

As one might imagine, such a dramatic statement earned a variety of reactions. Contessa and Number Man both simply stared at me, the latter finally looking up from his notepad to do so. Alexandria's eyes widened in surprise, though judging from her expressions so far, she might as well have been jumping up and down. Eidolon gripped the edge of the table like he was trying to break it with his grip strength alone, while Doctor Mother stared at him with open interest. Legend was the most reassuring, as he looked happy, like someone had just helped him stand back on his feet after being knocked down.

"How exactly does that work?" Alexandria asked, beating most of the group to the bunch.

"I go through a cycle in which I gain energy to invest in unlocking new concepts," I explained, having long since worked out a simplified explanation of my powers. "The first thing I bought was healing and lightning. Since then, I've invested in a whole host of other things, first building up a solid foundation. I naturally found my way to a lot of tinkering concepts because of their pure potential, but I'm not locked to it."

I raised my hands and wordlessly cast my simplest lightning spell, the spark of electricity jumping from one hand to the other, far below my threshold for damage.

"The non-tinker powers don't require equipment or preparation, I can just do them," I explained, casting a healing spell that I let disappear, just wanting the golden glow. "Yes, they sometimes have... exotic verbal or somatic requirements, but that's just how my theme works."

While it wasn't a complete breakdown of my powers, it covered the salient points in a system that they understood. It also held back a few aspects, which was on purpose. Maybe it wasn't the smartest idea to hold back when considering such a dire circumstance, but the sudden reveal of a fucking raid boss that dwarfed the Endbrings in power, apparently without even trying, was bringing out my paranoia.

"How long have you been upgrading your abilities?" Doctor Mother asked, her eyes filled with mental calculations as she openly judged my ability.

"I started working not long after I got my powers," I revealed. "A little time for build up, but not more than a week or so."

"You've become this powerful in such a short time?" Legend asked excitedly. "That's impressive."

"A good chunk of that is my tinkering," I assured them. "It's a serious force multiplier, especially because the abilities I unlock are often worth the stuff I make. My staff, for example? That wasn't a weapon, but was more of a focus, something to use my abilities through."

Something about my statement must have caught Eidolon the wrong way, because he pushed off from the table, leaning back in his chair aggressively. The kind of move a child does when they want attention, but don't want to ask for attention. It seemed we were all prepared to ignore it, since we clearly had more important things to talk about, but he didn't like that.

"Are we seriously going to believe this?" He asked, gesturing to me, speaking up when no one asked him what was wrong. "He is clearly a tinker, it explains everything, and we have seen him build multiple examples of items that give powers. Now he throws some sparks, and we just trust him that he is a watered-down version of Dauntless and me? He clearly built something that lets him heal and do his lightning, to pass off as more powerful than he is."

Rather than rising to his anger, I simply looked at Doctor Mother with a raised eyebrow. She had successfully chastised him before, so I was curious if she would step up again. Instead, Legend spoke up first.

"Eidolon, why are you being so aggressive?" He asked with a frown. "This is fantastic news. We finally have someone who can stand at the same level as you-"

"No," He said, standing roughly, his chair almost tipping over. "You have a replacement for me when my powers finish fading. Door to Houston, Texas."

Before anyone could respond, he walked through the portal as it appeared, vanishing into the portal doorway that seemed to be above a vast layer of clouds. While he was still clearly angry, his hunched walk told a story of defeat rather than anger. The portal shut just after he passed through, the room darkening slightly as the sunlight coming through it vanished.

"His powers are fading?" I asked, looking across the others. "Why?"

"We don't know," Doctor Mother admitted. "His most powerful abilities are getting harder to call on and less powerful. Some are almost impossible for him to use."

"His frustration is unfortunate, but understandable," Contessa revealed. "His whole life has been about fighting Scion, and he is slowly losing the ability to do so. With this latest increase in time and your reveal, it's like his life's work has just been declared useless. He could handle it better, but he isn't as bad as he is coming off."

I frowned, looking back at where the portal had been. Contessa's words were a bit dramatic, but... I suppose they were understandable. I'm not sure I would react quite like him, but I could at least see where it was coming from.

"Perhaps we should refocus," Alexandria suggested. "I will talk with Eidolon later, for now-"

"Has he tried pulling a thinker power that will explain or help him?" I asked with a frown. "I mean, he has access to a significant library, right? Including thinker powers? That probably includes at least one focused on Parahumans, right? Or maybe some sort of self-diagnostic power?"

"That...is a suggestion I will bring up when I talk to him," Alexandria said diplomatically, though I couldn't tell if it was because my idea was dumb or because she was trying to hide the fact that *she* felt dumb. "For now, we have more important things to focus on. Do you understand the scope of what we are attempting to achieve, Arcanum?"

"My mind is having a hard time wrapping itself around it, but... yes," I said, dragging myself back to a concept my brain had been happy to be distracted from. "This is... it is more than I could have ever imagined. But with enough time..."

I trailed off, rubbing my face as I considered what the group had explained. The concept of a being capable of wiping out entire planets, connecting realities together, the nature of powers, the group itself... It was overwhelming. Especially since they were now obviously looking at me as if I were potentially the solution to everything they had been looking for.

I was starting to regret telling them about the nature of my powers at all. They had likely been approaching me with the idea of building something for now.

Now I was their silver bullet, and all I could think about was how rare it was for a bullet to survive its usage intact.

"I... I need time to consider... everything," I said, shaking my head, standing from my chair. "This is... More than I could have ever predicted. I thought that the Endbringers were the endgame, now..."

"I'm not sure that's a good idea," Alexandria said, her tone sending a chill running down my spine as she stood, focused directly on me. "If you truly are what we are looking for, then letting you return to Earth Bet puts you in danger we can't risk."

"I appreciate your concern," I said, giving her the chance to rethink her statement. "But I have things I need to work on, and I have responsibilities. I will not just vanish because-"

"We are talking about *trillions* of lives, Arcanum," Alexandria stated, pushing through my words. "I understand it is unfortunate, but for the greater good, you need to stay here where it's safe."

"By the sounds of it, nowhere is safe," I responded, though there wasn't any heat in my voice. "If Scion is as big a threat as you say, then this Earth is just as in danger as any other."

In truth, I understand what she was getting at because... she was at least partially right. I wanted to leave, to see Olivia, to pace around, and most importantly, find a way to verify what they were telling me. But it was hard to argue against the fact that trillions of lives trumped whatever I wanted. Still, that didn't mean I was about to let them lock me away for my own good.

"Look. Brockton Bay is just about the safest place on the planet, and over the next few weeks, it's going to get even safer," I explained, knowing that Kali was going to start absorbing huge amounts of power from our newly installed barrier system.

She would likely get the energy to absorb Brockton Bay completely by the end of the month, though growing did get more and more difficult the larger she grew, the point of diminishing returns was far past the city limits.

"Let me go home, let me wrap my head around this," I asked, not because I thought she could stop me, but because I didn't want to make enemies. "There isn't anything I can do but

twiddle my thumbs while I wait for my power to grow, so let me spend it building ways to take down Behemoth."

"We can't allow you to participate in that fight," Doctor Mother added. "You barely survived fighting Leviathan. One of the central points of this meeting was to convince you to sit out from the next one."

"I know," I admitted. "If this is all true, then I agree, I can't risk myself. But that doesn't mean I can't work on making better weapons, more equipment."

Of course, all of what I was saying depended on me verifying what they were saying, which I didn't actually know how to do yet. But when I figured it out...

Well, part of me was still hoping they were all insane.

"Why are you so confident that you will be safe?" Legend asked.

"Because my ability is bullshit," I responded, not willing to reveal Kali's existence to them. "I won't go looking for trouble. The city is basically locked down, and I survived a fight with Leviathan. I won't jinx it by saying anything definitive..."

"There are threats you shouldn't underestimate, powers like your annihilation rifles that will harm you no matter how durable you are."

"You are the ones who claimed to have a cape that has a victory thinker power," I pointed out, nodding towards Contessa.

"There are blindspots-"

"And you said you can work around them," I countered calmly. "Look, you guys made your point. I'm on board, and I won't be putting myself at risk. But I refuse to abandon my objective of killing the Endbringers."

The group was quiet for a while, and I could almost feel Alexandria as she considered how hard it would be for her to beat me down enough to accept her orders. Thankfully, before she could try and find out, Legend spoke up.

"You don't actually need our permission to leave, do you?" he guessed, examining me with a raised eyebrow.

"No," I responded with confidence, "My teleportation spell doesn't differentiate between space like that."

In truth, I had been worried about exotic effects stopping the teleport, so when I had first made it, it was a particularly robust design. Technically, they had just given me access to this planet, but I didn't have access to anything else. I had been focusing too much on Earth Bet, specifically Brockton Bay, to consider the possibilities of reality hopping.

For now, I didn't have access to anything powerful enough to travel outside of the cluster, nor did I have a way to anchor to anything. I could maybe find a detailed enough image of Earth Aleph to find a jumpspool there, but there wasn't much of a point.

"On top of that, you clearly aren't taking me seriously enough if you are throwing out threats and deciding that you can dictate what I can and can't do," I added, giving Alexandria in particular a look. "I will remind you that my blaster effects got through the Siberian, the cape who got through your invulnerability. Further..."

I tapped the table and, with a sliver of focus, accessed one of the annihilation spells stored in my hand. A purple casting symbol grew from where I tapped, and a large chunk of the table, about the size of a manhole cover, was annihilated. All the people at the table quickly moved back, with both Legend and Alexandria lifting off the ground. Nobody moved to attack, but they were clearly wary of the purple magic.

"I need time," I said, no longer trying to convince them, simply stating what was going to happen. "I will be careful, but right now, I need to go."

"I think it is a mistake," Doctor Mother responded. "But it is also clear we cannot truly contain you. We will be in touch."

She turned and left the room, Contessa and Number Man following her out. I was pretty sure it was some sort of power move, leave before I could to show she was still in control, but I simply shook my head, looking towards Legend and Alexandria.

"As hellish as this is, thank you for filling me in," I said, getting nods from both of them. "I'll be in touch soon, when I can wrap my head around all of this."

Without anything else, I teleported away, appearing back on the teleport pad. I stood there for a long moment, looking down the path into my home.

"Alya... did all of that actually happen?" I asked. "Did... did we actually see all that?"

"We did," She responded, forming into her semi-corporeal form, flowing beside me. "I explored the twisted flesh on the other side of the portal. It was... significantly worse than what you could see. I'm not sure mortal minds are strong enough to see some of it."

I nodded, though I still wasn't really there. I could feel the weight pressing on me, feel the goal posts of what I was aiming for suddenly get thrown far into the distance. An entity that could destroy Earth? Destroy hundreds, thousands of Earths...

"William. You need to focus," my soul-linked partner said, doing her best to keep me from spiraling. "We can do this. Magic can do anything; we just need time."

"Time... right," I said, shaking my head, before shaking myself free of the crushing weight and walking along the path.

The first thing I needed to do was to make Olivia as strong as possible. It wouldn't do much in the face of someone like Scion, but I refused to leave her in just her cloak any longer, especially since she had already agreed to some upgrades. Then I could think about confirming what I had seen and been told.