **sound** of *chaos* **looked like**. Screams and retching was the reaction of many, with a few even collapsing into seizures as their mind failed to process. And then it was gone and there was panic on the deck as everyone tried to help those who had collapsed...and tried to figure out *what in all that was holy and a few things that weren't, that had been...*

Chapter 80: Remember Me

A day later, they were honestly no closer to answering exactly what the 'QE Disruption Bomb' had done. Whatever it was had *royally fucked* the local QE fields in a way that was gibberish even to Izumi. Though the effect had been localized enough that the general flow of QE from the equivalent of global QE currents had eroded and disruption over the course of several hours. Extremely tentative viewing of the island by remote drones had revealed that the landscape for several hundred meters around the blast site was...fucked. Warped, twisted, and fused. Grass was bonded to concrete but still growing, bits of the QE storage crystal were fused with a decayed and pitted stop sign that looked like it had briefly sprung to life, only to die in some sort of hellish agony.

The entirety of Gajajima Island had been declared hazardous and a 'nothing leaves' zone. Even the drones had been left there, rather than risking them coming back with some sort of taint. The entire crew of the ship, and everyone else present, was also effectively quarantined for the next several days at least...even if Izumi had also been immediately ordered to make a half dozen more of the disruptors. Those left the ship only in containment spheres that *didn't* originate on the ship. Only to be pulled out right before being primed and thrown through their target Gates, *as those Gates were being collapsed*.

Honestly, using them at all with no farther chance to study was insanity. Only the continuing loss of control of Gates worldwide and the armies of monsters that now controlled a third of Africa made the Powers that Be desperate enough to try. And Japan had the dubious honor of trying the damn things on their Gates. Both because they had come up with them, and because they honestly had better control of their Gate situation than almost anyone else at this point. Even the Americans couldn't claim theirs were under control to the same extent, simply by virtue of the sheer size of the United States. Gates opening in a random wheatfield in Kansas might open more slowly than those in New York...but getting people in place to *close* such Gates was a logistical nightmare.

So, hurrah. Japan got to try the insanely risky plan first. Joy. Worse, Izumi was quarantined with everyone else, so she couldn't even participate. Instead, all she could do was watch the operation via video link as several teams closed in on Lesser Gates that had been targeted for the operation. Even as she did so, something that no one had explained to her niggled at the back of her mind. Finally, she got up the nerve to just ask.

"Nedzu? How are we going to even know if this works?"

The Dean, who had gone so far as to shunt aside all other communications to focus on this operation, let his eyes drift to her screen for only a moment.

“I wondered when you would ask. Are you certain you really wish to know the answer?”

Izumi bit her lip, Momo’s arm around her shoulders tensing. This was why she hadn’t let the question slip before. She was afraid she knew already. Closing her eyes and bracing herself, she nodded at the Dean.

“You sent scouts through, didn’t you?”

The chimera’s smile was grim, and he didn’t try to deny it at all.

“Yes. The two Recon teams that supposedly failed weren’t failures at all. They were designed only to *appear* that way, in order to insert operatives. Only one of them has been successful, to our knowledge. You know him, actually, in passing.”

Izumi blinked, startled by that. She both wanted to ask...and was terrified of doing so.

“His name is Azusahawa Sakuta. You helped him with his Quirk, just a few months ago now. Do you remember him?”

She did. Of course she did. Her memory was the next best thing to infallible, after all. Something she half-regretted now.

“The man whose Quirk made people forget him.”

The Dean nodded, then explained farther.

“You sent the government into a bit of a paranoid fit, you know. Azusahawa took your advice and visited Nishimura & Croft. They managed to help him learn to intentionally control his Quirk fully. Which was great for him...but also made him into a perfect assassin who was already registered to be observed by the government. Thankfully, he’s a good man, and never complained once about the additional watch lists he ended up on. He also actively *volunteered* for the assignment, once it was explained to him.”

Izumi closed her eyes. She was happy that he’d made progress. But had very mixed feelings that her advice had caused him to be in danger now. Momo squeezed her shoulder and asked a question to buy Izumi a moment to try sorting out her feelings.

“How is he sending messages back? I would think that would be impossible?”

Nedzu’s grin was a bit more cheerful this time.

“Oh, that was delightfully simple! He can make other things be forgotten about for short periods now. So he’s been making a set of capsules with a timed mechanical flare be ‘forgotten’ and sneaking them onto monsters headed through gates! It’s quite random, I’m afraid. But we’ve successfully collected four of nine messages he’s sent. Each one complete with canisters of very old fashion, pre-quirk, *film*. We had to reach out to some hobbyists for the expertise, but they created a camera for him that is purely mechanical, with film that is purely chemical. Developing them is a bit finicky and the results are far inferior to the digital imagery of today. But we’ve gotten quite a few additional bits of information from analyzing the results!”

The chimera stroked a couple of keys, and a data file was sent to them.

“You can see for yourself! We didn’t want to jostle your elbow while you were working. But they give us more hope that this may accomplish something. We managed, earlier today, to get a telepathic message to him as well. He’ll be set up where we think the Gates will most likely lead, far enough to be outside the radius of effect...we hope. Even if he *does* see what happens, it will likely be some time before he can locate *another* Gate and try to slip himself or a message through. But there’s at least a chance he’ll succeed! And, of course, we can observe the behavior of the monsters at existing Gates, mark the flow of how many Gates open, and so on.”

Izumi sighed and nodded. It was a horrible burden to put on a civilian who’d already been screwed by his own Quirk in life. But...at least he *would* be remembered now. As a Hero in the more traditional sense of the word, if this worked. A man whose own Quirk had forced his parents to forget who he was, perhaps forever remembered in the history books. Fitting, she supposed. Though she hoped he lived to see it, rather than it only being a posthumous sort of victory for him. Either way, she had something else to focus on at the moment.

“Looks like they’re starting.”

Nedzu nodded.

“So it does. Let us hope for luck. Good for us, and bad for our enemies.”

There was a bloodthirsty tone in Nedzu’s voice that would normally have bothered her. But given the things she’d seen since this invasion started? This time she shared in his bloodthirst...

Katuski was glad the Wonder Duo hadn’t needed him to stick around for the testing. He could admit that what they’d pulled him away from the fighting for was way more important than simply splattering a few more Ogres. But that didn’t mean he’d liked playing chemistry set replacement instead of punching shit. Combat was what he was born for, and if it hadn’t been for the death toll, this invasion would have been his paradise. As it was, he was guiltily aware that he was one of the few that were going to enjoy the way the world had changed. He was smart enough to know there was no way they could put this all back in the bottle. It was going to take *years*, at minimum, to beat back the invaders. And, even then, the world wouldn’t be the same safe place it had been before.

It was fucking horrible.

He knew that.

Hell, part of him hated it because there *were* people he cared for, like his parents, that weren’t fighters.

He was also completely aware, however, that it was a change to the world that *he* was going to thrive on. As proven by the fact he’d rapidly become the anchor for a Reaction Team. Just like each of the Wonder Duo had. He wasn’t in charge of his squad the way they were. But that was honestly fine with him. It meant that he got to focus on the fighting, instead of having to order all the lesser fighters around. Even better, he got aimed and let go at the toughest fights, since they knew he had the firepower and skills to handle it.

This changed world was almost a pure meritocracy and it showed in assignments like this, which had a lot of the under generation of Heroes present, with the more powerful Quirks they'd been born to. That might not be true everywhere. But Nedzu was a pragmatic, ruthless bastard when pushed to the wall. He'd used his new authority to hammer out teams based on power and talent, rather than any previous ranking. Even some non-heroes were being quietly folded into the Hero forces. He'd seen Icy-Hot working containment down in Osaka, despite the fact that he'd been removed from Heroics at UA and, so far as Katsuki knew, hadn't been able to reenroll elsewhere. A sign of desperation and change, perhaps. But who knows? Maybe a slap of reality like this had gotten the fool's head on straight.

"Nitro. Start the party."

Katsuki smirked...and launched himself off the building he'd been watching their target portal from. Accelerating with controlled explosions, he barrel-rolled to send a spiral of pre-stored sweat out in a fan ahead of him and detonated it all just as the monsters below saw him coming.

"METEOR CRASH!"

He wasn't always the type to shout out his attacks. But *this* one was special. Not only was it a hell of an epic opener, forming a flaming ball of concussive force that impacted hard enough to cause a *visible* shockwave distortion as he landed in a three-point hero pose. But that pose wasn't just for show in his case, as the carefully-shaped explosion had left him in the center of a patch of monsters that had been driven off their feet. This opener was actually the start of a *chain* he'd perfected over the last week, and he targeted the most powerful enemy present, accelerating with explosions from the support gear in his boots. The Ogre had been staggered by the Meteor Crash opener and failed to block his gauntlet as it wove past its guard and planted over the monster's heart. Katsuki's smirk was vicious as he triggered the pre-loaded gauntlet and watched the monster fall.

Even as he launched himself at the next set of targets, he heard more barked orders coming over the comms. There wasn't just one Reaction Team here, but *three*. They'd weakened other areas, enough so that there would likely be a price to pay in losing control of some Gates temporarily. But everyone had agreed that they needed enough power to a point at the locations they were trying this stunt to ensure Midoriya's fucking-scary MWDs got through the Gates only *as* those Gates were being closed by force. No one wanted to find out what happened if the energy release backsplashed through an open Gate. Which meant they needed to get enough control here to get the timing *right*.

Something that, given the number of heavies they'd brought in, took less than ten minutes to achieve. As they took control of the Lesser Gate, Katsuki joined others with pure mechanical or biological armaments in chucking attacks through the Gate from range, keeping the other side clear as Robo-boy raced forward and chucked the Distortion Bomb through the Gate. Everyone leapt backward, scrambling away, even as a dozen heavy emitters poured Quirk Fire into the Gate, causing it to collapse with a violent event horizon that *erased* everything within fifty meters. Everyone had gotten clear...but they all waited with bated breath to see if *something* would happen.

A few seconds later, something did, as the fabric of reality tore like a Rift was opening, only this one was a jagged kaleidoscope of unreality that defied any attempt to describe it. Everyone flinched away, but the dozen MK II Siphons that had been brought in activated an instant later and the wild Rift began to calm, vanishing entirely in just a few minutes. Breathing sighs of relief, everyone was still left to wonder.

Had it worked? What had happened on the enemy side of the Gate? Was this worth all the risk they'd just taken? With no answers immediately forthcoming, their leaders started snapping orders. They needed to get these teams back in the regular rotation and close any Gates that had gotten a foothold while they were busy...

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