**Deadline 12.7**

“Don’t die, don’t die, don’t die,” someone said, over and over again.

Everything hurt, though it was a distant pain, like stubbing your toe in a dream. I got the sensation of movement coming in waves, as the air rushed past me, or as I rushed past the air. I knew I was hurt, but weren’t you supposed to not feel pain if you were hurt enough.

*Peak Condition.*

Right, right, that’d keep me aware. Hard to be in Peak Condition if you didn’t have functioning nerves. The chanting continued, sounding scared, tired, angry, and whole bunch of other things. We started to slow, and I could feel a lot of people below me, messing with my ability to Warp Space, though it was all still tied up keeping the working Vista and I’d made going.

I felt a hole in my powers, and a pretty big one at that. No, not a hole, but an opening, ready and waiting to be filled. I tried to think of a suitable sex joke, but it was like trying to swim through tapioca. Not that I ever had, but it felt like what I thought it’d feel like. *Stay on topic, stay on topic,* I thought, a la Star Wars, smiling to myself, though my mouth hurt when tried to smile to everyone else. I had a Major slot open, and most of a Minor one as well. What should I use it on? I tried that healing power the monochrome guy had, but it wouldn’t take, which wasn’t very nice of it.

We landed with a painful jolt, and I twitched. Well, my Metal Projection twitched. Same thing. *“Fuck!*” the voice, which had gone quiet, swore, before picking up its litany of “Don’t die,” once again. I wondered what was going on, there were a lot of people around me, moving the air in hundreds of different ways. I felt the breath of someone nearby still and gave it a little prod, and it started up again. Air movements were good, but it was hard to make out any detail. I was more than a little annoyed at this when I remembered I had eyes.

Opening them, I quickly closed them right up as I looked right into blinding fluorescents. I was being moved, and when I tried again, I had a moment to adjust before another fluorescent bulb rolled across my vision. I’d forgotten how dark it was, fighting out there, until I was suddenly somewhere that you didn’t need darkvision to see clearly in. The person carrying me solidified, and I barely recognized Herb. His mask was beat to hell, and the naked panic on whose face just looked completely out of place.

He stopped someone, demanding, “Where’s Panacea?” to someone out of my line of sight.

The person took a few seconds to reply, a woman’s voice telling him, “That one’s a lost cause.”

Fury blazed across my friends features as he yelled, “*NO HE ISN’T! WHERE’S PANACEA!*”

The woman snarled back, “Busy with people that can be saved! Either go fight or go away! I’m going to help people who *can* be helped!”

I tried to tell Herb to ask Zilla as he took an angry step forward, ready to respond, but for some reason I couldn’t really get the breath to, what little I had just causing hot liquid to dribble out my mouth. Using Aerokinesis I formed the words “Ask Zilla” in the air.

Herb’s head snapped over to what I’d written, his eyes glimmering with Power Sight for a moment before he nodded quickly, saying, “Zilla? *Zilla! Fuck!* Eecee, Zilla, where’s Panacea!?” he got a response as he started walking quickly, almost jogging, as we went down hallway after hallway.

Someone stepped forward and tried to say, “Stop! You can’t go-guh!” as something happened to him and the person next to him, causing them both to collapse.

After a few more steps, Herb whispered, “Dude, open up your suit, I need to touch you.” I opened up my costume where he was holding me, only to hear something wet hit the ground and him go “*Fuck!”* It felt cold, and kinda weird, and kinda good, though the fact that he wasn’t making any of the *dozens* of jokes he could’ve worried me a little.

We went through a couple set of doors, and someone tried to say, “what are you doin-” only to be cut off by twin cries of “Lee!”

I was put down on something as someone left the room, Herb keeping his hand on my back as two other shapes entered my view, one wearing a half mask while the other just wore a hood. It took a bit to realize they were Taylor and Amy, the second of which was moving her hands along my chest. I wondered what she was doing until Herb said, “Open up, she needs to touch you.”

That made a lot of sense, so I did so, causing her to stumble forward slightly. I heard another weirdly wet sound as she held back a panicked, distressed yell, not really saying anything as Taylor let out a strangled scream. “How?” Amy demanded, sounding scared, poking at something in me.

Herb said, “Leviathan,” but Amy shook her head, pausing as Taylor said “Hookwolf.” I wasn’t really sure what either of them meant, as it was Herb that’d brought me here, but I felt metal shards pushed into contact with my Metal Projection, which re-claimed them, bringing them back into the whole. Other parts of me moved a little, but I didn’t feel much of a difference, my thoughts muddled with bright clouds of pain.

“It’s too much, it’s just too much,” Amy said to herself after a moment, looking pale and tired and lost. She brought up a hand to push the hair out of her eyes, leaving long red streaks across her face, and I wondered who she’d been working on that was so hurt it’d left her hands that bloody. I couldn’t help her heal me directly, but maybe I could do what I’d done with Vista? I could See her power easily enough, and the power that I’d drained from myself for that last hit against Leviathan was already back, so I tried to give her more power to work with.

Nothing happened.

That was. . . *odd.* It’d worked for Vista, so why didn’t it work for Panacea? Even if it was a distance problem, with Biokinesis being touch-ranged it should still work as she was touching me. It should work, so why *wasn’t* it?

*Biokinesis.*

Right, I didn’t actually *have* Biokinesis, like I’d had Space Warping. Well, that was an easy enough problem to fix. Slotting it in, I became hyper-aware of what I was touching, and what I could use my power on. Still had no idea what I was doing, but I knew I could do it, at least. Herb and Amy gave simultaneous sighs as I helped them Get Better. They were helping me, so it was only nice to give them a pick me up in return, like a bio-kinetic reach around. *Hey! That’s a sex joke!* I thought, proud of myself.

. . . What was I doing?

Oh yeah, I was trying to make Amy’s power work better, like I had with Vista. I tried to do so with Herb as well, but it didn’t work, probably because he didn’t have Biokinesis. I’d need his copying ability to enhance his copying ability, and I pondered why it worked that way, the terms *Impetus* and *Expression*, drifting through my thoughts for some reason.

Well, if I couldn’t up Herb’s ability, I could *definitely* up Amy’s ability. Probably. Possibly. Maybe. I wouldn’t know if I didn’t try, and while it seemed really nice to drift there, I had things to do. I wasn’t sure what they were, just a niggling sense that I didn’t have time to waste.

Focusing on Amy, as much as I was able, I poured my power into hers, the now familiar draining sensation was annoying, but I was doing this to help her. I didn’t remember how this would help her, only that it would.

Amy gasped as her eyes caught fire, beautiful Bone White and Blood Red Flames burning with power as her Biokinesis was pushed further and further, to greater and greater heights. I could practically feel my body shifting and realigning as Taylor gasped. “Are you okay?” the bug controller asked, unsure.

I tried to tell he it was fine, I’d done this before, but it came out as a wet gurgle and Amy snapped, “Don’t do that!”

Taylor had looked scared when I tried to talk, but Amy being Amy seemed to help. On the other side Herb murmured, “How the fuck. . .?” to himself, but that was it.

My favorite healer kept working on me, the blood on her face condensing into a Crimson beetle that jumped down onto my chest, though I didn’t feel it land. “Bugs!” she called, and a stream of insects came in through a vent, dropping onto me. Less than a minute later, Amy waved them off, and they retreated back through the vent. She seemed like she was done, and I was feeling a little worried for some reason, so I stopped feeding her power, the fire in her eyes fading, leaving her normal, expressive green orbs as they were before, though there might’ve been a little red that hadn’t been there before.

She looked over me, from head to toe, and frowned, before hitting me in the chest as she command me to “Breathe, dumbass!”

I gasped, and, while mean, she wasn’t exactly *wrong.* As I took in sweet, cold gulps of air, the fog that blanketed my mind slowly lifted. Noticing that Herb had taken his hand away, I closed up the back of my costume and sat up, stretching out. Looking around I saw that Taylor and Herb were covered in blood, Panacea looking a bit dirty but otherwise fine. Flicking a hand out, I sent bits of my suit out and cleaned all three off in seconds as I let out a deep sigh.

“Okay, that sucked. Gonna need a new strategy next time,” I said, more to myself then them, prompting simultaneous responses from all three.

“*What?*” Taylor asked.

“Not alone you’re not!” stated Herb.

“Oh *hell* no!” Amy yelled, “*Your insides were mush!*”

I started to reply to Herb, but Amelia’s statement took me back. “Really?”

*“Yes!”* she yelled back, and Herb nodded.

That was. . . bad, and I could freak out about it *after* the fight was over. “Break, you need to go back ASAP. We don’t know how long you need to be out of it before your power thinks the fight is ‘over’ and you’re back to zero.”

“I-I’m not leaving you alone!” he shot back, but his objection lacked conviction.

I opened the eyes of my costume and Saw him, looking for that aspect of his borrowed power. Finding it, I shook my head, “You’ve got to keep going. I’m going to take a few minutes, at least, and it’ll lapse if you’re not doing *something.* Go and make sure Kayden’s okay.”

He pointed at me aggressively, but his words died before they crossed his lips, knowing I was right. “Don’t-Just don’t do that to me again!” he more pleaded than commanded.

“I’ll do my best, next one I get is intangibility,” I promised him. It was obvious to him that that wasn’t good enough, but he turned and left, opening the door and dodging as the sound of gunfire came from down the hall. “I’m headin’ out,” he told the person. “Shoot me again and I’ll shove it up your ass sideways!”

I covered my eyes with my costume as he turned into a velociraptor and took off so fast he blurred, feeling him sprint out the building with Aerokinesis. There was the pounding of feet as PRT agents ran inside, pointing their guns at me. “Step away from Panacea!” one of them yelled.

Taylor and I exchanged confused glances as Amy asked “What?”

“Step away from Panacea!” was yelled at us again, the person in the back giving the commands not the talkative type.

“She’s on my team, and *not* a Ward,” I pointed out, “Back the fuck off.”

One of the idiots actually took the shot, which I deflected between us easily.

“Fuck off,” I told them, using Aerokinesis to shove them backwards and out the door, slamming it, and covering it with a solid layer of air. “Right, that was. . . weird.” I looked over and saw someone else lying on another bed in the room, still breathing but unconscious. “Oh, shit, um, should you help him?”

“What?” Amy asked, following my gaze. “Fuck!” She leapt over to him, putting a hand on his chest as her power flared to life.

I followed her over, standing behind and reaching past her to lay a hand on him, healing him as well. I turned over the reins of my Biokinesis to Panacea as I said, “Right, so, I was a dumbass and tried to match Levi power for power, and that was. . . *dumb.* I blame Hollywood.” Amy gave a derisive snort as she worked, the injured man’s flesh re-arranging itself before my eyes.

“Hollywood?” Taylor asked, still looking a bit shell shocked.

I motioned her over as the PRT tried to batter the door down, not even getting through the Air Shield. Compared to Levi’s attacks they were absolutely pitiful. Putting a hand on her uncovered face, I gave her the ‘get better’ treatment, her paleness fading as she calmed down. “Yeah, power vs power, mano-a-monstero, air versus water. He was standing there, not engaging me physically, and I’d lose if he did so I did the same. It didn’t work, though I did get him at the end. But I’ve got more than just the one power, and I need to remember to *use* them.”

Amelia stood back from her patient, bumping against my chest, and turned around to glare up at me. She was only a few inches away as she informed me, “You shouldn’t go back at all!”

I got the weirdest urge to hug her but shrugged instead. Touched by her concern, I smiled down at her, “I’m a hero, fighting monsters is kinda what I do.”

She glared at me, before she sagged, the fight going out of her, her head dropping down. She leaned forward, pressing her cheek against my chest, “Just don’t die, okay. I’m worried enough about Vics, and she’s not trying to fight an *Endbringer.*”

“I’ll go see if I can help search and rescue,” I promised her. “I’m pretty sure I’m no longer Endbringer Bait, but if he’s there I’ll try to hold him off long enough others can get to safety, then I’ll pull back.”

Amelia didn’t say anything, just nodded, though we both jumped when a voice yelled ‘”Panacea, are you unharmed!”

She pulled back and we both turned to look at the door. Taylor said, “There’s heroes outside, a lot of them.”

“Yes?” Amy replied confused. “Why?”

“What are your demands?” the voice demanded.

“Demands. . .” I echoed, finally understanding. Closing up the chest of my costume, I undid the air shields, making several between us and the door, just in case. “I’m not holding her hostage, dumbass. She’s on my team and was just patching me up.” I opened the doors remotely, and the parahumans charged in. One guy launched a bolt of energy at me, which hit the first shield and dissipated.

He prepped another and was promptly swarmed by insects, the others stopping, looking around. “He’s healed, by the way,” I offered, jerking a thumb backwards.

The lead cape, a woman in white and golden armor, looked around, then back at the PRT. “We were told you’d knocked out the guards and kidnapped Panacea,” she told me.

“What?” she asked. “Why would he do that? I’m on his team. He’d have priority, just like New Wave would.”

“Wait, really?” I asked. “’Cause Break was told to leave me to die, then knocked out the guards when they tried to stop him. I think. I was kinda out of it.” Amelia looked *furious,* so I quickly continued, turning back to the lead cape, “Then the PRT goons came in, guns pointed at me, and tried to kidnap her. One of the idiots tried to shoot me when I asked what was going on, but his aim sucked. I kicked them out, since they were shooting innocent people in a *hospital.*”

One of the parahuman’s armbands chimed, *“Geyser deceased, CB-4. Cruise Control deceased, CB-4.Bastion deceased, CB-4. Garbage Man deceased, CB-4. Fearles-”* she clicked it, shutting it off. I hadn’t noticed it until then, but I’d lost my own armband, though given what I was planning, that was probably for the best.

“We don’t have time for this,” the woman said. “Panacea, are you still healing people?”

“I’m not sure I want to now-” she started to say, but caught my look. “Fine. Yes.”

“And you weren’t being held hostage?” the woman pressed.

“No!” the girl beside me shot back. “I wasn’t!”

“Then let’s go back to fighting the Endbringer instead of each other,” the hero in charge concluded, walking out, the other heroes following.

I looked at Taylor and Amy, “Put your helmets on, don’t know when some idiot’s gonna start shooting.” Lady Bug, pulled the bottom half of her mask from her belt and re-attatched it, grabbing the box I’d built for her while Amy muttered, “Hypocrite” under her breath and grabbed her own helmet, which had been sitting on a nearby table.

We walked after heroes, only for the PRT troopers to point their guns at me as soon as we left the room, the leader announcing, “You’re under arrest for th-”

“For god’s sake, shut up!” the woman we’d been speaking to snapped, halfway down the hall. “You, whatever your name is, you’re going out to fight?” she asked me. I nodded. “Good, go.”

I started to fly away when one of the PRT officers grabbed Panacea’s arm. “You need to come with-” was as far as he got before Taylor reached over, quick as a snake, and unlatched the troopers visor. Panacea reached up at the same time and flipped it up, tapping the man’s face, and he dropped to the ground bonelessly. “Fuck you,” she spat, looking at the other troopers who looked suddenly unsure. “He’s taken a nap. Let me go, or you will be too.”

As one of them tried to point there gun towards Taylor, only to find it wouldn’t move, as I was holding it in place with solid air. “For fucks sake!” the woman yelled, stomping over to Taylor and Amelia. “Panacea, come with us and we’ll make sure you find someone who *isn’t* an idiot!”

I flew off, finding an exit and taking off into the storm. “Eecee, Panacea, Lady Bug, don’t respond but if things get bad, just call for help.”

“What’s wrong?” Vicky asked a few seconds later.

“Got hurt, Herb took me to get help, they told him to fuck off, guards told him to fuck off, he came in anyways, I got patched up, PRT tried to shoot me for ‘kidnapping’ Panacea, heroes got called in, they got things sorted, PRT tried to arrest me and take Panacea anyways, Amy put that asshole to sleep and went off with the heroes,” I rattled off.

“Uh. . . okay,” Vicky replied, obviously unsure.

“Sitrep people. Other than Lady Bug, and Panacea, how is everyone?” I asked instead. The storm was omnipresent, lightning striking all around as well as the flash of powers going off across the city. Looking inwards, another Minor slot had opened. Part of me wanted to slot in Stellar Creation. Without Stellar Negation it’d be dangerous to use around others, but while my Air lost to Leviathan’s Water, throwing some Plasma into the mix should help even the scales. I hadn’t practiced with it nearly as much as I had Air, given its distinctive appearance, but if I wasn’t pulling it out until I was alone anyways, it wouldn’t matter.

Resolving to get that *next*, I slotted Shadowform. Nothing seemed any different after I did so. No new senses awakened, which I was glad for, as I was still trying to get a handle on the ones I had, nor did anything else seem to happen.

“With Legend, lost sight of Leviathan a while ago. He can dig underground,” Purity reported, and I took a minute to process that. It made sense; drills were construct shaping 101. Well, they were if you watched Gurren Lagann, so maybe that wouldn’t be most obvious conclusion. “I’m running low though.”

I wondered if a star created with Stellar Creation would recharge Lightform’s reserves. They gave off radiation like the stun gave on earth, despite that making *no* sense, so maybe that same radiation would help her fill back up when she couldn’t access the sun. . . *Or she could just go up,* I thought. Lightform did odd things to the body, and a lessened need for oxygen might be one of them.

“Break off from Legend and head up through the storm,” I commanded her. “Refill your tanks, but if you get lightheaded drop back down. I might have a backup plan, but let’s see if that works. Who else?”

“Æonic, Mick, Curtis, Tyrone, and Boojack are all currently unreachable,” Zilla chimed in.

There was a moment of silence over the line before I sighed and started to fly towards the city, knowing I’d have to go over them in turn. “Raida, you good?”

“Uh, yeah. Savin’ people. Kinda scary, but Boo’s watchin’ out for me,” the girl replied after a moment.

“Gallant, Vista?” I prodded.

“Fine!” the pre-teen space warper replied. “It’s really hard keeping the wave back! I can’t do anything else!”

“No problems here,” Gallant added in.

“Vista, don’t use your power other than keeping that up. Leviathan’s looking for who did that and tried to kill a cape with a similar power,” I told her, walking the line between truth and lies.

“That why you were hurt?” Missy asked, and I wondered exactly what she meant by that.

“No, I tried to 1v1 Levi,” I replied. “I didn’t win, but I didn’t lose either. Theo, how’s things at the base?”

“Pumps are working, no flooding,” he reported. “Some weird stuff from the computers, but I don’t know what it is.”

“Weird *how?*” I asked, suddenly reminded of the time I worked IT and the endless stream of vague statements from clients.

There were the sounds of typing for a few seconds before he said, “Um, some sensors are going off, but I can’t find out where they are. It’s not in the base, but that’s it.”

Trying to remember the documentation for the base itself, which was several times larger than the first monster document I’d gotten from Numberman, I had no idea what it could be. I’d barely put a dent in it, and had no idea where to start. Breaking me out of my thoughts, there was a sound that seemed to cut across the rain, the thunder, the lightning, *everything.*

If I had to put it into words, I’d say it was a loud, rhythmic static that chirped, overriding everything else. Looking in its direction, a sphere of perfect blackness had enveloped a small part of downtown, maybe only a city block. Air streamed into it, the rains spiraling in its direction as well, before it disappeared, leaving nothing behind.

The rain slackened off quickly, dropping to a light drizzle as the clouds started to thin, the day getting brighter. *Did. . . did they do it?* I wondered, looking around. This wasn’t the plan, and I wasn’t sure if the others had fought Levi enough to satisfy their ‘Endbringer Target’ Flaw, but id they’d somehow managed to kill him. . . this changed things.

*Would this spawn Khonsu? If it did, my next power needed to be Time Immunity, and I’d have to see how his presence interacted with my possibly being an EB target,* I thought. Chuck could probably no-sell his power, but Herb might have some trouble. That was assuming that Khonsu’s appearance was set in stone. It showed up after Behemoth was beaten down with a time-based attack. Would the next one be. . . whatever that was, related?

The rain stopped entirely, but the clouds thickened, darkening the day once more. With Levi gone, *if* he was gone, he was no longer controlling the clouds, so they stopped raining, the aftermath of his control making it heavily overcast. Looking out over the city, trying to figure out what to do next, I caught sight of a flash of Liquid, extending upwards and downwards, controlling every piece of water in the city.

“Barrage from above and below!” I called, wrapping myself in spheres of solid air and shifting to Shadowform, not really sure what I’d seen, but hoping I was wrong.

I wasn’t.

They weren’t compressed spears this time, but the collected raindrops came shooting down like a million bullets, a million more coming up from the flooded streets. Each droplet, accelerated to hyper-velocity, flew past the all the others, not a single one in my range colliding with another.

My shields expended themselves, doing their jobs and keeping me safe, but others weren’t as lucky. Several fliers I could see in the distance dropped down, likely dead, and in the distance something large, probably a Dragon craft, exploded. Unfortanately, Levi wasn’t done. The bullet-rain from below stopped and came down in a second solid sheet, moving even faster, blasting through the remains of my air shields and through my insubstantial form.

The rain started again, faster than rain should be. While it would be hard enough to sting unprotected skin, it wasn’t anywhere near lethal speeds. I was under no delusions that it couldn’t do that again at a moment’s notice, though. “Shit, how’s everyone? I’m fine.”

“We’re good,” Taylor said, “but a lot of people died, what happened?”

“Rain with the force of bullets,” I told her, “Vicky?”

“We’re good!” she affirmed, echoing Taylor. “Glad this thing has a roof. It’s kinda beat up, but it didn’t hurt us.”

Purity added, “Legend and I were above the clouds. Break’s with us.”

“Raida?” I asked, but got no response. “Shit, Zilla, I need directions on Raida. Eeem.”

She gave me the directions and I sped off. “Æonic?”

“Still unavailable,” the VI told me.

Hopefully that meant he was still in his Time Bubble, so he’d missed that. I dropped down, towards Rune’s location, shifting my costume configuration. Darkening everything and switching to a full helm, I opened tiny slits across my costume, through which metallic tendrils streamed out as Metal Projection came to the fore. Feeling myself hit that limit to the power, the free-floating tendrils automatically changed form into a shifting steel giant, still wreathed in Shadow.

Unlike before, it didn’t feel awkward to move, only like I was suddenly huge, with my eyes in my chest instead of my head. That being said, I was still aware of my ‘real’ body, I could just feel the metal one just as well. While the perspective was odd, with Aerokinesis I didn’t my eyes to see what was directly around me, which synced up perfectly with my new form as I approached ‘Raida’s’ location, or at least where her commpiece was sending a signal from. The buildings here were wrecked, rubble covering half the street, the other half flooded. I could sense people under the masonry, so many that it pressed, ever so slightly, against my Space Warping.

I could dig them out, but I had *no* idea how to shift the rubble without possibly crushing those I was trying to save. I’d played around with the metal tendrils during the last week, and they counted as ‘me’ for *some* short-range powers, like Lightform, but not for others, like Biokinesis, with no seeming rhyme or reason. I hadn’t tested them with Shadowform, but there was no time like the present.

I couldn’t see through my projected metal, but I could somewhat feet with them. This wouldn’t be up to my standards of use, but it standards took a back seat to trying to make things work a while ago. Extending tendrils, I dug through the masonry, trying to home in on the nearest person I could ‘sense’, though it was like trying to see a shadow in a darkened room. The feelings I got as my tendril dug through the rubble came through more clearly than they had before, which gave me hope that I could pull this off *without* accidentally impaling anyone.

It wasn’t exact, but I felt the difference between rock and air and carefully moved the end of the metal tendril around, blunting the tip until I felt something with a little give. Spreading the metal out in smaller and smaller branches, I wrapped around what felt like a knee, or maybe a really thick elbow.

Dropping the tendril, and what it carried, to Shadowform, my hold stayed strong and I resisted the urge to cheer. Part of the rubble shifted, dropping down, and I extended the tendril in each direction, finding a foot and hips. Circling the latter, I pulled back, the projected metal retracting and pulling out a girl with a hood that had no face, just an infinite expanse of stars.

Putting her down, I leaned my ‘body’ down close enough that I could retract a bit of metal from my ‘chest’ and put my hand through my giant’s body and grab hers, healing her as I extended more tendrils. With the proof of concept done, I found it much easier to search out others, the new tendrils extending almost on their own. Five, ten, twenty people were found and extracted, though not all of them were still alive.

The faceless girl seemed better, or at least without anymore visible injuries, so I moved onto the next most injured person, a man in dented armor which was banged up enough I could reach through the cracks. I felt a thrum, the rain stopping as I spread my tendrils out, shifting everyone still alive to Shadow.

Another round of Bullet Rain came down, though without the simultaneous attack from below this time. It passed harmlessly through the survivors, riddling the corpses with holes, and I waited a long moment before releasing the survivors back to normalness. Actually. . . there was no reason to do that whatsoever. I continued pulling out injured, keeping them in Shadowform, finally reaching the largest pocket of air, right in the middle.

A pair of hands grabbed the tendril, directing it over to someone. Wrapping around them, I split it up, only for one of the new branches to be directed to another person. Eleven people later, the hands patted the tendrils. I assumed that meant I didn’t need anymore, and shifted them all to Shadow, pulling them back through the rubble, which promptly collapsed.

Retracting my metal tendrils like a demented fishing line, the first was Raida, who was unconscious, followed by an odd assortment of parahumans, all injured. Catching a hint of a familiar Flame, I wasn’t surprised when a mole dug its way out, promptly exploding upwards into Boojack. “The fuck?” he asked, looking up at me and the collection of people I held up in the air all around me by thin, metallic, shadowy tendrils, their lessened weight in that state letting me maneuver them with ease.

Bring Raida to me, he took a combative step forward. “What?” I asked, leaning out of the center of my armor, giving him a look as I mentally pulled back her costume so I could heal her, extensive bruising on her now exposed arm.

“Looked like a monster tryin’ to eat her,” he said.

Her bruises disappeared, her leg shifting as it un-broke. “You didn’t know it was me? Can’t you sense my power?” I asked.

He just stared at me while I worked, finally saying, “Huh,” and nothing more. As I worked, I realized that I’d done that training with Herb *after* Boojack was made, so he had no memory of it. I’d need to keep that in mind, if Herb ever made a clone that I could work with. It was zero for four so far, but he had at least six more, and I hoped at least *one* would be the type I’d recruit.

The water stilled again, and I sent a tendril to touch Boojack, who just raised an eyebrow behind his mask. This time the water around us erupted into spikes, which stayed up for a bit before dropping back to regular water. They came back a few seconds later, and then a few seconds after that, and a fourth one before dropping down and staying water as the rain pressed down. I waited a long moment, the water erupting into rising bullet rain, before coming down as just and extra layer of precipitation.

“Leviathan seems to be switching to city-wide attacks,” I commented conversationally, feeling the water doing the same things as far as my Aerokinetic senses could reach.

“Yup.”

“Any thoughts?” I asked, hoping for another perspective to help me figure out what I needed to do.

“Yup,” he repeated.

I waited for his explanation, finishing my healing of Rune and switching to another person. With us both in Shadowform, I could heal them without dropping back to reality, which was nice. “You wanna share?” I asked sarcastically.

“Nope.”

I sighed, “Do you know how to call someone to pick everyone up? I’d rather not carry them all back.”

He nodded in agreement, walking over to the first hero I’d grabbed, who I only now noticed was wearing an armband, making a ‘drop it’ motion. As I returned her back to reality it chimed, “*Starfield up, BB-4.*”

Boojack leaned over her, pressing the buttons on it and said, “Got wounded. Need pickup. Soon.” Letting go of them, he folded his arms and sat down on a piece of rubble. With a wave of his hand, a crystal umbrella grew out of the ground, shading him from the rain. He reached inside his jacket, pulled out a baggie from which he extracted a blunt, and put it back. Aiming a finger at the end, a midnight blue beam of energy set the end alight and he took a deep drag.

Before I could ask what he thought we should do, the armband on, presumably, Starfield’s arm responded. “Evac in two minutes, please stay in that location.” Boojack nodded, shifting on his piece of rubble as a crystal chair extended up, a footrest rising so he could lean back and relax, and took another drag.

As we waited, more deaths rolled in, and I got antsier, wanting to do *something* to help.

“*TO BE DETERMINED AFTER I WRITE THE NEXT CHAPTER, WILL BE RELATED TO WHAT’S GOING ON THERE.*”

The water went still again, and I shifted Starfield and Boojack to shadow, only for nothing to happen. Thirty seconds later the stillness stopped, but I kept everyone in shadow anyways. Waiting, I opened up a hole in the center of the giant and stretched my reconstructed joints, moving back and for forth only for my hand to hit something.

Reaching for the small of my back, I found a hard case latched onto my costume, which opened up at my touch, revealing a handle. Grabbing it, I held a gun which glowed a muted brown. It took a moment, but I realized it was the desiccation pistol I’d picked up hours before this SNAFU started. It was an invaluable tool which, between the craziness with Eidolon, realizing how strong Leviathan truly was, and everything else, *I’d completely forgotten I had.*

*I’m a goddamned fucking moron.*

Putting it back and promising to remember the *anti-water gun* when *fighting the hydrokinetic,* I finally dropped Starfield and Boojack, who was happy to learn he could still smoke as a living shadow, back to reality. Her armband reconnected to the network and started the process of announcing the dead again.

“SEE PREVIOUS STATEMENT*, PROBABLY KID WIN* ***AGAIN***,”

I was just about to put the injured down and leave Boojack to watch them when I spotted a golden glow coming from nearby as the air down the next street over was disturbed. A dozen people turned the corner, all of them sliding along the top of the water like it were ice, shepherding a woman who knelt within a sliding golden dome. A woman in grey who burned brightly to my Sight flew above them as she trailed a thick plume of dust behind her.

Boojack put out his joint and pocketed it as they neared, waving a hand as the crystal furniture fell away to nothing. As he did so, the group suddenly reacted to me as if they’d only just spotted me, despite me being a twenty-foot-tall giant of shadow and steel. They scattering as they pointed weapons in my general direction, though half of them would’ve missed. Looking at them, there were a few injured people in the golden dome, though something about it made me uneasy. “You the Evac?” I boomed, wishing I had Acoustokinesis to make this work better. Checking my powers, the third Major slot wasn’t anywhere close to ready, but the next Minor slot would be in a few seconds.

The dusty woman with the power of Ash Manipulation, flew forwards, looking down at Starfield. “Just her?” she demanded.

I looked at all the people still carried by my tendrils, over a dozen of them hanging in the air around me, wondering how she missed them. Shifting the tendrils down, the leader watched dispassionately as I returned them to reality, one after another, in a row on the rubble that stuck up from the water.

The woman nodded in satisfaction as little goblin-things leapt from places they couldn’t’ve been hiding it, picking up the injured and carrying them to the odd golden dome. When Raida touched it, she bounced off the side, unable to enter. The minions put her down after another try, the same green glow that was around the feet of the other heroes springing to life around Raida’s prone form, keeping her on top the water.

Boojack moved forward, form shifting into a Hippo as he moved next to her. As he did so, a water clone formed from the water flooding a nearby alley, running towards the group. I moved to block it but had to dodge what looked like a giant novelty candle that rocketed past where my ‘head’ was, missing the clone by inches as it dodged.

Raising one hand, I shifted it to a mass of tendrils that shot out and ripped the clone apart, ripping into it again as it tried to reform until it stopped. “Sorry!” a girl in a slender dress that looked like brass called out.

“It’s fine, just-” I caught a flash of movement at the end of the street and caught sight of the Liquid that streamed off it in every direction. “Shit, Leviathan!” I warned.

The leader, only a few feet away, muttered “*Not again,”* to herself, a feeling I heartily agreed with.

“Announce his location, get them to safety, I’ll hold him,” I told her. With my ability to drop to shadow, and the ability to keep my main body insubstantial while my projected metal existed in the real world, this fight wasn’t going to be nearly as dangerous as before.

The others took off, but the ash manipulator stayed behind, the powdery substance streaming out of her body. “You too,” I told her, catching a flash of Levi as he moved around us, disturbing the air enough that I could track it before it suddenly plunged underground and disappeared.

It came up from underneath the group, which twisted around to avoid it just in time. Levi clones formed only to lose cohesion as Boojack turned into a giant rhinoceros, half the size of leviathan itself, and charged the Endbringer, slamming him into a nearby building.

The rescue team took off as I charged the Endbringer, pushing myself from behind with air and using flight to move even faster as I extended more tendrils, growing to match Leviathan in height. The Endbringer leapt forward, trying move around me, but I extended the metal of my arm and caught him as he jumped, using his momentum as he started to drag me along to swing around and slam into him with an open hand full of twisting spikes that dug into his crystalline flesh.

They didn’t get very far, but it still injured the monster, who turned and struck me, sending water shooting down at me, only for it to pass through my insubstantial body. Grabbing my metal frame, he tore me off of himself, throwing me backwards as Boojack charged him once again.

As Boojack closed, the Endbringer’s right arm from the elbow down seemed to dissolve into water. I lashed out at the buildings around me with metal hooks, slowing myself down and charging the Endbringer as well. Boojack ducked underneath a tail-swipe and hit the Endbringer dead in the chest once again, pushing it back into the same building he’d been thrown into last time.

The Endbringer dug his remaining hand into the giant rhino’s flesh, Leviathan’s tail flashing down and piercing the asphalt to give it leverage as it tossed the herbivore away once more. As I closed, water streamed off Leviathan’s body and reformed his missing arm.

It jumped for me, leading with its liquid limb, only for it to vaporize into nothing as I shot my desiccation pistol, fouling Leviathan’s trajectory as well. The secret to the Endbringer’s grace was its control over the water that surrounded it, and without it he was caught flat footed, even if just for a moment.

My rending strike caught it in the face as I copied its technique and sent tendrils of metal through my feet into the street to ground myself. the metal of my form groaning under the strain, some tendrils snapping, but I brought it to a halt. The Endbringer’s other hand came down, tearing into my metal as compressed bolts of water riddled my giant’s metal chest and shot through where I was, passing harmlessly through the other side.

Slamming the Endbringer to the ground, holding its head firmly, a royal purple sword of plasma blazed to life in my other metal hand, the metal tendrils starting to glow as I ‘held’ it. Stabbing downward, a water clone grabbed my arm from behind as it boiled away, stopping me.

My metallic arm to Shadow, but that gave Leviathan enough time to bring both it’s arms up and tear through the metal tendrils holding it down, skidding backwards as the flooded street carried it away, only for the Endbringer to suddenly start skipping across the water the second before an enormous mastodon slammed into it, trunk encircling the Endbringer’s waist.

Charging forward as Boojack slammed his foe down into the ground, over and over, Levi’s tail whipped out and stabbed through the center of my metal construct, slamming directly into the shield covering my chest, draining it despite it being in Shadowform.

Not bothering to try to figure out *how*, I just changed the plan, assuming that Leviathan himself could hit me even if his water couldn’t. While that sucked, this was still doable. Leviathan’s tail struck out again and I parried with my flaming sword, which deflected the thrusting limb, cutting deeply into it. I closed the distance and struck, But Levi rooted himself in the ground and tossed the mastodon at me, coming with it himself.

As he flew at me he dug his remaining clawed hand into the flesh of the trunk, ripping through it as the muscles across his chest bulged. Freeing himself, he jumped backwards, out of Boojack’s copying range as the rain above us accelerated to the speed of bullets once more, water spears coming in at us from every direction, so many they were impossible to dodge. Even the desiccation gun didn’t help, the attacks coming in so fast, and from so many directions, that they couldn’t be stopped.

My exposed metal was torn apart, and Levi forced the steam from the water that hit my sword to cover me in an attempt to burn me, but I was unharmed. Boojack was not so lucky, his shaggy hide pierced hundred of times over in the second before I could reach him and try to shift him to Shadowform, dead before I could save him.

With Boojack gone, and the others likely having retreaded to safety, I dropped the star saber and gave Leviathan a one finger salute as I shifted fully to Shadow and dropped through the ground, ready to let him become someone *else’s* problem.

Leviathan objected.

He darted forward with insane speed, claws slamming into my giant and ripping it to pieces, tearing its head clean off as I disappeared below ground. Dropping further down, just to be sure, I heard a loud grinding sound and Leviathan’s tail shot through the dirt, ripping into the metal giant’s shoulder, cutting off an arm. Dropping down further, the Endbringer dug below me and slammed up into me, water drills cutting through earth as if it were sand as he shoved an arm through the constructs chest and grabbed me directly, pulling us both up to the surface where another hundred water spears passed through me to no effect.

Still in Shadow, I created a pair of suns in my flesh and blood hands and shoved them into Leviathan’s claws. They passed through the water covering him as if it weren’t there, but super-heated the Endbringer’s flesh, which transferred to the real world, causing the water to vaporize as the twin stars sank deeper and deeper into his green flesh. The super-tough material of his hands resisted my suns, but they burned through it anyways.

As soon as we were above ground, Leviathan squeezed tight, trying to crush me but just breaking my shields, the one covering my chest having just returned. Finding no success there, he threw me upwards with enormous strength, hurling me higher than the skyscrapers, giving me nowhere to run. He crouched down before launching himself after me, his injured hand reaching out to punch through my chest.

A dark shape blurred into view and a German Shepard the size of a city bus slammed into Leviathan, knocking him down into and through a building. Looking around, I could See Purity and Legend coming in from the north, Alexandria from the South, Eidolon from the South-west, and a number of other powers streaking in from across the city.

If Levi was smart, he’d try to cut and run, attacking someone more vulnerable, and I couldn’t let that happen. I had an open power slot, and reached to put Speed Zones in it, to make me even faster when Kaiser’s Metal Creation took its place in my mind. It didn’t slot itself, but I could feel my power pushing me in that direction. Following it’s suggestion, I did so, not sure why. I felt something in myself shift and twist, my power ringing like a struck bell, nausea assaulting me as the metal extending out retracted all at once.

Something connected, interfaced, and adapted, before metal streamed from every pore as if my body were purging itself. They tendrils extended and reformed, as they had when I first used the power, forming another body of metal, though this one was different. Instead of the grey of steel, but a shining gold shot through with pure white.

My Orichalcum body flexed, feeling light, tough, and strong as I turned my attention down where Tyrone was harrying Leviathan, keeping him busy. While I couldn’t meet the Endbringer shot for shot, I could steal his techniques, and there was a lot more *air* here then there was *water*.

Extending out a ‘tail’ of braided metal, I flew downwards, shoving myself along with it just like Leviathan did to move himself. I blasted towards the pair, flying far faster then I had ever done without Lightform to push me, and struck Leviathan like the fist of an angry god.

While my punch’s momentum wasn’t enhanced, I was still hitting the Endbringer with several tons of incredibly hard metal moving at several hundred miles per hour, and as Leviathan tried to dodge Tyrone grabbed onto his tail with his teeth, slowing him down *just* enough for me to strike him dead in in the chest. There was a thunderclap of force as he was blasted down and through the street, which crated with an explosion of water that shot off in all directions.

The Endbringer, chest deformed in the shape of my fist, started to sink into the ground but Tyrone appeared over him, latching onto the Endbringer with his jaws and throwing him upwards. As soon as the Endbringer left Tyrone’s range, we were both assaulted in every direction as every free piece of water on the block blasted towards us, ripping apart buildings as he tried to kill us.

I shifted all but the outermost layer to shadow, but the Orichalcum took the hits, denting but not breaking. Tyrone disappeared cimpletely, reappearing behind Leviathan, who hung in the air, covered and held aloft by his shroud of water. The Endbringer’s assault stopped instantly, but Leviathan was waiting for this and speared the hound through the chest with its tail, impaling the replicant.

Tyrone growled, deep and echoing, as water formed around him in its own shell and he forced himself further down the tail that impaled him, catching the Endbringer’s claw with his jaws as they both fell down to the ground, crushing a building as they rolled over each other. Leviathan was trying to kill Tyrone and get access to his Hydrokinesis once more while replicant was just trying to hold him in place and countering anything the Endbringer tried.

As I charged, Legend and Purity blasted by, strafing the Endbringer with explosions and piercing lasers. With company here, I pulled back my projected metal and formed a blood red flaming sword, diving at the Endbringer. Getting close, I stabbed it in the back, dodging as the both rolled over, the Endbringer tearing at Tyrone with its clawed feet as its tail swung around to stab him again and again, tearing the enormous hound to pieces.

He held on though, Alexendria arriving and slamming into the Endbringer as well her punch rocking its head back as the Endbringer’s blow bounced off the hound’s suddenly impenetrable skin. She pulled back and Leviathan struck with everything it had, finally killing the hound, water bursting from its form and exploding outwards in every direction.

Alexandria was thrown back by the solid wave of water as I shifted, for an instant, to Shadow, letting attack pass me by. What was left of Tyrone was blasted to pieces, Purity darting in front of Legend as she let out a shining white sphere of her own, blocking the indiscriminate attack.

Leviathan darted away, only to run headfirst into a glowing blue brick wall which held fast against the impact, the unnatural construction tethered by a thin line of light to Eidolon’s right hand, the ‘strongest parahuman’ finally joining the fight. He held out his left and a sparking ball of fractal light started to grow within it. “Hold him!” the man in green and white yelled, and Alexandria shot forward to do just that.

I followed, the Orichalcum running through me letting me put myself under the pressure needed to enhance my speed more than before, though I lacked the tail to fully copy the Endbringer’s technique. Leviathan tried to dig undergrund, but Alexandria caught him by the tail and pulled, straining, to keep him up, finding a handhold in the cut I’d made when I’d deflected its tail with solidified star before.

The Endbringer turned and clawed at her, its missing arm re-grown past the elbow, and it tried to shove the rest of its watery hand in her face, only for it to bounce off an invisible field of force.

I reached it and it slashed at me with its real arm, which I deflected with my sword, my power straining to hold it the star in place from the force of the blow, but succeeding, allowing me to stab it in the side. I left the blade there, mentally growing it deeper into its flesh to get a better grip. It blasted me back with a column of water, and while I blunted the impact with an air shield, I let it carry me away, focusing on keeping the sword in place, holding Leviathan where I stabbed him.

Eidolon’s power had grown, an impossibly deep sphere of light the size of his head held at the ready while his other hand directed a tether of blue energy to create a blue collar that latched around the Endbringer’s neck.

Lasers pierced the Endbringer’s hide, holding it in place as Eidolon shoved his hand forward, throwing the sphere towards Leviathan, bound as he was. “Get away!” the man yelled, and I complied, pulling back as fast as I could while the others did the same.

Leviathan broke its bonds, ripping itself free in a geyser of gore as it tried to escape the attack, accelerating as it went off. The sphere expanded outwards suddenly, fractal light dancing in complex patterns as it sliced through everything it touched, from the bodies, to the cars, to even the buildings.

The Endbringer danced around the patterns, blurring as it tried to get out of the sphere, only to break off again as more beams blocked its path. The beams quickened, as did the Endbringer, my perception of the world slowing to keep track of them both. The Endbringer moved faster and faster, each attempt to escape stopped by another beam, finally making a break for it but not *quite* dodging in time. The beam caught the Endbringer’s tail, slicing through it cleanly as it escaped, leaving only a sliver behind of flesh attached to its rear.

Alexandria and Legend blasted around the sphere to try to get to the Endbringer, but it escaped, dropping down into the ground and disappearing. The light from Eidolon’s attack faded as Leviathan’s sixty-foot-long tail, sliced into hundreds of pieces, dropped into the wreckage below.

I let out a long breath, looking at the Triumvirate. “Do you think that was enough to make Levi pack up and go ho-”

The rain stuttered, before coming down like a hailstorm of bullets around us. Purity poured Light above herself in reactive shield, A pyramid of blue force appeared around Eidolon, I wrapped myself in a sphere of Air Shields, Legend turned to a laser and ran, and Alexandria just floated there. A moment later, it came down on us again before it stopped. Purity let the projected light fade, breathing hard, as Legend returned, Alexandria turning to look at me. “I believe he’s not leaving until we’re dead, or he is,” she told me, looking me over. “Where’s your Armband?”

I shrugged, “Leviathan broke it.”

“Get another,” she commanded, flying off. Eidolon followed suit, not saying a word as he headed off in the opposite direction.

“Vejovis?” Legend asked, and I looked over at him and nodded. “Good job. I’d like to talk to you after this,” he said, a weary smile on his face.

“Um, okay?” I replied, not sure how else to respond. He gave me another nod and flew off, Purity nodding to me as well before following him.

Looking around, I wondered where the hell Leviathan was. Deciding to follow Alexandria’s. . . let’s say advice, I started to fly back towards the medical tents, which was the closest thing to a base I knew about. Trying to make sure I was fully ready for the next confrontation, I grabbed my pistol which had been gone unused during the fight and reloaded it. *Too many tools*, I thought. While everything looked like a nail if the only thing you had was a hammer, it was *really easy* to remember to use that hammer in the first place. When you had a toolbox, you’d probably use it all, but I vividly remembered how, despite having a full workshop, my father tended to use the same dozen tools for everything.

Restricting myself down to a few powers per persona helped focus me, but I’d gotten into the habit of using a hammer for *everything*. I’d had powers that I’d barely touched, and while I didn’t need that level of capability against normal opponents, *this in no way counted as normal*. I wouldn’t seek Leviathan out, again, but we’d hurt him *badly* here, and if he hadn’t left yet, then Alexandria might be right, as much as it galled me to agree with that psychopath.

Checking, I’d picked up another Minor slot. *And yet more tools.* I slotted Speed Zones into it, feeling it activate and mix with all the others without incident. Fighting Leviathan was all about speed, and *these* I’d practiced quite a bit with. Mass uses of them would be obvious, but minor uses could make the difference on the battlefield just the same. Feeling it finish threading itself into place, I put a Speed Zone along my arm, just to test it. It seemed the same, though the feeling was *so* much clearer then that evening I’d spent playing tag with Velocity. I hoped he was okay. I hadn’t heard him die this time, but I’d been somewhat busy.

“Um, Vejovis?” my comms buzzed, the worry and constrained panic in Theo’s voice almost tangible. “I figured out the computers.”

“Eecee, Yeah Theo, what was it?” The last thing I needed was for Eclipse to start breaking down. Was it something I’d missed? Cauldron’s interference? A Coil plot? It was just another thing that I couldn’t spend time worry about, and I was glad that I’d be able to put it aside and focus on the fight.

“It *was* the sensors, just the long-range ones,” he explained, hesitating.

*Was it another, even* ***bigger****, Tidal wave?* I worried, glancing over towards the bay. The one that Leviathan had arrived with *still* was straining against Vista’s construct, and if another came it could flow right up over the wall we’d made. “So it wasn’t a bug?” I clarified, hoping I was wrong.

“Um, no,” Theo told me. “It wasn’t.”

“Then what *was* it?” I asked him, getting annoyed, not having the time to play twenty questions. “Spit it out, Theo.”

“It’s The Simurgh,” he said helplessly, and I felt my stomach drop. “The Simurgh is coming.”