

The next few days were busy, but not overly complicated.

I spent most of my time working on the soldier project, putting together the baseline of equipment and building on top of the boots and cuffs that I had already designed and made. On top of that, we ran several patrols, working with New Wave to provide Weaver with as much experience as possible. She was an incredibly fast learner, easily picking up the lessons that Lady Photon and the other experienced members of New Wave had for her, and adapting quickly to the flight gear and super strength I gave her.

By the end of my week, with half of this cycle over, the bug controller moved as if she had always been able to fly, and as if her added strength was something she had been born with. I liked to think I had gotten the hang of flying, but she was honestly better. Perhaps the connection between some insects that could fly helped her wrap her mind around the concept.

Or, perhaps, she was just better at it than I was. People had talents, after all, and while it was a bit strange to have a talent in something that was usually impossible, it was far from the strangest thing I had seen or heard. Her ability to multitask so deeply could also have something to do with the ease with which she developed the skill.

Days continued to move, and on the ninth day of my cycle, Weaver and New Wave finally found where Coil was hiding. While the discovery was somewhat anticlimactic, given the ground we had already covered and the already excluded possible locations, the base itself was a shock of massive proportions.

While discovering it was nearly assumed, none of us had come even *close* to anticipating just how well off the villain was. His base was huge, and judging by part of its design, it was clearly an off-the-books Endbringer shelter. Both Weaver and Alya had seen what those looked like through their abilities and could easily confirm that, at some point, someone had thought that's how they were being built. The first two floors of the bunker turned lair were essentially, according to the two overwatch capes, nearly identical to the Endbringer shelters. The rooms had been repurposed and broken up with internal dividers, but their design was clear.

Deeper into the large underground structure, everything quickly shifted into a legitimate supervillain bunker or lair, complete with everything from medical rooms, prison cells, an armory, and just about everything you could imagine in between.

It was honestly hard not to be impressed in a morbid and concerning way, as Alya, Weaver, and I spent several hours creating a comprehensive sketch of the facility and its occupants.

"This guy... he is an honest to god bond villain," I said, sitting in a tucked-in corner of an alleyway, rolling up the crude but effective outline of the bunker's layout. "I'm surprised you guys didn't find a cat in his office."

Weaver and I were hidden in an alcove along a blind alley, hidden from the rest of the world, far enough from Coil's base that it was barely in range of Alya and Weaver's power. Crow was also with us, acting as a look-out by hiding in the shadows of a rooftop AC box, completely invisible. Between our rather effective hiding place, and the fact that I teleported us directly there, I was reasonably confident that no one knew we were there. I absolutely did not want to get spotted moving around the area in a way that would tip off Coil.

"I'm just shocked no one has noticed he is here," Weaver said, shaking her head. "That was thirty armed soldiers, just hanging out, ready to do whatever he says."

"Not to mention all of the equipment, the food shipments," I pointed out. "He might have access to a stranger to move things in... or maybe a mover? Either way, we need to assume he had assets in play. Is he still in his office?"

"...Yeah, still reading PRT reports in his costume," She responded. "Are you sure that watching him like this isn't against the rules?"

"He was in costume. Just because you noticed him before he was in costume is not our fault," I assured the novice cape, patting the armored plate that ran along her shoulder. "As long as we don't make an effort to figure out who he is, and we don't follow him once he is out of costume, we are fine."

In all honesty, if it came down to it, once we committed to capturing him, I would almost assuredly ignore the "unwritten rules" and chase the supervillain down, even if he was out of costume. I wouldn't drag Weaver, Crow, or New Wave with me, but I wasn't about to let a villain like Coil get away just because he was hiding behind convenient rules. Not to mention the fact that, not long after Coil arrived at his admittedly impressive lair, he triggered this cycle's quest. My powers clearly wanted him behind bars pretty badly.

Eventually, when our surveillance was done, Crow dropped down to us from the roof, and I teleported us away to the Dallan household, where we quickly entered through the back door. Most of New Wave was there to greet us, save for Laserdream, since she had classes.

After a brief greeting, we headed down to the remodeled basement, the now familiar meeting space of New Wave. The table, which had maps of Brockton Bay spread over it, many marked with patrol routes and old territory lines, was quickly cleared before Taylor and I spread out the newly completed map of Coil's bunker across the table. The finished product consisted of several pages, each large page corresponding to a separate floor. Once everyone was settled in, I went over what we had uncovered.

"In total, there are six floors," I explained, gesturing to the map. "The top two seem to emulate the Endbringer shelter pretty closely, but have been converted into a storage area. Below that, we start to see his real lair."

I went over the general structure, marking off points of interest, such as the workshops, the barracks, and the armory. Before I could go into more detail, like talking about the people who inhabited that space, Glory Girl spoke up.

"So... is there a reason we are worried?" the young heroine asked, floating slightly above the table, looking down at the various maps. "Why not just flood the place with your golems?"

"That... is definitely an option," I admitted, looking over at the rest of the team. "I'm concerned about what sort of traps or backup plans might be in store for us. This villain managed to create an entire supervillain lair in one of the most populated portions of the city. Not only that, but it seems he might have been running... operations during that whole time. There is no way someone working like that doesn't have his lair trapped."

"You and Weaver couldn't find any traps?" Amy asked, sitting back in her seat. "You wrote down how many bathroom stalls there were, but no traps?"

"There are a few suspicious things we marked down," I pointed out, tapping a corridor lined with what we *thought* might be pressure plates. "But both Alya and Weaver have limitations. Alya can't see where there is no air, and Weaver can't see where bugs can't go. The entire building could be stuffed to the gills with mines or C4, and we wouldn't know as long as they were sealed up tight in the walls or something."

The group winced at the rather horrifying idea, before we started poking holes in the bunker's design, trying to find a gap in its security.

"We need a thinker," Manpower eventually said, sitting back in His chair. "Someone who can pick these traps out while we move."

"Or, I could make a few solutions to cover our bases," I pointed out. "I'll have to make them... things I cast rather than items, but I think I can make it work."

"Having you head the whole operation is going to seriously slow us down," Lady Photon pointed out. "With this many floors and this many well-armed mercenaries, we can't afford to follow behind you and wait for you to clear every hallway."

I chewed on my lip, nodding in understanding as I looked at the crude sketches I had made, listening to Alya and Weaver's description. Slowly but surely, a thought pushed its way into my head. An idea that had, somehow, never come to me before.

"What if we are thinking way too hard about this?" I asked rhetorically, a frown forming on my face. "All we need is Coil and his capes, right? Once we have him, and any other capes he has in custody, then everything else just becomes a matter of time. I might even feel more comfortable just throwing the golems at the problem until it solves itself."

I reached out and tapped two different spots on the maps.

"This is some sort of workshop, with someone who we think is a tinker inside. He is on the young side, possibly still a teenager, and appears to be sleeping in a room connected to the lab," I explained. When everyone but Weaver started to shout, I raised my hands to hold them off. "Yes, I should have started with him, but he is fine. We watched him for a good thirty

minutes, and he seemed to be there willingly, at least on some level. He made a phone call to his mother, made himself a frozen pizza, and spent most of his time tinkering."

"So... he is willingly working with Coil?" Lady Photon asked.

"We... couldn't tell. But, he seemed to be in good health and not actively in danger, hence the lack of panic," I explained. "Yes, getting him out is a top priority, but putting our capture of Coil in danger because a teenager who whined for two minutes straight cause he was out of orange soda would be stupid. If that's his biggest complaint, he can sit for another day or so."

That didn't exactly make everyone happy, but they at least nodded in agreement. It was rapidly becoming blatantly obvious that, whoever Coil was, whatever his power was, if he even had one, everyone had been underestimating him. Jumping the gun because he had a possibly underage villain working for him was not going to do us any good.

"This is Coil's office. He seems to spend the most time here," I continued. "The room is decent, has an attached bedroom, a gun rack, and equipment near the door, and a panic button under the desk. If we could get in and extract the two capes from the scenario, we stand a much better chance of de-escalating any issues with the rank and file. Hell, if we wanted to, we could pass it off to the PRT, and they can negotiate, offer favorable terms, or do whatever it is they do to de-escalate a scenario. But without the leader and the tinker, the group is spinning in the drain."

"How do we extract them?" Manpower asked, raising an eyebrow. "We were just discussing the possibility of traps."

"By teleporting directly into their rooms," I said with a smirk. "Both Alya and Weaver have seen the interior of the rooms with enough detail that they should be able to lead a teleport directly into each room. Crow and I go after Coil, while Weaver and a few others extract the tinker. Then, whoever is waiting at the top, whether it be golems and guardians or PRT forces, can move in to work on the mercenaries. Honestly, I'm a bit disappointed I never had the idea to let Ayla lead a teleport before. It makes perfect sense, given her ability to see inside structures easily."

"I... are you sure I get enough information through my bugs?" Weaver asked, sounding a bit nervous. "My sight and hearing is still strained and doesn't always come through crystal clear."

"We can spend some time practicing," I assured her. "Until you're confident you can get it right. We'll need to spend some time organizing everything and decide whether we want to involve the PRT or not. If they are even willing to participate"

"That's the easy part," Glory Girl said, rolling her eyes. "Just let them have the credit, they will jump at the opportunity."

"She is being dramatic, but... she is also not wrong," Lady Photon added. "IF we want them to help, if we can prove that our plan is solid, they will likely agree to it in exchange for controlling the media attention."

"Well... as long as they don't invite the media to the actual operation, I really don't care how they handle it," I responded, shaking my head. "I don't care who gets credit, as long as it gets done right."

Once the general plan was established, we began discussing the specifics. Details were important when working with such a complicated situation. Additionally, if we decided to bring the PRT in, we needed to have most of the details planned out in a coherent chain, not just a general plan of attack. At least, we did if we wanted them to take our idea seriously.

Of course, involving the PRT was not really necessary. I could just throw my golems at the problem, setting off whatever traps were in place, whatever security they had waiting for them, while Taylor and I teleported in and grabbed Coil and his tinker. The golems could handle the goons by virtue of pure numbers, while taking Coil and his capes out of the equation would hopefully keep things simple.

The problem was, this wasn't a raid on some random Empire warehouse, or ABB drug storage house. This was an honest-to-goodness bunker, built under a heavily populated portion of the city. Coming in, stomping the enemy flat with wild use of magic and parahuman powers was not an option. We needed to keep the situation on the surface calm, with a solid calming presence.

Again, that wasn't anything we couldn't necessarily handle...

The longer we talked about it, the longer we discussed the idea, the more and more we all soured on the idea of bringing the PRT in on the issue. We had the cannon fodder to do it safely, we had the numbers to keep the civilians safe, in the form of the guardians, and we could easily get in and out of the huge facility.

Hell, we could even teleport a good chunk of the golems directly into the bunker, ensuring the mercenaries wouldn't be able to dig in and use their fortified position to hold us off. Between that, our large army of golems, and the small army of guardians, who the civilian population trusted, we had all the resources we needed.