**Diversification 19.14**

“And who are *you* all?” an annoyed looking PRT official asked my group.

“I’m Nephilim,” I replied. “We’re the Penumbral Defenders, from New Brockton Bay,” I replied, looking around the marshaling ground, which had been set up next to a ‘West Deptford High School’. I’d Strode us all nearby, and been directed by PRT staff to the intake. “You were expecting us.”

The man winced, putting a finger to his ear. “Alexandria, they’re here.”

I could feel the wind created by the woman as she flew over, almost too fast too see for a normal person, but either experience or Peak Condition let me track her easily. She stopped, floating above us, staring down, her eyes hidden behind her visor. As before, she glowed with the Grey & Faded Black of **Personal Temporal Stasis**, a power that, even only looking at it, I knew would be locked to me even if I *could* wiggle around the fact that it had no visual effects, only a *lack* of being affected by things.

“Where’s Break?” she barked out, annoyed.

Lifting an eyebrow, I regarded her skeptically. “Vejovis thought it better *not* to bring the power copier to fight the thing that makes evil copies. Same with Panacea. I owe him five bucks, I didn’t think you foolish enough to want him for this. Ten, actually, as I didn’t think *you* would be here either.”

From the set of the woman’s mouth, she wasn’t very happy with my rebuke, and subvocalized something. However, with my capabilities, she might as well have been shouting. “Numberman, I need eyes on Vejovis.”

There was a pause, before *my* comm unit activated, my own voice informing me, “Cauldron opened a Door to my office. I threw a pen at them,” my projection informed me.

“Vejovis is in his office. He’s not happy,” Numberman’s voice added, coming from the earpiece Alexandria was wearing.

“Then it’s probably him,” the woman muttered looking, head turning slightly as she took in the twenty fighters we’d brought. “I haven’t seen you before,” she stated accusatorily. “Who are you?”

“I fail to see how that’s my problem,” I replied, “and you can call me Nephilim.” I opened my arms, and my wings, “you can probably guess why.”

As always, my dimensional cloak was worth several times its weight in gold, letting me shift to a new costume. **Metal Projection** allowed me to form mithral pseudo-plates, which I directly controlled, and fit as an underlayer on the purple and red, intricately carved plate armor that I wore, From my back extended a pair of mithral wings, that burned silvery-white with **Healing Fire**, the colors tweaked to avoid comparisons to the Suns I’d previously created. With my ability to change the color of my powers I could create silver suns as need be, as would every other power I used in this role be similarly colored.

In some ways, I bore a resemblance to the form I’d wore when I clashed with the Simurgh, only human sized, and not blindingly bright. I wielded an orichalcum sword, with the design for strike enhancement running through it, which I’d made by taking guiding Taylor through the process. The fact that all my work to distance myself from Vejovis hadn’t worked was aggravating, but thankfully **Projection** was there to cover my ass.

“Powers?” the woman demanded.

“Like you, but less so, and multipurpose fire,” I replied easily, forming a silver sun knife, and tossing it into the air, making it twist like a solid thing, and catching it, and then blinking to the side in a short bolt of lightning that I’d tuned to be blue in this form, reforming as I was, sun-blade and all. “That, and a good bit of Tinkertech. What’s the plan?”

“You’ll be told when it is time,” the older woman informed me, before flying away somewhere else.

By my side, Taylor sighed. “I can’t believe I liked her.”

I shrugged, “When someone ‘knows’ they’re smarter and stronger than everyone else, why bother being polite to the peons?” Turning around to the gathered PD behind me, I addressed them all. “Alright, looks like we’re on our own. Fucking lovely. Everyone remember the briefing:. If they’re naked, they’re clones; if their forms are twisted and they’re naked, they’re not Case-53’s, they’re clones; if they’re fully transformed, they might not be clones, but if they try to kill you, well, that’s not kosher, so try kill them right the fuck back, only stay safe. Clones have no sense of self-preservation, so it’ll be like dealing with the worst of the Zones, so kill first, ask questions much, *much* later. I don’t want to explain to Break how any of you managed to get yourself killed. ***Understood?***” I asked, reinforcing my words by addressing their Shards directly.

*“Understood!”* the others echoed back to me.

“Good, then do as you will. Assuming that our actions haven’t changed things, the fight kicks off in two hours. Remember the cardinal rule of Precogs! They see what would’ve happened *if they hadn’t told you anything.* They’re useful, and can get you intel you wouldn’t have otherwise, but they’re not infallible. Isn’t that right, Gauge?” I asked, turning to Theo, who was loaded for war.

The boy was standing nearly almost as tall as I was, in a suit of power armor. His **Small Arms** power, while Second Triggered in strength, had been a Vial. With a few sessions where I, with his permission, mucked around with the Shard, I’d loosened it up enough to broaden its ‘Small Arms’ requirements even further than it was before, already fairly broad, allowing him to use it even *more* effectively.

With those modifications, he’d been able to reach even further, including making a full set of power armor as a ‘small arms accessory’ according to his Shard. Was it kind of dumb? Yes. But considering that DekoTara had gone from ugly as sin trucks, to the *literal mecha* she was currently working on, Tinkers were eight kinds of bullshit if you gave them enough time and resources.

*Then again, it was Tinkers that helped take out Scion, in the original timeline,* I considered. The ones that did it originally were still in the Birdcage. I think. Honestly, I couldn’t remember *who* did it, only the person who shot the moon, was involved.

Regardless, the boy had taken well to the near-infinite metals we had, and had built a full on Ironman suit. Okay, he built *Warmachine*, with the number of guns he had in the thing, but it could protect him, fly, and was something he was improving when he wasn’t doing custom orders. While the boy philosophically preferred non-lethal weapons, anything that could non-lethally take out a Brute was almost certainly lethal to a more normal person.

“It is,” the boy agreed, backing my statement on the fallibility of Precogs. “Should I start cycling?” he checked.

I wanted to say no, since the fight wasn’t going to fight, but I’d *just* talked about the fallibility of Precogs, so I nodded, the boy’s power starting to flicker in slow, regular patterns. “Alright everyone. Spread out if you want, and remember, you living is more important than getting a killshot. Dismissed!”

The PD started to wander off, and I looked around, taking in all the Parahumans around us. There were a *lot*, though not nearly the number that had shown up to fight Leviathan, and I didn’t see anyone that I recognized as a Villain.

Regardless, I **Saw** them all, many of whom were using their powers in small ways, more than enough to start copying powers by the dozen. I had a single open Minor slot, having learned my lesson, the next two-thirds of the way towards unlocking.

As for my Major slot, I’d finally gone ahead and slotted in a new Shard into my single slot, the next one three-fourths of the way there. And so, I had a new power.

*Legend’s.*

The others seemed nice, and **Short-range Teleportation** had been *very* tempting, as I wondered, *exactly* what about it would merit a Major slot, but at the end of the day, the choice was obvious.

It had speed, it had power, it had versaitility, but it was also *incredibly fucking distinctive.* This wasn’t a common-use power, this was a *‘Holy Shit I’m Fighting Scion!’* power, and one that would be very, *very* useful for that.

It was also *incredibly difficult to use.*

It was a Mover power. It was a Shaker power. It was a Brute power. It was a Breaker power. It was a Blaster power. It was a Striker power. Hell, it could be argued to be a *Changer* power! Over half the classifications applied to it, though, when I tried to use it to it’s utmost, turning my body to light, some part of my power revolted and said ***NO****.* Then again, given the taboo on any kind of Changer ability I was shackled with, I was somewhat surprised it worked at all.

So I couldn’t turn into a living laser, nor could I then use other forms of energy to heal myself, but the ‘blasts’ were free reign, in addition to the man’s flight, which *stacked* with my other kinds of movement. In a straight line, I was made of ‘goes fast’, only Legend himself likely able to outpace me, by telling relativity to go suck it by becoming mass-less.

However, just like with my other major powers, **Absolute Territory**was a stone-cold *bitch* to use, effectively a self-contained suite of powers instead of a straightforward one like the Minor powers. With Aerokinesis I could fly, make shields, make weapons, control gasses, *scrub* gasses, detect people by their breath, *deny* people the ability to breathe, and so much more, but *all* of it was reliant on my own control of the power.

With Legend’s power, some base uses, like flight and basic kinetic blasts were easy, but everything about that was taking work. I’d managed basic hot and cold rays, and figured out how to condense them into a touch based blast. Past that, trying to do *most* of what the Cauldronite could do, like forking the lasers, shooting them around corners, and through walls. He could also make them cut, disintegrate, our outright *invisible*, something I had *no* idea how he’d managed to do.

When I got a handle on it, that power was going to be *great,* but, for now, it was effectively a flight aid, especially with Alexandria around. I might’ve been able to bullshit Eidolon, but Rebecca Costa-Brown was a great deal more perspective. I was using abilities she didn’t think were *possible,* but if I started throwing around her friend’s lasers, even recolored? It was an unnecessary risk.

Lacking anything to do, I slowly walked around the field, Taylor walking behind me. Taking an Obsidian Oak disk from my belt, I flipped it out, my partner using her power to grow it outwards into a Dryad body, which started to walk on my other side. On the bright side, at least everyone here seemed to be an adult, so they at least hadn’t dragged the Wards into what, even if we didn’t lose a single fighter, would *still* be a bloodbath.

Lady Bug might actually be one of the youngest ones here, though, given what she’d seen fighting monsters beside me, I wasn’t too worried about her. She’d only seen the beginning of what I’d eventually *assumed* was Echidna, but, given that we were fighting her *now,* and I remembered killing *something*, I suppose it wasn’t.

*Then. . . who did I kill?*

I *still* didn’t remember what’d happened, but the feeling that I’d killed *someone* was something that was hard to shake. *Thinking about it won’t matter,* I told myself, focusing on the here and now. Collecting more powers, I looked for *any* kind of organization at play, but other than a base-camp being created for people with medical abilities, the kind of people who *couldn’t escape if Echidna bum-rushed them*, I didn’t see anything.

No one was being grouped, hell, no one seemed to be *briefed* on what was going, or else everyone would be ready to run on a moment’s notice. *This isn’t good,* I thought. Toggling my comm-unit to reach everyone I’d brought, I commanded, “*Defenders,* *spread out and tell everyone the basics of what we’re facing.*”

The people I’d brought nodded, and started to move to the various groups that’d gathered as Taylor and I continued to walk. “Any thoughts?” I asked the girl beside me.

“. . . It feels like when Leviathan attacked*,*” she said quietly, and I grimaced.

“It does, doesn’t it,” I sighed, continuing to collect powers. “On the bright side, while Echidna’s stronger than most, she’s dependent on her clones. If we can pin her down, I can kill her. Remember, if you see Trickster?”

“Kill him,” she replied, not happy about it, but she understood why. Echidna was dangerous, a *teleporting* Echidna was a disaster. While the girl would’ve liked to save people, the point that someone started indiscriminately kill was the point you *stopped* trying to save them.

It was a good twenty minutes later when Gauge’s voice came over the comms, sounding panicked. “*Attack incoming! They’re underground!”*

I froze, feeling out the area around us with **Mineral Manipulation**, one of my *less* used powers. It didn’t work nearly as well on dirt, which is what we were standing on, and, *focusing,* I could *barely* sense voids, but they almost seemed like sewers, instead of something else, only the presence of air down there letting me even detect *that*. And, even then*someone with a more specialized power should’ve noticed!*

“*Everyone, Run! Gauge, attack* ***how?***” I demanded, Taylor having frozen beside me, assuming direct control of every insect around us. Through them I could taste sewage in the caves below us, which had been what’d caused me to ignore them, though the spaces were completely lightless.

Using Strider’s power, I captured a bit of my own silver floor and teleported it into the space, illuminating dozens upon dozens of twisted, sickly looking naked men standing knee deep in shit, a couple of large, mole-like creatures digging through the dirt.

I couldn’t see their powers, but when Gauge quickly replied, “I don’t know, the ground just explodes!”, I didn’t need to, grabbing Taylor and flying straight up.

Using Acoustokinesis, I shouted, making the sound carry, even as I reached out without a hint of subtlety to command every Shard in range, *“Telekinetic Clones Below Us! FLY!* ***NOW!****”*

Taylor was stiff in my arms, focusing on Dryad as her body exploded outwards, growing out in every direction to try and make a shield. I tried to reach down and press down with **Mineral Manipulation** to try and crush the clones, or at least keep it in place, but my power found little purchase on the mixed material of the dirt.

The flame I’d teleported sputtered out, throwing the underground cavern into darkness once more, but the clones, having been discovered, were already reaching up, several glowing with a variety of colors as the combined parahumans on the marshaling ground all stampeded away, trying to escape.

Focusing my own power, I threw down a shield of air over the ground Taylor hadn’t covered, causing some capes to stumble, finding the ground an inch higher than they expected, but most rallied, pounding on the harder material, their own steps wearing against the protection, but the ensuing blasts of air giving them even more speed. Trying to throw up every defense I could, I pulled upon New Wave’s power, spinning a silver shield around Taylor and I as we continued to ascend as quickly as I could safely move the girl.

It had been barely twenty second from my warning when the field exploded upwards, dirt accelerated to extreme speed. Those with high enough Mover or Brute/Breaker ratings either made it out of the blast, or were able to weather it, but somewhere close to a third did not.

Those that’d run for Dryad’s shield were shoved upwards, Taylor quickly forming walls and a ceiling around the disk to try and keep them from falling off, even as the near-hypersonic dirt scoured the formation, and I flew to it, sending a command through my comms to where Panacea and the others were ready in New Brockton Bay, *“Injured incoming!”*

Reaching it, as dirt, rubble, and dismembered bodies flew everywhere, I slammed a hand on it and *Strode* it away, the possibility that anyone inside still fully combat capable slim. I couldn’t see *anything,* so, with a sweep of my hand, sent winds flying outwards to clear the air, feeling others trying the same thing as I worked, and letting their efforts beat out mine where they clashed.

The debris fell away, revealing fetid pits, from which dozens, *hundreds* of naked men and women started to pour out of. To my **Sight**, the copied powers spilled together into swaths of raw power, the hundreds of variations of each power melding together into formations that, at a glance, I knew were forming into Major powers in my constellation.

This many powers, used at once, and by False-Hosts with no care for their own lives would *massacre* the still recovering parahumans.

Luckily for those gathered on my side, mass destruction was my *specialty*.

Letting go of Taylor, but snaking a metal tendril out to keep her up, I swept my arms together, pulling *all* of the air in the area together, compressing and forcing it down, thickening the air around the clones into a thick soup, then a solid prison, even as they struggled, breaking apart everything they touched, the Ballistic Clones powers able to break them free, but high-speed air was no danger to my powers.

I pulled more and more air in, spinning it into a descending tornado that could be seen by the naked eye, streaming in from every direction even as Taylor started working to grow Dryads below us, grabbing every fallen Host, or just those that weren’t running fast enough, to carry them away beside me.

Another section of the ground, slightly further away, exploded up but was shunted to the side as more clones started to pour out, including, *Echidna herself.*

*Well, if you’re going to make it this easy, I’m not going to argue,* I grinned, flicking a hand out and sending a silver sun dart out, the flames looking like burning metal, impacting the tornado and setting alight, lighting up the night with harsh incandescence as the starstuff ignited the twister, burning straight down until it hit the clones, and the hardened air, whereupon it *exploded,* my own control over air and star allowing me to vent the explosion back through the tunnel they’d dug, directing the straight up into an enormous pillar of fire.

*Game. Set. Match.* I thought, only for a louder noise, as if the world was ripping apart, to come from the city itself. If the previous explosion had been a bomb, this was a *nuke,* the city erupting in every direction, destroying Philadelphia in seconds and sending millions of tons of shrapnel in every direction.

I moved to throw up shields, pushing **Unidirectional Telekinesis** to deflect the larger pieces as they headed for us, while glancing back down to the crater where a burned Echidna *should* have still lived, regenerating from the blast, but there was nothing but scattered, burned body parts and ashes.

One of the other members of the Penumbral Defenders, the one that Herb had given the second Triggered weather control vial to, moved to do what I did, only on a large scale, and with less control. Tornadoes touched down across the city, absorbing dust and debris, before hurricane force winds blew through the area to create clear lines of sight.

Philadelphia was destroyed, utterly, and pouring from its wreckage were *thousands* of clones, dozens upon dozens of Echidnas present, and all of them screamed in a mindless fury that wouldn’t stop until the world burned.

Staring at the forces arrayed against me, I looked to Taylor. “Ready?” I asked.

As the clones launched hundreds of attacks our way, blasts of fire, lightning, cold, stone, warped space, and who knows what else, my partner shook her head.

“No. Let’s do this.”