

Once Crow joined us, Legend nodded in approval, turning around and guiding us through the rest of the crowd. As he walked, the crowd parted before him, people quickly stepping out of his way. The hero himself moved with confidence, projecting an aura of warm calm, despite the situation. Even knowing everything that I had been working on, I was still feeling the pressure, yet he walked through the crowd as if it were Tuesday. That kind of calm could only come from experience, from knowing precisely who and what they were about to face. And seeing as the Triumvirate had the highest Endbringer attendance count out of any cape group on the planet, it made sense.

"You've managed some pretty impressive work, Arcanum," Legend said as we walked. "Am I correct that you are the one to reduce the rain like that?"

"Ah, yes, something I prepared earlier. A weather control building at the center of the city," I explained. "It should keep back the worst of Leviathan's storm for a while. Not forever, but a while."

"Impressive," he said with a nod. "The loss of visibility from the storm makes everything considerably more difficult. Well done."

Despite not really being associated with them or the PRT, I couldn't help but feel a little bit of warmth at his compliment. The man had an air of honesty and leadership that made those words feel far more impactful than they would have otherwise. Not to mention his reputation.

After a few more feet through the crowd, we stepped into a nearby building, some sort of old office, one abandoned recently enough that things hadn't started to rot. There were quite a few parahumans inside who had sought out shelter from the rain. Further in was the Triumvirate, surrounded by other heroes, as well as a few local Protectorate members, including Miss Militia and Armsmaster. A single soldier armed with my equipment stood beside Alexandria.

Eidolon stood with his arms crossed, looking impatient in his green costume, despite his face being covered.

"Arcanum, thank you for joining us. Estimates say that Leviathan will arrive in fifteen minutes, so time is short," Alexandria stated, understandably blunt and direct. It appeared she was at least partially waiting for me to arrive, as she immediately continued. "As many of you know, we have four thousand soldiers augmented with tinker tech on scene thanks to Arcanum and associated PRT work. All Protectorate heroes should have received an overview of their capabilities, but to be brief, each individual is ranked brute five, mover four, thinker three, blaster eight. They are working in squads of ten and should be moving to get into position around the city, looking for attack angles on Leviathan."

Alexandria looked around, meeting everyone's eyes, including my own, as she explained the situation to the various leaders and PRT heroes gathered around her. This was clearly the pre-fight speech for the in crowd, and I recognized quite a few of the heroes standing around listening. Faces like Chevelier and Myrdinn, the latter of which claimed to be a wizard, though I was pretty sure it was just PR.

"This is the Anti-Endbringer-Armies, or the AEA, first deployment against an Endbringer, but their presence vastly changes the way we will start this fight," Alexandria continued. "Each soldier is armed with a ranged weapon designed to do significant damage to Endbringers. Parahuman support will be tasked with driving Leviathan into kill zones. Arcanum, any advice concerning the soldiers?"

"Stay clear of all weapon fire from these soldiers," I said without even really thinking, keeping my surprise to myself. "Their weapons, which fire a lance of purple energy, use the same method I used to disable Siberian. They will cause damage regardless of brute rating."

"What if they fail?" Armsmaster asked.

"Against Endbringers, that is always a possibility. If it comes to that, then we switch to standard Leviathan tactics," Alexandria stated, nodding to the local leader. We keep him busy to minimize how many waves he can pull in, while striking en masse to cause damage, before retreating and repeating."

"I already have several large mechs incoming, they will be providing us support should the AEA fail," A voice said, coming from some of the equipment set up off in the corner. "Meanwhile, I will be coordinating through the armbands as usual. I will keep people informed of any developments, changes in strategy, and Leviathan's location. Arcanum, is there anything you'd like to say?"

For a moment, I hesitated before realizing that it was Dragon, the famous Tinker from Canada, communicating through the speakers.

"We don't have to worry about tsunamis hitting the city from the outside," I explained, Alexandria's head snapping to look at me. "I set up some protection against those. I also have an opening attack that should let us do some considerable damage. Any powerful ranged attackers should be stationed within their personal ranges off the beach, as long as they are confident they can retreat quickly after the opportunity is over. Anyone too squishy or slow should be held back, this is mostly to give the soldiers a good chance off the bat."

"Those... are bold claims," Alexandria stated. "How confident are you?"

"Confident enough to be standing on the shore when he gets here," I responded.

"I should mention that he has already reduced the storm to light rain," Legend mentioned. "For what appeared to be the entire city and beyond."

"Is this true?" Alexandria asked. "How were you able to do so?"

"The mayor was happy to let me work when I explained some of the projects I had in mind for the city," I explained. "I'm sure you've already identified the buildings along the coast and deeper into the city. You know how powerful my personal equipment can be. Imagine how much I can bring to bear from a building."

"... Very well, Arcanum, we will shift our forces," She said with a nod.

I was honestly a bit surprised she just took my word for it, and was willing to shift what they were doing so easily, but I'm glad they did.

The briefing was over after another minute or so more, and Crow and I received the previously mentioned armbands. We both strapped them on quickly, before following the crowd out of the building they had taken shelter in. As we walked, Crow and I drifted back, away from the main group, not wanting to be the center of attention. As we stepped outside, Legend began rising slightly off the ground, catching everyone's attention. The timer was ticking down, with just about ten minutes remaining before it was predicted that Leviathan would make landfall.

While I would have liked to stick around for whatever speech Legend planned on giving, I needed to get into position. I would not let Leviathan get past my hard work just because I was dazzled by the legendary Legend. Crow and I snuck away, leaving through an alleyway before we broke into a run, flashing across the street before heading for the shore.

"I can't believe we just skipped out on a Legend speech," Crow said, trying her best to act nonchalant, despite clearly being beyond nervous. "They are supposed to be life-changing."

"Hard not to be considering what comes after them. Sorry, but I need to get into position," I said with a frown as we both landed on the beach with a pair of thumbs and a spray of sand. "You could go back and teleport to me when he is done."

"Yeah, let me just leave you alone so you can stare down Leviathan on your own," She said, shaking her head. "Do you really think the best place to start a battle with the *ocean Endbringer* is on a beach?"

"Like I told Alexandria, do you think I would be standing here if I wasn't confident?" I asked, quickly using magic to push a huge amount of sand to the side.

The hole I cleared out revealed a flat disc of metal, inscribed with all sorts of magical lines and set with a trio of gems. Without another moment, I stepped onto the platform and sank my magic into it, starting to establish a connection.

The relatively simple platform was not what I had spent so much time making, but rather the control platform for it. It was linked back through a thick cable of electrum that ran underground, connecting to one of the larger buildings I had built, this one rising above the shore skyline. At its peak was a thick orichalcum rod, studded with inset uncracked geodes. The building itself was built as strongly as I could make it, and it currently housed literal tons of gold, silver, and precious gems. If I had a few more days, I would have reinforced it with adamantite, but there just wasn't enough time.

As the platform drank in my magic, I could feel my awareness of the building starting to increase. Inside it was a truly astounding amount of energy, stored in the thousands of massive gems fused into its structure.

As I linked myself in, slowly preparing to utilize the structure's singular purpose, a soft thump reached my ears. I couldn't turn around, but thankfully Crow filled me in.

"Holy hell, it's Eidolon," she explained. "Can't see his face but... he seems kinda annoyed."

I frowned, but focused on the task ahead. It made sense that they would send someone to keep an eye on me, and even more likely, cover for me in case my claims were overstated. I had more important things to focus on, so as long as he stayed quiet, I-

"What makes you think you can do something no one else can?" the world-famous hero asked. "You think you're better than everyone else?"

While his words asked if I considered myself superior to everyone, his tone was clearly more concerned with me considering myself better than him specifically.

"I've never claimed to be better than anyone," I said, frowning but still not turning around. I needed to focus on the ocean. "But my record so far is pretty good."

"Tinker tech is unreliable at best, and exotic types are usually worse," He responded. "The others might think you have a chance, but I'm not willing to throw everything away just because you got lucky. When you fail, I'll be ready to keep it all from burning down."

"That's good," I answered, only barely listening to the shockingly whiny cape. "Knowing powerful people are ready to help in case I fail is good to hear."

My sarcasm must have hit a nerve, judging by the way that Crow stepped in between us, blocking his path to me. For a moment, I was considering using the grand working on him, and I absolutely would if he attempted to hurt Crow, but after a long pause, I could hear him kiss his teeth. A moment after that, I saw his shadow rise above us as he took to the sky again. Eventually, it stopped, the powerful cape floating high above the shore.

"What the hell was that?" Crow asked quietly. "What a dick..."

"You know what they say," I responded just as quietly. "Never meet your heroes."

She snorted, before I once again focused on the task at hand, connecting my magic to the grand working. With five minutes left, the water along the coast began to pull out, disappearing towards the ocean.

"How confident are you in your Tsunami protection?" Crow asked, both of us looking out at the mostly empty bay, miles of trash, boats, and junk half embedded into the much. Before I could reply, she responded to her own question. "Right, right, you wouldn't be standing here if you weren't confident. Just know if I drown, I am haunting your ass."

It didn't take long for the wave to come in, though it looked less like a wave and more like a gigantic wall of water. It was almost into the bay, just a few hundred feet from the PRT Rig, when suddenly a blue wall of energy appeared, slamming into the ground and rising up hundreds of meters into the air. The wave crashed into it, the wall of energy going from translucent to nearly opaque as it absorbed the energy, the water smashing up against it. The barrier, projected by the line of buildings I had made along the coast, created a wall of energy all

along the entire entrance of the bay. It easily absorbed the impact force, internally converting it into more energy for the barrier.

Behind me, I could hear the hum of the projecting buildings, and I knew that each one cast a beam upwards and forward, coalescing into the barrier.

I could also hear shouts of amazement and shock, even as the water began to recede, likely being pulled back to form another incoming wave. It didn't matter, though, as it would take an insane amount of energy to take the barrier down, and I had specifically tuned it to water so that the Leviathan couldn't try to overload them with pure strength. The only way he could take them down was to come inside the barrier and destroy the buildings.

But to do that, he would have to go through me first. And four thousand heavily armed, magically enhanced soldiers. And a bunch of capes.

Another wave slammed into the barrier, and again it took it easily, the hum of the magical projectors barely modulating. I had built their energy reserves deep, and they were remarkably efficient at converting the impact energy back into something useful. Each wave only made them stronger.

Finally, just thirty seconds after the second wave started to pull back, I caught a glimpse of the bastard, hiding in the water that remained after the wave, pushing on the barrier. He was darting back and forth along the edge of the barrier, confused about what was stopping his waves. At first, he only appeared in flashes, but when he eventually poked his tail through the barrier, the thick appendage passing through it unrestricted, he became bolder. After a full forty seconds, he stepped through, revealing himself at the edge of the bay.

The abomination was at least thirty feet tall, with a corded muscular frame that seemed overly top-heavy, his thick shoulders and neck outweighing his lower torso. It walked like a gorilla, using its arms just as much as its legs, with its tail, easily as long as it was tall, if not longer, whipping behind it. Its legs were strangely thin, like they might snap under its own weight. Its hands were clawed, digging into the mud as he stopped just inside the barrier, looking at the city. Behind me, everything was silent, even the rain felt muted as the green-skinned monster watched us.

He looked wrong, like someone had designed him to look like he shouldn't be able to function. Even his eyes were mismatched, with one on one side of his face and three on the other, each a glowing bright green pit with no pupil.

Suddenly, he blurred, dashing towards the shores at a shocking speed, leaving behind one of his baffling water echoes, several more appearing as he slammed through a boat wreck.

I let him come.

"Arc... you said you would stop him, right?" Crow said, her voice cracking slightly. "Arc... Arc!"

When he was almost to us, Eidolon was cursing as he shouted into whatever communication gear he had, and I finally activated the grand working I was now hooked into. Directed by my magic, the tall beam of orichalcum sticking up in the air glowed, firing out a beam of the same blue energy that was keeping back the water. This barrier was directed by me personally, and as I made a two-handed grab, as if I were trying to reach out and grab him myself, two vaguely hand-shaped barriers slammed into the monstrosity, caging him in seconds.

The feedback was tremendous, feeling like I had just slammed a metal bat into a solid iron pole, the force reverberating into my very bones. But that didn't matter, because with a groan, I lifted Leviathan off the ground, forcing him into range of the nearly one thousand troops and hundreds of capes waiting for him.