**Infringement 16.3**

“Oh. It’s *you.*”

“Hello Sarah,” I smiled, giving her a cheery wave as she walked in. “How’s my brother been treating you?”

“I was under the impression her name was Lisa,” said brother, back in full ‘Villain’ persona, asked.

The small blonde glared at me. “It *is.*”

I rolled my eyes. “Yes it is, Chuckles, and your name is *actually* ‘Rurik’,” I told him, referencing the name of his character he played in the dungeons and dragons campaign I’d run for my family years ago.

Aeonic turned to the Thinker, giving the impression of a cool gaze from behind his mask. “I do not appreciate being mislead, Tattletale.”

“Like you told me your *actual* name,” she scoffed in turn.

“We are *not* equals,” he informed her. “I pulled you from certain death, killed those who sought to retrieve you, and sheltered you within my demesne. You are of use to me, and will thus be protected and compensated, but a duplicitous ally is worth less than an honorable opponent, and I have *no* opponents left.”

Sara gave him an unimpressed look, though there was an underlying tension to it. “Didn’t you ask me here to talk about your ‘opponents’?”

“I called you here to brief Vejovis on the rats that have infested the far corners of the city, and the probing insects that have tread upon our threshold,” my brother disagreed, getting into the swing of things. “Kaiser and Lung were opponents. Armsmaster could have been. These are pests, nothing more.”

Tattletale rolled her eyes, shaking her head, looking over to me. “You *are* related.” I shrugged, and Aeonic stared at her expectantly. “Yeah, okay, whatever.” slipping out her phone, she tapped on it, the lights dimming slightly as the back wall of the meeting room slid back, revealing a screen. It flicked on, and after navigating a few menus, the city was displayed, showing the Zones and anomalies. A couple clicks later, and three new sets of colored sections spread out, blue, grey, and black.

The blue was centered on Captain’s Hill, likely the territory For Whom the Bell Tolls held. The grey, covering the area that I’d cleared, and then some, ominously covering the north of the city and seeming washed out, was then probably meant to indicate the Penumbral Defenders. The black, on the south-eastern end of the city, was something I *didn’t* know. Additionally, there were several white starbursts on the western edge of my brother’s ‘lands’, for lack of a better term.

“What’s the white and black?” I asked, trying to figure it out on my own. Had an anomaly gotten loose in the south and was spread out, taking things over? It couldn’t’ve been *that* bad, or I would’ve been warned. Unless it wasn’t leaving the city, so it wouldn’t trip my father’s vision, that is.

“As you can tell, the red, green, and yellow represent the threat zones in the ruins of Brockton Bay,” Tattletale said instead, turning her back on me. “Our people have been risking themselves for this information, so you-”

“Vejovis is the one who suggested our procedure,” my brother pointed out.

The girl sent a sour look my way. “Of *course* you are. The Red, Yellow and Green zones borders are still firming as we ‘send’ teams. The PRT maps are trash, and will get you killed, so, you know, keep using them. Blue is our territory, that we pushed out and cleared *ourselves.*” The challenging look she sent my way would probably mean more if I didn’t know that my brother would work with me to make things better, regardless of what she said.

Obviously not liking whatever she read from my expression, she continued, “Grey is yours. *Great* move hiring Lady Bug’s father, by the way. The man *despises* you,” she threw out.

I just shrugged, “Feeling would be mutual, but I don’t really give a damn about him personally.”

“*Sure* you don’t,” she shot back patronizingly. “The plans you got from Accord were smart, at least.”

Giving my brother a questioning look, he shook his head. “I didn’t inform her of that. She mentioned you were likely working from a plan, though she did not know the extent.”

“The entire city?” the girl in question asked, before commenting, “Ambitious. Are you *sure* you aren’t a Villain?”

“Figured out a way to use your power on me?” I questioned in turn. Had I not come clean to my team, this fact would’ve worried me, but the fact that she was working for my brother,that  my foreknowledge had been reduced to established facts and broad strokes instead of prophecy, and that I was quickly approaching the point where I could throw down with almost everyone but the S class threats got rid of most things she could use against me.

She smiled, probably thinking figuring out a way to ‘find’ information about me put her in a position of power *over* me, a notion that I wanted to disabuse her of, but would be better to let her think she held. However, I needed to test just *how* far she’d been able to progress, and teased, “But not as much as you’d like, is it?”

“More than enough to figure *you* out, *Boardwalk,”* she shot back, grinning victoriously, I laughed, ready to do so no matter *what* she’d said, giving me time to figure out a response. I wasn’t sure if she *actually* knew or was just fishing, but I’d deny it either way.

“Close, but no cigar,” I chided her. “Though, considering there are many that want him dead, more than would from his showing up the PRT, I’d prefer it if you *didn’t* toss around your theories as if they were *facts*. Now, what’s the white and black up on the screen, Sarah.”

“You *would* say that, but you can’t fool me,” the girl insisted. “I kn-”

*“Tattletale*,” Aeonics voice wasn’t loud, but it carried a quiet menace that had me looking over to my brother in surprise, not having expected that from him. “I believe I asked you here to deliver your findings. If you wish to antagonize our allies, I’m sure I could find someone *else* to do your job.”

“No-one could do my job,” she shot back, but the cockiness was gone from her visage, leaving me to wonder just what’d been going on here while I was busy with Eclipse. “White is the Fallen. At least their scouts. They think they’re being subtle, but they’re obvious if you know what to look for,” she paused for a beat, “*and I do*.”

I nodded, having wondered when they’d show up. “Any major players we need to worry about?”

“Not yet,” she declared. “They’re not sure whether to be scared of this place or worship it, which means the guys and girls in charge aren’t providing a unified front,” she chided, shaking her head. “We’ve got a few weeks before they move in, though they’ll likely come for *us* first.”

“Why?” I asked, seeing reasons for them to do that, for them to go after my people, or to set up their own territory altogether.

Giving an ‘I know something you don’t’ smile, she offered, “While you were playing peekaboo with powers and rebuilding the city in your image, *we’ve* been helping people, getting the fame, *and* the fortune.”

Fame I could see, but. . . “Fortune?” I echoed.

“Donations,” she replied. “Unaccountable, discretionary funds to help us ‘continue reuniting lost families’. It was *child’s play* to get corporations on-board.”

I nodded, seeing how that could work. That however reminded me, “Aeonic, did you decide if you wanted to get in on the deal we have with Toybox?”

He shook his head, “Maybe in a few months. We’re securing ourselves before we’ll offer our strength to others, for a price.”

“. . . I hate you,” Tattletale declared, and I looked at her in confusion. “Either you don’t know why, or you do. Either way you’re an asshole,” she informed me, turning back to the screen and continuing before her boss could say anything more. “Speaking of assholes, the black on the map is the Merchants.”

I looked at the darkened section. The blue and the grey were fairly even blobs, large areas of taken territory, but the black was spread out haphazardly, long, thin areas extending out from the main ‘body’, curving up and around and forming odd shapes.

“How are they dealing with the anomalies?” I questioned. We were doing so with a, quite frankly, *ludicrous* amount of precognition, along with my own stupidly large conglomeration of powers.

“They aren’t,” the Peri-cog informed me. “Really?” she asked at my confused look, shaking her head and muttering ‘idiot’ under her breath. Aeonic cleared her throat and explained, “They’re letting their people trip over them, hitting the ones that can be hit, and getting out of the way of the others. They’re dying, but somethings. . . wrong with them. They’re recruiting from other towns, but too fast. They’ve got half a dozen new capes, and one of them’s a Master.”

Even taking what she said with a grain of salt, the girl being anywhere between eighty to ninety-five percent right for anything she stated with certainty, if the Merchants had personnel to burn she *might* be right on this one. “Do you know what type?”

She shook her head. “Something subtle. Probably suggestion instead of command. Whatever it is can affect a lot of people, and why we’re not doing runs near them.”

“Why? They’ll be fine. . .” I trailed off. “You’re worried if they have the memories, they’ll still be affected,” I realized.

“We’ve already lost someone to something they only had memories of experiencing,” my brother noted. “She wrote her report, and then walked into the Zones without telling anyone. We checked our cameras later, and lost track of her in the Yellow Zone. She was heading for the Red. Her writings were crazed, about ‘travelling through the mouth of hell, which leads to paradise’. She was the only survivor of her team from that run, and the reason we’ve stopped our forays into the most dangerous of territories.”

“*Fuck,”* I swore, shaking my head, at the implication. To have something able to mess with someone through their memories though. . . that made things trickier. If I was being honest, I was a little surprised that he’d done so, but also a little ashamed at that thought. I’d assumed my brother would’ve kept sending people, the precog method, even with the threat of mental contamination, far more safe than *actually* sending people out. However, he seemed to be growing up a little with the responsibility of command on his shoulders.

“Indeed,” Aeonic commented dryly. Leaning forward, he steepled his fingers,“So, what do you suggest we do?”

“You’re asking *him?*” Tattle demanded incredulously. “I’ve told you that you need to-”

“I have heard your *suggestions*, Lisa,” My brother cut her off. “I would like to hear from another. So, *Vejovis,* what would you propose?”

I turned it over in my mind, while Sarah pouted, walking over and sitting in a chair to our side, at the end of the table, a bit like Eidolon had done before I’d accidentally taken off his arm. Something in my look made her flinch, and I wondered what results her power was giving her. It didn’t matter though, as I concentrated on the issue. “Hmm, there’s the bloody way, though I’d prefer we didn’t, the subtle way, though again I’m not sure about that one, or the cautious way. Hmmmm.” I glanced over towards Sarah again. “Does she know about the problems Cogni can have with precog power?”

“She knows it does not account for my presence, outside of normal time as I often am,” Aeonic nodded. I nodded in return, mildly impressed for that *complete and utter BS explanation* which sounded correct if you couldn’t *See* it was wrong.

“Which one do you want to hear first?” I asked.

“Bloody,” he responded instantly.

“I kill them all,” I shrugged, ignoring Tattletale’s ‘*What?’* “Not to the last man, of course, but the leadership that’s mind controlling people and throwing them into a meatgrinder. Junkies are dumb, if canny, but they’d never be staying *here* instead of somewhere safer if they had a choice. Raid the edges of the city for a quick buck, absolutely, but they wouldn’t *set up shop*.”

My brother stared at me from behind his mask, before nodding slowly. “And the Master?”

“I found the person who killed Heartbreaker,” I stated. “He hates Human Masters as much as I do.” *Exactly* *as much.* “To him, there’s a good chance everyone down there is already as good as dead, and he’d be doing them a kindness. Whatever their power, I doubt they’d get a chance to use it, let alone survive.”

“Cautious?” he asked.

I waved around, “What you’re doing now. Hold back, wait for more intel for your experts,” I nodded towards Sarah, “to get a better idea of what they’re doing. They’re on the other side of the Red Zone from you, so you don’t have to worry about them encroaching. They might attack, raiding you, but with your people you’ll have a warning.”

“And Subtle?”

“Brian.”

“WHAT?” Tattletale yelled, surging to her feet. “I told you there was a Master, and you want to send in someone who’s a one-man-army!”

I held up a finger, “We use Post-Cog to see if it goes badly. A week’s worth of practice runs before you go for it, to see if there’s a possibility for it running badly.”

“Were you not listening!?” she demanded. “Master powers can work *through* her power!”

I shook my head, “Then you don’t use her power on Brian, you use it on *you.*”

“You think she’s not?” the Thinker scoffed, turning to Aeonic. “Please tell me you’re not *listening* to this!”

My brother instead told me, “Stop playing with her, Vejovis. She’s *mine.*”

I raised an eyebrow at that, glancing over to Tattletale, who blushed slightly, meeting my gaze head on, daring me to say something. *Oh.* “I’m saying you use the fact that you can’t be seen with the power to run one-removed ‘what ifs’. Have someone who’s *not* you instructed to give the order, and get tomorrow’s memories where they did. They wouldn’t get hit by whatever the Master effect is that messed up your team, unless its something that can be brought to your base and spread, in which case you’re screwed either way. Then *you* come in and tell them not to, creating a future where the order isn’t given, but you know what would happen if it was. Be Coil-lite, as it were, but with precog instead of whatever he does. That way you have knowledge *if* someone can be compromised before you have everyone experience tomorrow’s memories and be compromised, though you wouldn’t know *how* they were compromised*.* You could use it as a safety measure for the teams, so that if someone does something weird you’re informed and can either choose to do nothing, letting it happen, or step in.”

He considered it, “You are making the assumption that her power works on itself, that the person she touches can see the memories of someone else seeing their memories.”

“Does it?” I asked, having assumed it was.

Aeonic shrugged, “I don’t know. However it would be easy enough to test. And if she can’t, would you still send in Gnomon?”

“***No***,” was my instant answer. “Even if he *wasn’t* as dangerous as he is now, sending a person in where they could be Mastered. . .  I’d never suggest that, especially with an unknown Master power.” From Tattletale’s lack of response, and the lessening of tension in her stance, she agreed with me, though she still didn’t sit back down.

My brother nodded, looking to her and asking, “Fallout if we choose the ‘bloody’ option?”

She grimaced, taking her seat, “Not good, but it could be worse. With them publicly poking every bear they can find, no one will be surprised if something happens, but with the new PRT Director it’ll give him more of an excuse to try something.”

“You know who that is?” At her ‘who do you think I am look’, I rolled my eyes, “Remember, I know how your power works. Do you know for *sure?* And if so, who?”

“James Tagg,” she announced, and I swore. “Heard of him, have you?”

“Better question,” I asked, “What’s the fallout if I kill *him*. Not *me*, obviously, but if he just happened to die one night? Say, in thirteen hours?”

She whistled, “He’s that bad?” Mulling it over, shooting a glance towards my brother, who nodded to her, she shook her head. “Not enough information to tell you. Could be nothing, could cause the government to shut down the ENE office. Could cause them to finally quarantine Brockton Bay. Too much going on to give you an answer without some serious research.”

I nodded myself, glad she was being honest with me about the limits of what she could know. “Thanks. Just another thing to throw on the pile, I guess.”

“I believe it would be optimal to choose to wait, in regards to the drug-peddlers,” Aeonic announced. “It’s foolish to show your hand if you have the chance to see what’s in anothers, even if they are merely addicts with delusions of *competence*. We’ll let them wander through the minefield, and deal with them on our terms.”

“Works for me,” I agreed, already trying to figure what I was going to do about Tagg. “I’ll have Squealer write up a report, or, more likely, talk to her and write it up myself, on what she knew before she left. They’ve got a clockwise telekinetic named whirlygig, a brute that gets stronger the worse he feels named Craven, and a woman who can create drugs named Snowball.”

The bark of laughter that got out of my brother wasn’t in keeping with his perona, and he coughed. “That sounds within line with Skidmark’s naming scheme. The first seems straightforward to deal with. The Brute powered by withdrawl, his craving of drugs giving him strength, would be useful for a prepared attack but useless for spontaneous defense.”

. . .  *I’m an idiot.* I hadn’t put two and two together, but the man’s name wasn’t Craven, meaning cowardly, but *Cravin’,* because he would be ‘craving drugs’. That fit *much* better with the other names.

 “The third though. . . the third bears further consideration,” noted Aeonic, shooting a glance towards Tattletale, who nodded back in agreement. “When we find more, we’ll notify you,” he informed me, “As we will if we decide it would be best to use your contact.”

“Same,” I replied. “That’s everything I came for. You have anything you wanted to talk about?”

He shook his head, waving to the display, “Only that. Thank you for allaying my concerns, though. . .” he paused persona cracking. “Can ya call next time? I nearly had a heart attack when I heard you were on my doorstep.”

“I’ll try, Chuckles,” I laughed. “See ya around.” Reaching out, I pulled towards the Mark in my office, vanishing with barely a pop.

Tagg being around changed things, and I wanted to go out and kill him *tonight*, knowing the man, with his view of ‘the biggest dog is the United States Government, and everyone else needs to submit or be crushed under its boot’, was, quite possibly, the *worst* person to have in the area. I suspected a Cauldron plot, but mostly because one could *always* suspect a Cauldron plot and have a statistically relevant chance of being correct. If I moved now, before I even *met* him, I could distance myself from the fallout, but I was also *very* aware that this kind of rushing off to do things is *exactly* what I got angry at Herb for doing, and what I promised I wouldn’t do myself.

Grabbing my phone to bring together a ‘war council’, it vibrated as I received a text myself, from Panacea. It was short, only two words, but those two words made me grin in anticipation.

*It’s ready.*