

Tattletale's sudden reveal was met with a lot of yelling, everyone trying to ask her questions at once. I could only curse to myself, realizing exactly where the last two charges for my quest were about. Eventually, Armsmaster was able to shout over everyone else, at least partially directing the situation.

"Do you have any proof of that?" Armsmaster asked, finally silencing his team members. "How have you figured this out?"

"I'm psychic, I can read his mind," she explained, opening her mouth to continue. "I-"

"That was a lie," Armsmaster said, the two PRT agents gripping her tighter. "The only reason you're not being put in cuffs is because your first statement wasn't. How do you know there are explosives?"

"How- Seriously, a lie detector in your helmet?" Tattletale asked, looking like she was gonna say something before she shook her head. "It doesn't matter. Listen, my power... it lets me infer things from stuff I already know. Give me a bit of info on a person, and I can figure out their PIN number. Show me a picture and I can tell you what they had for lunch the day it was taken."

"So how do you know anything about Coil?" Miss Militia.

"Because... Because I worked for him, okay?" She explained, growing annoyed that we weren't just taking her words at face value, but actually forcing her to explain herself. "It wasn't willingly, though. He recruited me against my will, at gunpoint."

"Truth," Armsmaster responded. "I was under the impression you were a member of the Undersiders."

"I am!" Tattletale responded. "Now isn't the time for that. By activating his security, you started a countdown timer. If we don't deactivate it, it's going to go off and his base will explode, collapsing all of those buildings."

For a moment, her words hung in the air, and we looked to Armsmaster to confirm she was telling the truth. Rather than say anything, he started barking orders through his helmet radio, ordering the evacuation, which had been slow but steady, to pick up the pace. While he did that, I focused on Tattletale.

"Do you have any idea how to disable it?" I asked

"I... I think you can do it from his office computer, or at the central server room."

"Dragon is already inside his system, it's not there," Armsmaster cut in. "She would have already detected it."

"I... Then... I don't..." She trailed off, wincing slightly before spotting something behind me. Suddenly, her eyes went wide and she pointed. "It's a sensor on his body! If he gets too far away or he dies, it goes off to cover his escape or kill whoever killed him!"

I turned to see a PRT van, the same one that troopers had led Coil to, pulling away from their spot and driving down the road. Once again, Armsmaster shouted through his radio, but the van didn't slow. If anything, it sped up.

"He has spies and contacts all throughout the PRT!" Tattletale revealed. "They are working for him!"

I turned and took off, pushing my flight to its fastest, tearing down the street after the van. If Tattletale was right, if that van got far enough away, a whole lot of people were going to die. As I sped down the street, I flipped in the air, putting my feet first and slowing myself just enough to slam into the back door and not liquify everyone inside. Instead, I punched through the doors into the back, where Coil was sitting, just starting to pull his handcuffs off.

Of course, the villain didn't even have time to think before the partially crumpled door I punched through slapped him in the face, breaking his nose and knocking him unconscious. The van swerved, the drivers shocked by the impact, almost driving off the road. In fact, the only reason that they didn't, slamming into the shops along the street, was that I quickly tapped into my magic and brought forth a huge tangle of thick vines, wrapping around the vehicle, slowing it down and all but tearing out the engine. The impact and sudden stop sent Coil and two PRT troopers in the front slamming around inside the vehicle. I cursed, used one of my staff's storage crystals to cast a mass healing wave, before snagging Coil and teleporting back to the scene.

I arrive back just in time for Coil's nose to snap back in place, making several people wince.

"What about the troopers?" Miss Militia asked, looking ready to run to the van to check on them. "Are they okay?"

"They are fine, healed, and captured. The vines are sealing the door shut," I assured the America-themed heroine, practically dropping Coil to the ground and focusing on Tattletale. "What's next?"

"We... I need to see his office," The young villain finally said, quickly recovering from my dramatic move. "I need to be standing in his office and look around."

"I can do that," I nodded. "Any idea how much is left on the timer?"

"No idea," She admitted, going pale behind her domino mask. "But we need to hurry."

I nodded to put my hand on her shoulder, and before we both vanish, Tattletale speaks up again, loudly.

"Coil, we need Coil!" She insisted. "In case there is something I missed. Even a slight twitch could tell me exactly what I need to know!"

I cursed, reached down, and before anyone could stop me, I vanished with Tattletale and Coil in tow. I was taking a considerable risk, since we still didn't know what his power was, but stopping this catastrophe from happening took priority. We landed in his office, the same

minimalist, military-esque room as before. It looked mostly the same, with the only difference being a whole lot of boot prints on the ground, as well as some spent shell casings. It appeared that the PRT and the mercenary team that had gotten into it here or nearby.

The blood splatter, but lack of corpses told its own story, but for obvious reasons, both of us were focused on the task at hand.

The second we landed, Tattletale began her search, tossing drawers, shelves, and cabinets, searching through each one. Finally, after a full minute, she pulled out the drawer of a sturdy-looking cabinet, only to find not more stolen PRT files, but a sophisticated timer system that was slowly ticking down from eight minutes. It was built into the cabinet, the drawer itself modified to contain the device, which was little more than a keyboard and a countdown timer.

"Okay, okay, it's five minutes left, I can do this," Tattletale whispered, psyching herself up before reaching out and touching the device, only for it to let out our warning screech. "Fuck! I -I can't figure it out, it's a custom model and the guy who installed it is dead... No, that's not important!"

"What do you need?" I asked, looking at the young villain, who was beginning to focus. "Focus Tattletale, what do you need?"

"I need... I need.. I-" She desperately looked around at the mess she had made, the weapons against the wall, the dirt and shell casings, before her eyes rested on Coil. "I need to see his face! Take off his costume!"

"Are you sure? If we-"

"Yes, I need to see him!"

She crossed the distance and grabbed his mask. It refused to come undone until I physically tore the fabric apart, revealing a very skinny black man, older than I was by at least ten years, maybe more.

"Wake him up!" She shouted. "I need to ask him questions!"

With a quick, invigorating healing spell, I woke the super villain up, a flash of golden light sinking into his body. He jerked suddenly and tried to pull away, but I had a vice grip on his arm. He wasn't going anywhere without losing it first. When he realized his mask wasn't on, he changed tactics, his face shifting to one of near panic, colored with relief as he saw me.

"Oh, thank god, a Hero! Listen, Coil kidnapped me and forced me into the costume," He explained, almost pleaded. "My name is Thomas Calvert, I'm a consultant with the PRT, he is trying to destabilize-"

"He's lying," Tattletale said, shaking her head with a grin, despite the stressful situation. "...about the kidnapping part at least. He is actually Thomas Calvert. That's going to be fun for the PRT to explain."

I watched Coil's, or Calvert's, reaction to Tattletale's words. It was small, barely a blip, but his face shifted to a scowl, looking at her with a ripping anger that promised retribution. I don't know if he was reacting to his subordinate betraying him, or just being called out, but it was enough to confirm that Tattletale was on to something. Which was good, considering I didn't trust Tattletale in the slightest.

"Ask your questions, Tattletale. We are on a timer."

That statement seemed to catch Coil's attention, his eyes going wide as he realized exactly what sort of situation he was in. His scowl returned in full force, this time staying on his face.

"Real cold, Boss, it doesn't even turn off when you come back into range, huh?" Tattletale asked, a sliver of her overconfident smugness returning. "Real scorched earth type move. Still happy with your investment now that you're stuck in it?"

"I don't-"

"Four five B seven... eight Y three four R," The young villain rattled off, reaching out to start typing into the device. She smirked when Coil tensed up, before continuing to type in on the control device, her choices not matching her words at all.

After a minute of poking and prodding Coil into apparently revealing the code to her, Tattletale entered the last digit, and the device deactivated, slowly counting down red numbers blinking before vanishing, the device beeping loudly before going dormant.

"Is that it?" I asked, giving Tattletale a look, ignoring that Coil was now struggling to pull free of my hand.

"That's it for now," she responded. "He has a few sleeper surprises, I think, but those won't activate for a day... Or maybe a few days."

The teen stretched, wearing a smug look on her face now that the stressful situation was over. She started to walk around the room, peaking at things, pretending to be casual. She was, however, very clearly angling toward the computer. I guess she had forgotten that Dragon was still in the system, scouring it for anything dangerous.

"By the way, it's nice to finally meet you, Arcanum," She said, looking over with a superior smirk. "Aren't you going to apologize for last time? You were so rude, and now I just saved who knows how many lives."

"I have a feeling the reason for that was not as altruistic as you would pretend," I said. "And I won't apologize for last time, just like I won't apologize for this."

She was just a few steps away from the computer desk when, however, her ability worked, it seemed to pick up what I was about to do. With one hand, I slapped a knockout spark into Coil, before doing the same to her, jumping across the room to do it. She started to shout

no, reaching behind her back for something, but I wasn't about to let her pick up on anything else from me, or let her have access to the computer now that the crisis was over.

She was out before she could finish drawing the gun that was hidden in her costume.

I grabbed both villains and teleported back to the surface, handing them both to Miss Militia and a pair of PRT troopers. I did take a moment to pull Coil's suit back over his head, for no other reason than I didn't want to listen to anyone complain about me breaking the unwritten rules. They could worry about that later, when Coil woke up and started testing Armsmaster's lie-detecting helmet.

"Did it work?" Armsmaster asked. "Did you diffuse the explosives?"

"Yeah, the danger has passed for now," I assured them. "According to Tattletale, he might have some sleeper cells ready to cause problems, but you have a day or two to figure those out, and I'm pretty sure she can help you uncover them."

"Why is she unconscious? That is counterproductive to securing her help," Armsmaster pointed out. "Did something happen?"

"She was trying to get access to Coil's computer, maybe to get access to something he had?" I responded, shaking my head. "Plus, I wasn't interested in letting her use her power on me. She should wake up in an hour, I was purposely light with her stunning."

The two villains were quickly taken away, in separate vans, with Miss Militia traveling with Coil this time to watch over him. I did not envy her or anyone associated with the PRT and Portecterate, once they figured out who Coil was. I wasn't particularly versed in the make up the PRT, but having a consultant, or anyone associated directly with them turn out to be a super villain...

I could only imagine that a firing spree was imminent for Director Piggot.

After watching the villains be taken away, we focused back on watching the PRT continue clearing out the bunker. The majority of my team, who had hung back and helped continue evacuating people while I worked with Tattletale to stop the base from self-destructing, waited for around an hour or so before it was clear that the situation was over. Meanwhile, I waited until all three of my quest charges were filled before leaving. I shook hands with Armsmaster, sent our golems and guardians back out into the city, before everyone met back up at the Dallon household.

We celebrated the win, ordering pizza and sharing a few drinks, before I headed back to the forest, Crow in tow. She stayed in one of the guest trees, while I spent the night patching up and remaining with several golems. There was plenty of damage to fix, even if most of it was repaired with a simple metal control spell.

It was just about two in the morning when I finished repairing the damaged golems, setting them aside for the guardians to pick up as they passed through the forest compound.

Part of me considered going to sleep, but I had already cast the anti-sleep spell to help me focus, so the chances of me actually catching any rest were low to none.

Instead, I started a fire in the fire pit, tossing logs and sitting down in one of the comfortable chairs. I still had plenty of work to do, so I settled in to work through designing several more rituals, some very basic enchantments, and redesigning the geomantic ritual to include multiple people at once.

With any luck, I would be able to make the entirety of the New Wave decently potent brute sometime the following afternoon.