

Once we collectively decided that working in the PRT to our plan was more trouble than it was worth, our plans progressed rapidly. The PRT would have been the most complicated aspect of the whole scenario, between convincing them that Coil was a problem in the first place, to organizing their forces with ours. Hell, convincing them to take a back seat while we led the operation would have probably been a monumental accomplishment on its own.

So, without them, the plan was considerably more straightforward. Simple enough that, once we were done planning, we decided to run it at the nearest possible time, with Alya and Weaver watching and waiting for the perfect time to engage. It was around that time that the Marvelous Mage system spoke up and decided that capturing Coil was this cycle's quest.

I could feel it, resting in my brain. For capturing Coil, I would receive one charge, but I could also feel that a full three charges were available. Judging from previous experience, that meant there was more to this than just stuffing Coil into a cell. I needed to keep my eyes peeled.

Our opportunity finally presented itself at around two in the afternoon the following day, when Coil arrived at his base. He immediately changed into his uniform, before making his way into his office and sitting down at his desk. Immediately, he began making calls, most of them to his subordinates inside the bunker. It was clear he was setting up some sort of mission, as he organized his forces and sent out a half dozen of his mercenaries in a white van marked with the logo of a popular phone service provider.

When we realized what their mission was, our own mission suddenly became a lot more important.

"He is setting up surveillance at my *house*," Weaver hissed, standing up from her seat in our alley hiding spot. "He plans on putting cameras on our block and listening devices around the outside of our house! He knows who I am!"

"Fuck... okay, that makes this a lot more important. Is your dad home?" I asked quietly, letting out a sigh of relief when she shook her head. "Good. That means we don't have to worry about them. If we stop him now, and those six mercenaries just mean we have six less bodies to worry about."

"He knows who I am, Arc!" Weaver said, clearly agitated, and understandably so.

"I know, and I can imagine that's very upsetting," I said, standing up and putting my hands on her shoulders. "But no one is in immediate danger, and we can use this to our advantage. Once we have him in custody, we can find out how and why he knows. He won't be able to use that information properly if he is arrested. And if he somehow does, I promise you I will make you and your father safe."

Taylor tensed for a long moment, looking at me as if she was weighing my words. I expected Alya to warn me at any second that the bugs in the area were going insane. Instead, she was silent. Finally, after a good thirty seconds of the young woman nearly quivering in frustration and anger, she managed to calm down. She let out a few shaky breaths before

closing her eyes and focusing on her breathing. It was honestly kind of impressive, especially since she didn't lean on her swarm as a crutch.

After she calmed down, both Alya and her focused on watching Coil again, this time waiting for the supervillain to give his men the go command. With the mission ongoing, Coil and his people would be as distracted as possible, and while it was only a minor thing, every advantage was worth it, especially since we still didn't know what Coil's power was.

Finally, after several minutes of waiting, Coil gave the command for his team to approach Taylor's home and begin to set up their surveillance equipment. I smirked and nodded, handing Taylor a pair of teleport crystals. One to get the job done, and the other just in case something went wrong. I also handed Alya a pair, the elemental forming up beside me, her form the densest I had seen in this world.

While I prepared our two teleporters, Crow sent out messages to our teams that the mission was a go, and that the countdown would start in thirty seconds. We went over the plan one last time before we began to count down.

"Okay, guys, fifteen seconds," I said, gripping Alya's shoulder as Crow gripped onto Taylor's. "Ten... five, four, three, two, one, GO!"

Taylor and Crow vanished a split second before Alya teleported us away, our view rapidly shifting from a gross, dingy alleyway to concrete and metal. The room was brightly lit and minimalist, with a simple white desk, computer, and tower, all set on top. Sitting behind the computer, holding a radio in his hand, his eyes slowly going wide as he spotted us standing in the middle of his office, was Coil.

I fired off a spark of electricity, already charged and ready, across the office, looking to disorient the villain and keep him from pressing his panic button. The spark slapped against his shoulder, causing him to convulse once and hurl the radio from his hand. Rather than try to cast another spell to take him down, Alya simply dashed over to him, faster than anything I could manage, especially as she passed right through his desk. She carefully positioned herself to ensure that Coil kept his hands to himself, specifically away from his panic buttons.

I quickly rushed after the elemental, running around the desk while she shocked the villain every time he opened his mouth or reached out a hand. When I was finally by his side, I slapped a knock-out spell into his chest, the cape crumpling back against his chair.

With the target down, I finally got a good look at him. His costume was black, with a white snake coiling around his body. Combined with the fact that he was... worryingly skinny, it painted a disconcerting image. With him slumped in his chair, he looked like someone who had been starved, but was slowly recovering.

"Alright, well that's step one, let's get him out of here," I said to Alya with a nod, who put her hand on Coil's shoulder while I reached out and gripped hers.

The now familiar feeling of being teleported passed in a moment, and we were outside. Coil, who had been sitting in a chair, fell back on his ass rather unceremoniously, and beyond checking that he was still unconscious, nobody was really concerned. After checking on him, I stood to look around, confirming that we were surrounded by our allies. Along one side was New Wave, trusted heroes of Brockton Bay, ready to fly and defend the innocent should something go wrong. On the other side, the guardian spirits were assembled, shining through their various costumes and outfits. Further past them, we had nearly a hundred golems, all ready to charge in.

Well, some of them would charge in. Some of them would get a ride directly into the bunker, catching whoever was resisting off guard.

Only a few seconds after we arrived outside the bunker, appearing in a large parking lot where everyone had assembled, Weaver and Crow arrived. Crow had someone over their shoulder, a young adult dressed in their own costume, though it looked more like an undersuit that armor went over it.

"All good?" I asked, looking them both over, ready to heal them.

"Mission accomplished, no setbacks," Crow responded, sounding smug. "And I got to punch out a teenager!"

I rolled my eyes, cast a healing spell on the teen villain, before hitting him with a knock-out spell to be safe. The villain tensed and slumped before Crow placed him on the ground next to Coil.

"Okay, phase two is a go," I called out. "Start moving in!"

A solid two-thirds of the golems charged toward the major entrances we were near, while several others broke up into groups. I passed out teleport crystals to Weaver again, before her and Alya, with me along for the ride, bounced back and forth between the parking lot and the bunker, dropping off golems each time. In total, fifty golems charged through the main entrances with orders to disable any hostiles and arrest anyone else, while the remaining ones were teleported behind enemy lines.

We watched them charge in, full tilt, slamming through security doors, punching through concrete walls to disable those they could get through directly. It was honestly a little brutal to watch, especially when the first mercenaries attempted to stop them and were overrun and beaten down in short order.

Unfortunately, I only got to see the beginning of this, as I was staying on the outside, while Crow, Glory Girl, Lady Photon, and Manpower went in after the golem horde, to watch after them and clean up any issues they stumbled into. I stayed behind because I was the most flexible of the group, and I had Alya with me, and therefore could teleport anywhere I was needed, even after the group started to split up.

Needless to say, our forces tore through the mercenaries and traps like tissue paper. The tinker tech weapons were the only chance the mercenaries had at beating the golems. While the heavier traps, while they could do damage, they did not have the firepower to hold off a constant stream of the brass golems. Several explosive traps, deployable security turrets, and even a laser weapon that was stationed along one of the halls, clearly meant to clear the entire hall in one shot, all went off and either failed to do anything, or were quickly dispatched by golem reinforcements or the quick work of the team following them.

We also sent a pair of spirit guardians to intercept the team that had been sent to Weaver's home. They had succeeded in their mission, but were intercepted and apprehended as they reached the outer limits of the area we had cordoned off.

Weaver and I would spend some time cleaning her house when we were done with all this, making sure to clear every inch of her home, just to be sure.

In total, including the teleport apprehension of the Coil and the mysterious tinker, as well as the traveling group of mercenaries, it took a total of twenty-three minutes. It was around the tail end of that time that my first charge of my quest filled. Apparently the Marvelous Mage system considered Coil captured. Rather than feel reassured, I could only think about the remaining charges, and what I had missed.

Eventually the PRT and Protectorate did arrive on scene, joining us in the form of Velocity, Miss Militia, Armsmaster, and at least three dozen PRT officers, most of whom didn't exactly seem to know what to do and so focused on making a perimeter and slowly evacuating the buildings that the underground base was built under.

"So you became aware of this base, how exactly?" Armsmaster said stoically, standing straight, his halberd strapped on his back.

"The same way we found our ABB and Empire targets. We have a cape who specializes in overwatch, and can scan large areas at once," I explained, having no issue revealing that since I was pretty sure they had put it together at this point. "We were looking for Coil specifically as we suspected he was not as small-time as was believed."

"And what made you believe that?" Miss Militia asked, the patriotic heroine asked, her body language much more relaxed than her associates.

"During the Empire riots, the Empire fielded dozens of groups, all of them armed with weapons and equipment you might expect from a gang with decent resources," Lady Photon explained. "However, we also apprehended two groups, and heard reports of several more that were armed much more professionally, with tinker tech weapons and equipment. A small-time gang would not have the resources to equip and field so many groups like that at once."

"Logical conclusion," Armsmaster agreed, nodding his head once. "Why did you not involve the PRT? This operation has affected a significant portion of the city. We have already found several scorched-earth programs throughout Coils, including the release of several secret identities to the public. If Dragon did not offer her assistance, and I did not have a

high-bandwidth connection to her systems, several of them would have been beyond my skills to stop."

"There was evidence that Coil was making some sort of push," I explained. "His activity during the Empire's riots did not match his usual MO, and we were afraid he was going to make a push to take more territory or an attack against us. Plus, without evidence of his power, we had to react as if he were a power thinker, as that is the closest we could conclude. We also knew he had access to PRT files, which we didn't immediately catch on to being important, though we probably should have."

"PRT files?" Miss Militia asked, a frown just touching her eyes as she tilted her head. "Files on what?"

"The first few pages, which were all we could read since he didn't turn to the next few, were an analysis of the current state of the bay, and how you planned on changing to better fit it," Weaver said, attention turning to her quickly. "It also contained information on possible incoming threats."

"That document is less than three days old," Velocity, who was switching between listening and zipping around the area. "How did Coil get his hands on it?"

"A question we will ask once he wakes up," Armsmaster assured his coworker. "Until then, we need to continue-"

Armsmaster stopped as a distant sound, something from along the quickly established PRT perimeter. We turned to find a pair of PRT officers half-wrestling with a blonde teenage girl, who appeared to be around Taylor's age. What really caught my attention was the domino mask she was wearing. It took me a moment to figure out who she was.

"Is that... Tattletale?" I asked, tilting my head. "Last I heard, she was a villain, right? Weaver, what is she saying?"

"She is demanding to be brought over here, says she has something to say," Weaver responded, closing her eyes to focus, a small swarm coming up over from a nearby alleyway. "Says she has something really important to tell us that will save a lot of lives."

"...I've only dealt with the Undersiders once, and that was way back when I was just starting out," I admitted. "And the first thing I did was send Tattletale away so I wouldn't have to worry about a thinker getting in my head. Is she worth it?"

"The Undersiders are mostly small-time, and they generally do not harm civilians," Armsmaster said, reaching up to tap his helmet. "Under the circumstances, considering she all but just turned herself in, I'm willing to hear what she says."

The hero quickly spoke into his helmet radio, and the PRT officers began guiding the small-time villain to us, the young woman repeatedly trying to get them to move faster. When she was close enough to be heard clearly, she immediately started talking.

"Coil has his base set up with C4 to destroy the bunker and any evidence it might have!" She said, catching everyone's attention. "It's enough explosives to bring several of the buildings built on top of it down as well!"