

Fire Doesn't Cast Shadow

Prologue

“- January 25, 2010 .-“

When it became clear that putting an end to the Ootsutsuki threat was going to be the longest-term sort of affair – if only because the tree demons had sealed off their own dimensions from easy counter-access – everyone who mattered back home agreed to make it a permanent strategic tradition above and beyond all other concerns. Thanks to the Summoning Techniques, Sage Powers, the Rinnegan, and especially the Impure World Resurrection, it became possible to coordinate with even the departed.

The logical conclusion of this was to learn how to navigate the Sea of Samsara, the Wheel of Death and Rebirth itself. Good news, the might of the Ootsutsuki didn't extend to controlling *all* of the afterlife. Better news, he figured out how to embed triggers for past life regression into his own soul, so that he might recover his prior life's memories at a pre-determined level of Yin maturity. Best news yet, he discovered the reason the Ootsutsuki didn't follow up on their failure in his home dimension – they were busy fighting a completely different interdimensional war.

After some debate, it was agreed that he would become the first to re-join the wheel of rebirth in another dimension. Specifically, on the far side of the ten thousandth' dimension he floated through, the first sealed one since his own that was inhabited by more than 99% human souls. He did so on the assumption – neither confirmed nor denied by communion with the recently deceased natives – that he was entering a world, a universe, maybe even a whole *cluster* of dimensions of potential allies against their common enemy.

Instead, he woke up in Brockton Bay.

Well, the story was slightly more complex. He was reborn in Japan, but his parents fled to the USA after Leviathan sank Kyushu, only to be killed within the month by Empire Eighty-Eight gangmen who took offense at his hair and eyes.

After a hospital stay, he was put in foster care with a different pair of parents, who lasted a bit longer up until they were also murdered just two months ago, this time by Azn Bad Boys who deemed them Empire Eighty-Eight sympathizers.

After a second, longer hospital stay that left him lame in one leg, 20% short on lung capacity, and with 8,000 dollars in medical debt, he was caught up in the Chorus gang attack on the Hillside Mall.

The one silver lining, upon waking up in the hospital for the third time in this life, was that the attack had caused a fellow victim to trigger with healing powers, which she'd used to heal him and everyone else she could in the aftermath. Of his newest *and* oldest injuries. It was a charged set of circumstances to finally remember, but that was surely owed to being clinically dead for a few minutes before Panacea got to him.

He dutifully listened and correctly replied to the doctors and nurses. He dutifully listened and correctly replied to the child services too. Even though they were only going through the motions because he would be ageing out in just a few weeks. He went through all the right motions and said all the right things up until he was finally left alone.

He spent his third hospital stay planning. He mentally catalogued his present assets. He mentally catalogued his home assets. He checked the calendar. He smiled wryly at the irony.

It was his date of birth in his prior life.

“-. January 26, 2010 .-“

Assets: physique of an average young adult man (no parahuman powers, no chakra system), two-bedroom apartment (bills due in two weeks, rent in three), one flip phone (foster father's), one smartphone (foster mother's), \$950 dollars cash (can of savings hidden inside couch), curated access to state propaganda (TV set in the kitchen), unfettered access to the total digitized sum of human knowledge (smartphone broadband, paid monthly), memories of living long enough to become the greatest shinobi of his time.

Goals: gather information, develop long-term objectives.

“-. January 28, 2010 .-“

Similarities to his old world: size of planet, ancient Japan culture, present Japan writing, 50% of technology, the Cycle of Hatred, the Endbringers were the local tailed beasts but *probably* not misunderstood, and only the actions of the people with power mattered.

Dissimilarities: everything else.

New goals: gather more information, secure livelihood, (re)acquire power.

“- February 4, 2010 .-“

Lacking a chakra pathway system was an unfortunate but entirely foreseen inconvenience, practically inevitable outside the Ootsutsuki sphere of influence.

Conversely, the oldest of the Great Beast clans back home predated Kaguya and the Shinju entirely, and so did their techniques. Techniques which could and had been taught to – and by – humans. Naturally, that meant that at least some techniques didn't need the chakra pathway system, because they didn't need *chakra*. Instead, they directly used Yang, Yin, or combinations of both. Higher still were the sage powers, and there, too, senjutsu had been preceded by senriki.

Similarly, many of the highest-level shinobi techniques didn't use chakra either, but instead Yin and Yang energies transformed *back* from chakra, either alone or in various combinations, and never to 100% purity. In that context, it wouldn't be inaccurate to say shinobi sacrificed vertical power scalability, in favor of rapid acquisition at lower levels and ease of use.

For most in his situation, all this knowledge would be doomed to remain theoretical, and thus useless. This was also within predictions, it was assumed that transmigrants would prioritize local skills and abilities in any case, on the basis that the locals had to be doing *something* right to hold off the tree demons.

But fuuinjutsu worked as well with fresh blood, and ofuda were commonly used in various fields, including medical, torture, interrogation, and various forms of training. Both to reduce and to *enhance* one's sensitivity to the various energy transformations.

It took little time to create seals that enhanced his sensitivity to Yin and Yang. It took longer to tweak the script until he truly felt his *own* Yin and Yang energies as deeply and seamlessly as he did his chakra back in his last life. Not surprisingly, the fuuinjutsu from back home had certain blind spots when trying to work exclusively chakra-free.

What *was* surprising was that he didn't need to create the missing parts from first principles. Instead, the internet filled in the gaps and then some. Not only did seal script exist in this world as tensho, but it was just one of *five* forms of Japanese calligraphy, the others being reisho, kaisho, gyōsho and sōsho. These didn't include the even older *Chinese* calligraphy, which he'd be going over with a fine-toothed comb as well.

The final seal covered the floor, walls and much of the ceiling of his living room, which took more blood than he could afford to extract in a single sitting. Nothing a pre-drawn pack in a storage tag couldn't solve.

Finally, he was ready.

“Fuuin!”

The writing flared yellow, detached from the surfaces it was written on, and flowed inward as if pulled by a string, each line coming together and superseding each other.

The sudden extrasensory feedback was beyond disorienting, and the abrupt expansion of consciousness outright euphoric. It was minutes before he was able to tune back to his physical surroundings, and hours before he was willing to.

Eventually, he was lulled back out of his trance by two sore sensation on his forehead.

He went to the bathroom to examine the results in the mirror.

☯☷

The ancient symbols of the Sun and the Night were mirrored on his forehead right above the inner eyebrow of each eye.

“Well,” he told himself. “That's not going to work at all.”

If he was a trouble magnet before, it was nothing compared to what this would do to him the moment he stepped out of his apartment.

The seal was meant to be temporary, just until he increased his energies enough that they were too abundant *not* to feel. Because of that, he'd anchored it into his skin instead of anything deeper – never mind his very spirit which he couldn't even perceive yet – to be able to remove it later. Seals interfered with each other, especially as complexity increased.

For that same reason, however, it wasn't the sort that could just fade from sight. The position flanking the Third Eye was also important to its function, so he couldn't put it on the back of his skull, or his spine, or anywhere else more easily concealed.

It had taken him months to be able to feel chakra consistently the first time around, never mind mould it. Even if he went with his most optimistic estimates here, he was still looking at weeks before he achieved even the most basic control. He couldn't afford to stay shut inside his apartment for that long.

With a disappointed sigh, he undid the seal and wasted all of his week's work.

He needed a better solution. And some more specific supplies.

He needed something to bite on.

“- February 16, 2010 .-“

He double-checked the numbing acupuncture, waited for the painkillers to kick in, bit on the leather truncheon, steeled his nerves, and squeezed the cutting pliers.

The top half of his left pinkie toe flew loose with a spray of blood.

“Umfh!” he grunted in pain. Absent of medical jutsu to override physical stimuli, pain was quite dreadful. He had good pain tolerance, but even so his eyes actually teared up, how shameful!

After salving and bandaging his foot, he retrieved the toe, carefully peeled off and sealed the skin and flesh away in case he needed them later, cleaned the bone, and then ground it to the finest possible powder. He used first his late foster mother's mincing machine, then a mortar and pestle he'd bought from a natural remedies shop.

Ready at last, he re-did his sealwork from start to finish, adding the bone dust to the blood he used for the anchor sections of the array. He also expanded the parameters to include specific controls for location.

“FUUIN!”

When it formed this time, the Seal of Sun and Night inscribed itself directly onto his skull, invisible beneath his skin.

“Technique success,” he sighed in satisfaction after basking in his new sensations for another half a day. Experimentally, he tried to tug on the energies or at least influence them *somehow*, but it was like trying to consciously alter the focus of your eye. As a baby.

Clearly, an adjustment period was ahead of him.

That didn't mean there weren't things to do in the meantime though.

He went out, spent a couple of days tracking down the gangers who killed his foster family, stalked them for another three days to determine if they were redeemable – they weren't – and made sure there was no way to link him to the bodies.

By the time he was finished removing that risk to his identity, he was still getting only the barest response from his Yin energy, and trying to do anything with his Yang merely left him exhausted. Not the worst training but not immediately useful either. He wouldn't be able to attempt the Academy Three for some time still, never mind anything else.

Fortunately for his first mission, a total transformation wasn't necessary. The world provided convenient access to everything needed to build more conventional disguises. Among them were fake skin face masks. A bit of fuinjutsu – mixed in with his recently harvested skin, he'd need to start collecting the dust on the shelves for the future – made it indistinguishable from his real skin, and even copied the pores exactly to permit sweat.

All else being equal, experience and skill enabled a shinobi to succeed in any given mission.

He was more than equal.

He dyed his hair black, applied his new face, wandered into the West Side of Brockton Bay, and joined the ABB.

“- April 15, 2010 .-“

The Azn Bad Boys were a disaster constantly unfolding. Taiwanese hated mainland Chinese, mainland Chinese hated the Taiwanese and Vietnamese and Japanese, Koreans hated the Japanese and Mongols, the Mongols hated everyone except the Japanese, the Japanese hated everyone, and everyone hated the Indians.

This wasn't because everyone belonging to those ethnicities were bad, but because those who *weren't* didn't survive long, especially if they were press-ganged. The high turnover was the driving force behind the gang's recruitment drive. The leader's never-ending campaign to control all Asian minorities was both the gang's lifeline and its poison.

As a ninja, he was always professional on the job. He committed theft, ran protection rackets, peddled contraband, and was kind to the prostitutes when the stress of his cover finally demanded the relief they offered. But he only wore the red and green for as long as it took to finish his intelligence gathering. And he made sure the Empire took all the blame for his cumulative theft of half the ABB's liquid cash reserves

It would have been useful to get some more in-depth knowledge about the clandestine slave trade as a whole, but that would have turned the mission from short-term to long-term, and it was not worth the potential prize. He faked his death in a fight with the Empire as soon as he gained enough control over his Yin to inscribe seals through touch. He could only do so on other Yin bodies so far, and he couldn't use them for anything yet, perhaps not ever, but preparation was the mother of success.

He was 'lost at sea' having never revealed any powers, or otherwise intimated he was beyond the norm.

He used his spoils to rent a better apartment, order his preferred custom weapons, stock up on sealing supplies, and buy adequate training equipment.

“- April 16, 2010 .-“

Summary of report, Mission 2010-01: Infiltrate ABB

Lung (Kenta Shimoda) is an attention-seeking egotist whose only redeeming quality has long since been twisted into the greatest detriment to those around him and himself. His weakness is that he can be killed by any conventional means, if you don't give him the opportunity to acknowledge a threat. Recommended strategy: ambush while idle, behead.

Oni Lee is a soulless abomination. His name disappeared along with his soul back when he 'teleported' for the first time. His weakness are his eyes. Recommended strategy: ambush to blind, lethal attack on brain or heart.

Personal details, addresses and other actionable intelligence are attached, alongside information on underlings of note, and contingencies.

“- April 17, 2010 .-“

He'd known, going in, that he wasn't going to witness the most august examples of the parahuman sub-species. It was inevitable, the best and brightest this world had to offer would surely be counted among the hidden masters, those responsible for the interdimensional protection of this many-looped Earth. But even so, his first foray into the 'real' Earth Bet left him feeling greatly discouraged. To further fuel his frustration, what *useful* intelligence he collected happened more in spite of his mission than because of it.

Most of the readily available assets offered by this dimension had poisoned strings attached. This world's mankind had developed more drugs and toxins than existed in his last world. While definitely a shinobi type of weapon, the best and worst of these substances only affected humans, and were therefore useless for his greater goal of interdimensional warfare against tailed tree demons.

Tinker products were admittedly more enticing, but lack of reproducibility meant they would be one-hit surprises at best against the true foes. Certain striker or breaker abilities would serve better, but their users tended to trend insane.

Societally, Earth Bet was an even more extreme example of what not to do. There was a level of nihilism here that would have broken society back home, even before you counted how sinisterly effective the governments had become at self-destruction. And at making the citizenry *participate* in that self-destruction.

Elections were put-upon theater, economies were being deliberately destroyed by genocidal robber barons, no one could afford to buy a home, schools were indoctrination machinery, universities were debt slave farms, justice was a sham, and coordinated psyops took place every day through every means of broadcast, more insidious than in Shimura Danzo's wildest nightmares.

All this was before taking into account the Endbringers, whose constant attacks, and their impact on all the aforementioned, guaranteed the world would completely collapse before he even passed his middle years.

Amidst it all, what did the only people with real power do? The few *not* wallowing in the Birdcage because the vast majority of parahumans were just terrible?

Play cops and robbers.

The 'Unwritten Rules' were a disgrace.

It was not because of that practice that he decided not to adopt a parahuman persona for his next mission. Or the one that followed. He had a long-term strategy to adhere to.

But if he were to have entertained the idea, he'd have changed his mind.

He still couldn't cast most techniques. His learning curve was completely mixed up compared to chakra, he'd not regained any conventional options besides basic genjutsu, and Yin release had not progressed beyond embedding seals on other Yin auras. Also, his Yang energy still grew more from physical conditioning rather than the reverse, his body still wasn't at its peak despite optimal training and nutrition.

The Academy Three in particular were staying stubbornly out of reach, despite how useful they would be for his next mission.

Illusions had admittedly proved a most effective red tape bypass, but they worked best short term and one-on-one, and he lacked the bloodline traits for the more outstanding options he knew of. Permanent mind alteration he wasn't willing to use regardless, as he considered them a violation of selfhood. It was why he never pursued mastery in the field to begin with, despite having more than sufficient chakra control and imagination.

Fortunately, the world continued to provide convenient access to everything needed to build more conventional disguises. Among them were fake skin face masks which changed his bone structure. Coupled with his newly un-dyed hair and contact-less eyes, he was ready to give those old accusations about his appearance some substance.

His priority during his ABB infiltration had been intelligence gathering and monetary gain, so his cover had played the required roles. Now, he was ready to pursue insight – and training – in this new world's own forms of warfare.

He checked his seal work and appearance in the mirror one last time, wandered Downtown, and joined the Empire Eighty-Eight.

“- June 19, 2010 .-“

Summary of Report, Mission 2010-03: Live Action Training – Firearms

(submitted before Mission Report 2010-02, due to impact on latter's conclusions)

Guns do not exist on the old world, save some unverified rumors from the Land of Waves that did not last past Gato's occupation. There are some gun jutsu, but they either need mass casting by entire divisions to be effective in warfare (like the Rock Gun jutsu) or require such chakra control as to be unlearnable (the water gun jutsu).

Both of those have multiple equivalent firearms here that is superior in all ways. The water gun jutsu is beaten by every sniper rifle, the rock gun jutsu is more than matched by cannons and mortars, explosives scale better than blast seals in all ways except portability, and *all* firearms shoot projectiles faster than anyone has ever thrown a kunai or shuriken.

Key takeaway: bullets travel faster than sound. This means that it doesn't matter what kind of hearing or reflexes you have. It doesn't matter how good your hearing or acute your sense of touch, there is nothing to react *to* because the sound and air disturbance both reach you after the bullet does.

On these grounds, guns are as much a danger to a stationary shinobi as they are to the average civilian. For that same reason, they should work on the Ootsutsuki as well. Even if a target proves too durable or heals too fast, that still is not the failure of the gun as a delivery method, you just needed a different kind of bullet.

Case in point, for every 'unkillable' parahuman here on Earth Bet, whether due to invulnerability, regeneration or whatever exotic defense, there is a Tinker gun somewhere that defeats it.

Bombs and cannons are easier to evade, but they make up for it in collateral damage and splash range.

Summation: In their quest to throw the next pebble harder and farther than the one before, the humans of this world have created a weapon that doesn't need to worry about overcoming a foe, for the simple reason that it overcomes their environment.

Recommendation: Must adjust mainline tactics. 'Wait to ambush' still ideal for opening strikes, but 'stand still and counter' too dangerous once guns get involved. While malicious intent of parahumans makes their attacks easy to predict even without line of sight (thus vulnerable to preferred 'goad and counterstrike' method), the likelihood of firearms being deployed without killing intent adds an unacceptable risk of lethality to self. Will favor 'always in motion' approaches moving forward.

Addendum to Mission Report 2010-01: New strategy for Lung: force-feed grenade. Should also work after he ramps up, so long as he does not grow beyond one or two floors height, due to commensurate rise in durability.

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Whenever the time came for a hidden gun to be pointed his way, he hoped it was a hostile foe or even just a hired gun that did it. Then at least there might be some killing intent to sense and react to. Absent teleportation, until he could move as fast as the Raikage (at least), *or* developed some sort of defense capable of withstanding an average 500-1000 kilograms of force (on every square centimeter of his body), the greatest threat to his life was probably a regular citizen with a gun.

Or a veteran soldier used to pulling the trigger even without actually wanting to kill anyone.

“-. June 20, 2010 .-“

The Empire Eighty-Eight as a faction was a lesson in how to get away with blatant lies. They called themselves an Empire, but operated on exclusion rather than assimilation, ruled less than they destroyed, and might even be subordinate to a broader organization (Gesellschaft). The members were largely opportunists and zealots that espoused values and beliefs *not* actually espoused by

the ones they ostensibly imitated (the National Socialist German Workers' Party). The leader was a man who believed none of what his followers did, only playing the role in order to keep himself the overlord.

As an organization, E88 were the most stable and solvent of all unlawful Brockton Bay entities, thanks to Medhall Corporation, a pharmaceutical company that was not merely a method of money laundering. Kaiser also compensated for the self-defeating nature of E88's inherent fallacies by casting a wide net in his recruitment. E88 was the only major gang in Brockton Bay that recruited from other places.

As a social movement, the Empire failed as much as they succeeded. This was not because of flaws inherent to their ideology, but due to how their actions opposed it in practice. Notably, they did not let the best of those who embodied 'the Aryan ideal' continue unmolested (i.e. doing what enabled them to distinguish themselves in the first place). Nails that stuck out usually got press-ganged or hammered down for defiance. Especially if they triggered with a useful or thematic power.

As a cultural movement, they offended the intelligence of anyone with the decency to study this world's history. The Nazi party only achieved power in Germany because of persistent foreign meddling in their country's economic recovery, the German Empire was a meritocracy (such that they won a third of all Nobel prizes), the Germanics were born and bred individualists (and nigh-pathologically honest the farther back you went), the Norman Conquest of Britain sowed the seeds for what would eventually become the global abolition of slavery, and the Vikings matched autonomy and entrepreneurship against old empires rotting alive from rampant vice, and won.

Rather than pay homage to any of these admirable legacies, the E88 instead exalted the most extreme caricature of *one* of the Nazi's late-stage slogans.

To add a final insult to injury, they perpetuated the 'Aryan' delusion. The irony was thickest here. The Aryans established the single truly unbroken culture in this world's written history (Hinduism, India), but they only did so through successfully *winning the peace* with their conquered people.

Religion was consolidated through the marriage of Aseran (Solar) and Vanaran (Lunar) cults. Culture was consolidated through the greatest written epics known to this planet (Ramayana, Mahabharata). The fabric of society was consolidated through comprehensive laws (Manava-

Dharma-S'astra). And they even made sure that the ethnic caste system was merely an incidental *side-effect* of something else actually palatable to the people (family lineage and birthright).

All of this was achieved through consistent and pre-planned policies, stretched over a period many times longer than the Elemental Countries had existed back home at the time of his reincarnation.

In presuming to claim these legacies while embodying their complete opposite, the Empire Eight-Eight could safely be considered, to use a local metaphor, a Trojan Horse. Except this horse was even less self-aware than the wood one.

Incidentally, Kaiser's father went by Allfather. Considering that Odin was at worst this Earth's version of the Six Paths Sage (one of either two or three who rebuilt society after the Bronze Age Collapse), and at best one of the Kotoamatsukami (the distinguishing heavenly kami who created both this *and* his universe), the insult that E88 represented towards all races of mankind grew ever larger.

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Summary of Report, Mission 2010-02: Infiltrate the E88

Most targets continue to exhibit civilian-level physical capabilities, making standard ambush tactics viable in most cases. Genjutsu also viable on most targets. High-caliber firearms and explosives effective as well. Overwhelming firepower will eventually overcome all damage resistance (except exotic effects and extraordinary circumstances where mentioned).

Absent B-rank techniques or higher, high-yield explosives should be viable in most situations, but are difficult to obtain relative to the norm. Tinkertech laser weapons are guaranteed means of victory, but are difficult to source (without jeopardizing long-term agenda). Unless otherwise stated, Yang self-enhancement will tip the scales sufficiently in own favor even in unfavorable live combat. More specific recommendations below.

Kaiser (Max Anders) – ambush with lethal force on brain or heart, behead if possible. If already armored, stay on the move and pursue suffocation, electrocution, drowning, or the application of explosives strong enough to overcome steel hardness (given sufficient quantity, most options will suffice at point-blank range).

Krieg (James Fliescher) – trap under/inside heavy load and submerge in concrete or water until death by suffocation/drowning. Alternatively, apply contact drugs/poison. Second alternative, electrocution. Chains may not suffice to restrain for long, but would serve as excellent conductors. Absent of dedicated lightning techniques, urban technological level offers easy access to sources of lethal current (power lines, jumper cables). Other battlefield control & overwhelming force options known but currently unavailable.

Hookwolf (Brad Meadows) – electrocution as per above, suffocation/drowning may not work depending on how deep the transformation is. Total submersion concrete trap should, however, prove inescapable without help.

Fenja (Jessica Biermann) / Menja (Nessa Biermann) – if unable to enact standard ambush and kill tactics (depending on how well their Akimichi-type abilities work on reflex), use airborne tranquilizers and/or poison. Alternatively, force-freed explosives.

Crusader (Justin Roth) – close distance and attack with lethal force on brain or heart, behead if possible. If his overlapping clone is acting as defense, a bare hand might pass through (Manton-limit) to break his neck, apply seal, etc. Partial sensory sharing may render him vulnerable to illusion through clones.

Night (Dorothy Schmidt) – priority target, *must* be neutralized before entering her breaker state. If already in breaker state, retreat and try again when she returns to normal. Effectiveness of genjutsu on breaker state unknown, assume none. Battlefield control & overwhelming force options known but currently unavailable.

Fog (Geoff Schmidt) – priority target, *must* be neutralized before entering his breaker state. If already in breaker state, avoid physical contact at all costs, retreat and try again when he returns to normal. Effectiveness of genjutsu on breaker state unknown, assume negative. Battlefield control & overwhelming force options known but currently unavailable.

Alabaster (Whitney Bauer) – destroy brain, must be done within maximum 4.3 seconds.

Stormtiger (Ludolf Adelbert) – ambush with lethal force. If already using aerokinesis, employ tricks and misdirections to affect death or capture, either should be possible even at current own level of ability.

Cricket (Melody Jurist) – knife or bullet to the back of the skull. If in combat, use genjutsu to confuse her subsonic sensory ability, then close distance for close combat while her reflexes are impaired.

Rune (Tamara Klein-Herren) – ambush and kill. If already in combat, closing to melee distance or using ranged weapons will be equally effective, deploy as convenient.

Othala (Olga Meier-Herren) – priority target, should preferably be neutralized first. Has no abilities herself but can grant a broad range to others. Observed examples include augmented strength, pyrokinesis, regeneration, flight, super-speed, and invincibility.

Victor (Victor Alric) – ambush and kill. Ranged weapons should suffice in live combat. Alternatively, close distance and engage with Yang self-enhancement, though own martial art skill should be sufficient even without it, provided Othala has not empowered him as she usually does.

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Victor had been unable to absorb his skills and talents due to his Yin defense. Fortunately, he was able to maneuver the Empire cape into ‘realizing’ he must have unknowingly triggered during the cape fight he used as backstory on joining. He was then able to lean on his newly discovered ‘master resistance power’ to increase his standing in the organization as a secret trump.

Alas, he was outed during a fight with New Wave and Gallant, during which he was struck by – and resisted, though barely – both Glory Girl’s aura and Gallant’s emotional blasts. It wasn’t by choice, but it provided a pretext for Oni Lee to single him out and ‘eliminate’ him with extreme prejudice during a later skirmish with the ABB.

“-. June 21, 2010 .-“

The Academy Three were turning into a very long-term project indeed, as were all the other ninja techniques. Combining Yin and Yang energies in the right portions should be possible, but turning them into chakra – or a working equivalent – had remained a failure. Elemental jutsu had proven similarly elusive so far.

Hand seals did nothing, though he'd still use them for the mnemonic benefits and to give the illusion of a failure point.

Purely Yang-based physical enhancement was intuitive and controllable, but stubbornly refused to become permanent and automatic. He was sure he was missing something, but didn't know what. Externalized effects remained elusive as well. Shape transformation was actually easier than for chakra, but he'd yet to manage anything visible (never mind palpable beyond some added heat) besides golden glints in his eyes. Experimentation was necessarily slow as well, the quantity and density of Yang remained his most severe limitation.

Yin was producing better results, if mostly because his reincarnation provided him with a considerable boost to the baseline. Spiritual energy was also easier and intuitive to harness compared to the pseudo-Yin of chakra (un)transformation. The result of this was that he did not need seals to cast illusions, nor to combat them or similar effects. Also, unlike Yang, he *was* developing an inherent automatic resistance to mind-affecting powers, which had not been the case with chakra back home.

When he was subjected to Gallant's emotion blasts and Glory Girl's aura, he'd resisted both *without* having to initiate active countermeasures. Barely, but enough.

In theory, stronger Yang energy should protect his physical body from powers in a similar manner, though he had not gone out of his way to test this for obvious reasons.

If nothing else, it appeared that with Yin *not* being used up by his chakra system, his spirit could grow and self-actualize more freely. This led to continued expansion of consciousness, as well as gradual improvements to his extrasensory perception. He was beginning to develop the ability to sense the Yin and Yang of others. It was in most ways inferior to his previous tremor sense jutsu, or the echolocation of the Uminos. But it was passive and continuous, and he suspected it would increase in range and become more versatile with time.

Medical techniques were a complete non-starter. Even the purest and most precise Yin transformation did nothing. Other than optimize natural processes perhaps, he hadn't gotten ill or infected since he began to practice on himself, but that could just as easily be owed to his stronger life force. The only reason he hadn't completely abandoned the idea was that he looked like his

old self, despite not having what this world considered mixed-race parents, so some effect clearly existed.

All in all, he'd achieved minimal progress on regaining his old abilities besides *finally* achieving peak (unpowered) human potential. Shamefully, he couldn't even tree walk.

Perhaps he'd find some inspiration during his next mission.

“- July 10, 2010 .-“

He did not.

“- July 11, 2010 .-“

Summary of Report, Mission 2010-04: Infiltrate the Merchants

The Archer's Bridge Merchants are a small group of drug dealers with no real aspirations aside from getting rich selling and taking drugs, only using their powers to make their line of work less risky. The small scale of their operations render them a minor issue in the eyes of the local powers, which in turn allows them to subsist on the comparatively less-policed conventional segments of the black market.

This also made longer-term infiltration unnecessary, as they have no deep secrets or pan-national influence or leverage.

Recommended strategies: ambush with lethal force. Melee combat, long-range weaponry, genjutsu, Yang enhancement, overwhelming firepower will all suffice. Specifics below.

Skidmark (Adam Mustain) – ambush and kill. If already in combat, use psychological tactics to distract him, thus breaking his attention and eye contact with his deflector effects. Sustained overwhelming force will eventually overcome his power as well, unless he is given abundant time to layer it over and over again. Such long-term tactics unlikely to be utilized, target has not fully explored his power, his cognition is impaired by lifestyle.

Squealer (Sherrel Bailey) – standard ambush and kill. In combat, separate from her vehicle before using any approach of your choice.

Mush (name unknown, seemingly even to himself) – ambush with high explosives, thermite, or acid in quantities sufficient to destroy whole body at once. Theoretically his changer power is not constantly active, so standard ambush and behead tactics could still work, but not guaranteed.

“- July 12, 2010 .-“

Parahumans were dangerous, even the most incompetent ones while drugged up to their gills.

Though most were slower and more fragile than an academy student, parahuman powers tended to hit well above their weight class. Conversely, there were those with outsized endurance, damage resistance, or any other number of exotic abilities that improved their survivability or threat. Above and beyond those were true powerhouses, the few who could match the jonin from back home on their best day, all the way up to the Triumvirate who could challenge the kage of his generation.

The greatest generations too, perhaps, in Scion's case. Depending on how much power he was still hiding.

It was no wonder they needed twelve different power categories here, and fifteen different power type ratings. The E- to S-Class system used in his home dimension was inadequate to properly gauge the threat posed by these individuals.

The silver lining was that there certainly existed a number of abilities that would be useful against the Ootsutsuki, and any other extra-dimensional interlopers.

The big and stormy cloud to that silver lining was that these powers never grew and couldn't be harnessed, only received somehow from somewhere or something. This occurred almost entirely arbitrarily, independent of any physical or psychological prerequisites, through a process that literally required trauma. There were also a couple of papers circulating websites such as Parahumans Online, about the changes in behaviour *not* necessarily related to the trauma.

He wanted to keep an open mind. They had something similar back home, the more powerful a ninja was, the more eccentric or sociopathic they tended to be (himself being one of the more fortunate exceptions). But aberrant behaviour was far more common here, almost always extreme,

and it was most certainly caused by the powers themselves in many cases, not just trauma. Oni Lee, Scion, the Slaughterhouse Nine, Nilbog, Ash Beast, the many horrors in the Exclusion Zones. He would never approve shinobi applications for *any* of the parahumans he'd met so far, and less than a handful of those he read about online.

The worst thing was that some of the powers themselves were the sort that everyone would be better off without. City-wide brainwashing and worldwide event manipulation could not be trusted with anyone. Further tying all that into precognition was a disaster, as the Simurgh literally embodied. And this world even had literal cognitohazards. He himself didn't know what would happen if he ended up in the vicinity of Mama Mathers. Or, gods forbid, Valefor. As he was right now, he didn't give himself good odds against even C-rank genjutsu, never mind those creatures.

Above and beyond all that, though, was the reason why he left the Protectorate for last.

Brockton Bay. This city. This damned city that was so obviously a proxy site as to offend his inner shadow mastermind.

Child soldiers doing most of the fighting. Adult supervisors that were always elsewhere or otherwise too busy to help them when a fight broke out. Consistent and always *narrow* failure by the authorities to contain or eliminate the enemy. The same for all the knock-on effects that resulted. He knew a setup when he saw one, it was like the chuunin exam back home, except it never ended, the citizens were part of the test, and everyone failed. It was to the point where neither incompetence nor malice were enough explanation it on their own, though admittedly the insertion of 'Coil' as the hidden hand was a clever misdirection.

He hesitated to assume that everyone was *set up* to fail, but he'd learned a thing or two about powers these past six months. A concerted effort by the local Protectorate with Triumvirate backup would solve all the city's worst problems in one *day*. Same for all other metropolises and most exclusion zones as well.

Also, the powers he learned the least about were the ones that worried him the most: thinkers. Their powers practically tailor-made them for management or leadership roles. But they were not related to the person's intelligence, never mind wisdom. Further, like Tinkers, they never made it big without resources, leverage and influence. By extension, they never made it anywhere *fast*

without a handout from someone who already possessed those things, in other words the backing of a strong organization.

Long story short, unless he was both luckier than the Shichifukujin and as wise as Omoikane, Coil was a controlled opposition thinker. By extension, he was either in on the greater agenda, or among the ones pulling the strings outright. Both had higher odds than the same being true of the Brockton PRT leader, from what he'd learned and observed. It wasn't impossible that she was the sort of psychopath that thrived on putting children through unending torment, but if that was the case she was clearly not the person one went to contact.

In either case, doing anything to Coil directly carried too much of a risk to his ultimate goal, which was to collect goodwill and form an alliance with this world's hidden masters.

Conversely, there was no getting away from the sad reality that this world was doomed as things stood. Something that said hidden masters had either resigned themselves to, or trusted too much in whatever thinker was leading them onwards.

The solution, at the end of the day, remained the same: upend the status quo enough prove that he could make a real difference. Rinse and repeat until they gave him a seat at the table.

Even without the majority of his abilities, he had almost everything in place to begin. To feel comfortable seeking an in with the public, saner elements of the world's true leadership. In other words, to finally infiltrate the Protectorate.

The real one, not the obvious fall guys here.

All he was missing was a sustainable and secure base of operations, enough supplies to outfit a sealing division, and an alibi or five.

“-. September 13, 2010 .-“

He didn't make it to five, but four wasn't bad.

The first one was a small one-room apartment in Boston, which he got by impersonating the late owner during a genjutsu-assisted change in ownership, after said owner tried to rape the young girl he used an admittedly taxing illusion combination to convincingly pass himself as.

The second was an off-the-grid homestead in Missouri, whose real owner was unlucky enough to go bulk shopping two townships over just in time for the Slaughterhouse Nine to drop by, a month or so past. As he was never identified or even reported missing, slipping into his life was as easy as using another fake face, and genjutsu on a couple of government employees to set up new identification and ‘recover’ his online account for tax payments. Unless something drastically changed, this would likely become his main base of operations. The tree hiding in the forest, as it were. Him, his liquid funds, and eventually the bulk of the guns, bombs, and rockets he’d hidden in eighteen different stashes throughout Brockton Bay City.

The third was in Chicago, in case his first choice fell through. He was able to steal a third identity and negotiate a long-term payment plan for a small condominium, instead of standard rent. The plunder from his infiltration missions wouldn’t last forever, but that was fine, achieving financial solvency was next on the list.

Finally, the fourth was a regular two-room apartment in Manhattan, New York, where he finally sat down and got to work on his grand debut. Which no one would be able to connect to him unless they had the best thinker powers on the planet.

Here, at least, he finally had a breakthrough, in that he figured out how to combine Yin and Yang energies to make sealing-capable ink. Which wasn’t so much *combination* as it was constructing an imaginary notion with Yin, and then filling it with enough Yang energy to make it real. He still needed blood to provide the template, but now it was just a small drop for every liter of ink, instead of needing to give himself anemia for everything bigger than an explosive tag.

Might this be the answer he was looking for? Could he perhaps apply this paradigm to *all* his abilities? Yin-Yang release was the apex of power on his old world, was it the complete opposite here?

Unfortunately, it wasn’t something he’d be able to exhaustively test with his Yang still so weak.

Maybe he was just too attached to the familiar. Perhaps the answers lay elsewhere. This world had abundant history and traditions to draw from. Maybe Onmyōdō or Wuxing would work better as foundation for his re-development.

In the meantime, it just so happened that his signature trump card was entirely a fuuinjutsu technique. Even if he couldn’t use it with the impunity of his prior life – for now – he’d tagged

everything and everyone he needed. Pre-written and charged seals should substitute adequately in lieu of the equivalent jutsu. He just needed to make enough of them ahead of time.

Constantly using up his energies and blood would completely halt his training, which was frustrating immediately after he finally had his epiphany, but a shinobi's life was one of sacrifice.

At the very least, he'd make money and reputation from the practice runs. His explosive, storage and barrier seals would provide a hefty source of income once he had his debut as a Rogue, despite the artificial barriers against it.

Equally important, they would hopefully intrigue the local Protectorate through their utility – and ambiguous Tinker/Striker nature – without leading to *too* much pressure to make him join them. Especially of the unsavory kind. He was optimistic by nature, but he had to be realistic.

The reason for his chosen route wasn't just to upend the board, but to see what reaction would ensue from a change towards unambiguous good. The obstructionist laws against making income from powers was evidence that parahumans were set up to fail even outside Brockton. If the hidden masters reacted negatively even after he fixed all of their problems, if they were evil...

Well. He'd have no choice but to adjust his aims and strategy accordingly.

He hoped it wouldn't come to that. Legend, at least, seemed to be as reasonable as his reputation.

But he wasn't taking any chances here.

He was taking all his chances somewhere else.

“-. October 10, 2010 .-“

At 9:45 AM, he walked into the New York Protectorate headquarters for his 10 AM appointment with the power testers. Unsurprisingly, he was told to either reschedule or wait.

He decided to wait. Took a seat and joined everyone else in the lobby in watching the news. The news about a sudden and shocking event last night in Brockton Bay that killed all Merchant, ABB and Empire capes.

Despite his distaste at how long it took them to mention the fatalities not parahuman, his reaction was natural, genuine, and perfectly appropriate to the situation.

After all, as a shinobi on a mission, Namikaze Minato was never less than a complete professional.