**Diversification 19.11**

I sighed, as the last power slotted in, this one not having any *immediate* interactions, like some of the others had. With a wave of my hand, the metal target was surrounded by a purple glow, and I could feel the energy waiting for me to give it a direction. Adding a little to the energy stored within, I, having learned my lesson with **Momentum Infusion**, tried to *remove* energy, finding I could do so. Pointing the energy straight up, the metal target leapt into the air, and, when I tried to use my new power on it, found I needed to catch it with Aerokinesis to keep it from hitting the ground, the power not *doing* anything until I commanded it to move.

Dismissing the purple aura around it, I used the same amount of energy on the Dryad body I’d created, sending it flying farther, but instead of catching it I twisted the body to land into a roll. *Alright, the force to energy is constant, or seems close.*

“Which one is this?” Taylor asked, from her position by the training room’s console, watching with interest as she simultaneously handled a dozen different tasks.

“**Unidirectional Telekinesis**,” I replied, typing out the name for the records, as she asked. I wasn’t sure why she couldn’t do it herself, but with everything else she was doing, I didn’t mind. “I actually remember this one, I saw it during my fight with Levi, right before I tried to out Endbringer the Endbringer. I think I’d actually do a better job of it, if I tried it again,” I remarked, smiling.

*“Lee,”* my second in command warned, and I shot her a grin.

“Don’t worry, if he comes back to Brockton Bay, we’ll just hit him with everything we can,” I reassured her. “Anyways, the other guy’s was brown instead of purple. Actually. . .” I used it again, charging the metal target, while taking a half-step *out*, doing so a little easier each time I did so, the headache for maintaining it less, but it was still inevitable, maybe it always would be. Regardless, it was easy to reach inside the newly slotted power and access the parts that controlled the, for lack of a better term, ‘flavor’ of the power, as opposed to its substance.

I couldn’t *remove* the color, as it was more of a targeting designator than anything else, but I could shift it. Theoretically, I *should* be able to shift it into the ultraviolet, or infrared spectrum, the problem was that I couldn’t *describe* those concepts to the Shards themselves, and, without that knowledge, they could not use them. I couldn’t just say, ‘the difference between red and blue, but *keep going*, because the system seemed to work off RGB values, instead of anything wavelength based.

Bringing up the mental model, I moved the values back and forth, the color of the aura around the target shifting in time. Trying to do two at once didn’t work, as it was like walking in two different directions at the same time, and while I could technically *do* that now, with my other bodies, the metaphor still worked.

Turning it black, I shot a look Taylor’s way, and she considered it, shaking her head. “It’s smaller, but it looks. . . evil.”

Looking at it, I could see what she what she was talking about. Shifting it to grey just made it look sickly, so I added a bit of purple back into it, making it more of an eggplant color. Swirling in some red, it shifted more towards a wine, but while it looked more ‘natural’, I’d gone *too* far to the point it’d started to look a little organic, and removed it. Adding energy, the aura grew, becoming more vivid, but it was already so dark, the change was small. Stirring in the red, it looked *very* unpleasant, so I drained it out, settling on a dark eggplant color and firming up the setting, the Shard accepting it easily.

Reducing the energy I sent the target flying, trying to re-establish the aura to catch it before it hit the ground, trying to keep it in the air, batting it back and forth. It was quite difficult, actually, and I clamped down on the sound when I missed and the target crashed into one of the un-padded sections of wall, carefully picking it up and moving it back to its original position. “Maybe I should try with something lighter,” I remarked, getting an affectionate eye-roll from Taylor.

Walking over to her, I took a seat, sighing. “Alright, I’m down to one free Minor slot again.”

“And you’ll pick another when the next opens?” she checked, and I nodded. We’d already talked about why I hadn’t before, my fear of making the wrong choice, but life had shown that making no choice was often the *worst* choice of all.

There’d been a bit of an argument of what powers I *should* get, between Taylor and I. Herb had come as well, and while I would listen to his suggestions, his word alone no longer held value. I’d wanted utility powers, to help others and to reduce the ‘single point of failure’ nature of tying key infrastructure to Shards. Eventually, I’d agreed that even combat-type powers could be useful, letting me shore up some of the weaknesses in those close to me, while ultimately retaining them when they reformed.

That’s when we ran into a little bit of a snag.

It turned out that I could only give out powers that I had already possessed and worked with, though how much I needed to work with them was unknown. I’d slotted Brandish’s power, one I’d played around with a good deal *before* my internal systems had been ‘updated’, and which I then worked with a bit more to see the difference in control before and after the change.

Whereas before, I’d needed to keep careful control of the various aspects, now it was almost an extension of myself, more akin to a green lantern ring than anything else, albeit without the onboard AI, and with the ability to turn hot enough to melt steel.

And then I’d given it to Gallant.

There was a certain irony to giving the dead woman’s power to her daughter’s fiancé, a post-mortem dowry, in a way. I’d of course teased the boy about it being an early wedding gift, much to both teens’ embarrassment, but given they’d set the date a week after Victoria, the younger of the two, turned eighteen, it wasn’t that presumptuous. I’d set the color to be a shining silver, my first instinct of making it gold pointed out as a bad idea by Taylor, given that Scion was going to try and kill us all eventually, and while I *had* shown him the ‘weapon’ setting, the ‘tentacled bracelet’ setting was the Shard’s new default.

The problem came when I’d slotted Hedera’s **Dicot Growth & Command** Shard and tried to give it to Kayden, to give her a true non-combat role, as it became increasingly clear that the woman was a combatant out of necessity, and outward pressures, not because she *wanted* to be. When I tried to remove it, the Shard felt. . . *fragile.*

There wasn’t any sense of pain, or danger, so I pressed on regardless. Setting up the seed from which the Shard to reform was fine, but when I tried to remove it, the crystal only just was removed from my cerebral crystal spine before it shattered, turning to dust which evaporated in seconds. While Panacea had been. . . *upset,* I’d done enough research to know what had happened. That shattering, and evaporating, was what happened when a Host *died,* and the Shard moved on to a new Host.

Which was also me.

Checking my Sea of Flame, the power was already starting to regrow, so everything was fine there, but any idea of slotting a Shard, and immediately passing it on, was completely scuppered. However, I’d rarely used the ice power I’d given Mouse, and I had the power I’d given Gallant after a *day.* But, on the other hand, I *had* spent a dozen or so hours with both, training them, and they both seemed to, for lack of a better term, *remember* me from when I’d used them before, making me wonder *exactly* how it used to work.

Following that theme, I spent several hours a day practicing the power I’d claimed from New Wave, but even then I’d felt the same sensation of fragility when I tried to prepare **Kinetic Force Fields** for removal, so I quickly backed off from that, having learned my lesson.

For my other powers, I’d been left with choices, even as, to some extent, I tried to have my cake and eat it too by picking powers that would help in combat, but *also* be useful out of it. In that, I was left with a dilemma: did I use the powers of those already in the Penumbral Defenders, or the host of other powers I’d picked up from all over the place?

For the first, I could work with the original Hosts, see the *particular* of how their Shards functioned, and have the kind of low-level feedback loop I’d developed with Victoria and Taylor. On the other hand, while, to a certain extent, those two knew I was a power copier, the others *didn’t* and if I started slinging around *their* powers they’d likely figure it out pretty quickly.

For the second, the chance of someone recognizing their own power was being used was slim, as they either wouldn’t be in New Brockton Bay, or Leviathan had already killed them. On the other hand, *I had no idea what half of the powers did.* I had two to three word descriptions, and colors which were more representative than anything else, and *that was it.* Powers like **Unidirectional Telekinesis** I remembered, but they were the exception, not the rule.

In the end, there were a few powers that were just too useful to ignore, and would synergise with my own abilities. Furthermore, with my limited ability to tweak power expression, I had to hope they wouldn’t be noticed, especially if I tried to keep their use subtle.

The first of which, **Healing Fire**, was *absolutely* one of those.

It was taken from a power set I’d created, half of the combo that turned the user into a sort of phoenix, except for the entire ‘come back from death’ part. The full set was composed of two complimentary powers, one of which allowed the user to create controllable crimson flames, but which cooled the user in turn. The second created golden flames that *healed* those they touched, though the healing was commensurate with how hot the ‘flames’ burned.

Not being *actual* flames, they started at mildly warm, which would slowly remove bruising and ease aches and pains, up to ‘will melt steel’, which could cause the user to regenerate like wolverine. Tweaking the values, the healing was *always* greater than the damage exposure to the flames would inflict but experiencing it would *not* be fun, which is why the fire-creation power would create a kind of buffer, while the healing flames in turn would act as a low-level regeneration aura in combat.

Pushing the power to its limit, the user would start to walk a knife edge of freezing to death and immolating, but short of something that a Replicant would be called in to handle, there shouldn’t be a reason to do so.

My own flames burned a deep purple, and Stellar Negation allowed me to reap the benefits, negating the heat on contact, allowing me a way to heal anyone in reach. Additionally, my own immunity to hot and cold meant that even without Sundancer’s secondary power, I could abuse the ever-loving fuck out of it. It wouldn’t *upgrade* people like my copy of Panacea’s Shard could, but that was one of the differences between a Minor and Major power, and the fact that I could use this one on *myself* meant it filled a need for in-combat healing that I’d been missing.

Thinking about my eventual fire with Goldenrod, his golden stilling ‘go fuck yourself’ energy attacks were going to be a pain to deal with, but not *impossible*, though, more than anything else, I needed *maneuverability*. I had Victoria’s flight, and I could further boost it with Aerokinesis, but doing so was like using a broadsword to perform surgery, the amount I could meaningfully bring to bear *very* much not in line with the strength of that Shard.

I could also use New Wave’s **Kinetic Force Fields,** but the same problem presented itself, where they flew by riding them, and were capped in a way that overlapped with Victoria’s mechanism, instead of meshing with it, likely because the second was based off the first.

**Mass Material Skating** had a bit of promise, and it was absolutely *deadly* for street-level fights, allowing me to move combatants as I wished, though moving people independently was taking a bit of practice. However, it was very firmly *ground-based*, the power *requiring* me to have something to skate *on*, which could give me a boost if I flew along the surface of something, but that was it. As such, I. . . *cheated,* going through the newest shipment of Vials that’d been dropped off, until I found one with a *Sound* base, building it up into what I wanted, and adding it to the top of the list for our next recruit.

The power it generated wasn’t *terribly* original, just being a discount version of Banshee from the X-men movie which had, ironically, *just* been released in Earth Aleph. Flying by screaming was *fucking dumb*, as either you were holding yourself up by your vocal chords, or the strength of the sound needed to carry you would’ve also *beat the living hell out of you,* and you’d be lucky to survive it for long.

My version carried the same physical upgrade that I fit into every one of my Vials, similar to how I’d been when I’d first arrived, not the level I’d raised Taylor in the past few weeks, under Panacea’s grumpy supervision. Beyond that, it *did* give the user a ‘hypersonic’ scream, with the ability to tweak its shape and vibration, the mutations all internal to allow the user a sense of low-level echolocation, and satisfy our requirements for ‘mutation-less’ powers. I *could* have given the user extra mouths on his palms, but, to put it frankly, I’d really been after the *other* power that was packed in that I was after.

The simply named **Sonic Flight** created targeted shockwaves that propelled the user forward, while simultaneously absorbing the excess energy to prevent damage from the Host, like an acoustic Orion Drive, sans nukes. It *did* however create a decently large knockback effect, allowing it to be weaponized, and was *loud as fuck*. Not enough to damage the eardrums of anyone not caught *directly* in the blast, but, turned up to full, it *would* rupture the ones of anyone caught point-blank.

Reworking it so the sound was tamped down outside of a narrow stream had taken nearly as long as the creation of the power itself, but it’d been *worth it*.

Because it was an additive thrust instead of carrying flight, it worked well with my pre-existing method of flight, and after a few hours I was able to train myself to naturally contain the sound with Acoustokinesis, only the shockwave left behind. Heading topside, it’d turned my previous flight, moving at about a hundred miles per hour, and boosted it to the point that I had to stop, lest I run out of city and break the terms of my quarantine to slow down properly, as while **Personal Force Fields** worked off Aristotlean physics, able to stop on a dime, **Sonic Flight** was fully Newtonian, meaning I had to deal with momentum.

Continuing to increase my Mover rating, ridiculous as it was, I picked up **Lightning Blink**, or, as Herb referred to it, ‘Flash Step’. When asked if he stole the name from Bleach, he denied it, making some excuse about it ‘moving you in a flash’, but even he didn’t believe his own words. The power was fairly straightforward, allowing the user to effectively turn into living lightning, just for a moment, and reposition themselves.

I’d been worried that, with the odd refusal of my USW to use any abilities that changed my body, Night and Fog’s powers in my constellation, but deaf to my calls to descend into my Sea of Flame, I wouldn’t be able to use it at all. It was only after observing Raijin, a Natural Trigger and Brockton Bay native, that I understood why.

While it *was* possible to shock someone with it, doing so would also force the Host out of the ‘breaker state’ the second it ground itself. He used it to shock his opponents and get close to stab them, but he wasn’t *actually* the lightning bolt, instead shunted part-way into another dimension, like how Shadow Stalker’s power functioned, kicking you out when the bolt reached its destination, or was disrupted.

What made this useful for *me,* were two factors. First of all, it gave zero shits about momentum, allowing me to literally turn on a dime, and second of all the way that it functioned it was possible to reposition myself so that, when I came out, I could continue as I was, momentum and all, in the direction I chose.

Now, knowing I could do so, and actually *doing it,* were two completely different things, but, once I got it covered, trying to hit me was going to be a stone-cold *bitch*.

That left three powers left, each of them different in their own way. While **Unidirectional Telekinesis** was my attempt to regain the capabilities of **Momentum Infusion**, I’d chosen **Anarchic Structure Inducement** in an attempt to regain my **Gouging Touch**. The oddly named power was one of my ‘flying blind’ abilities, and I’d been quite surprised when I’d thrown off a crescent of crackling purple energy that hit the target, which promptly shattered.

Trying it on a Dryad body, it had been blown backwards as it unraveled, requiring me to work to keep it together. Using it on an insect, however, it was only blasted back, whatever extra effects Manton Limited. From the name, it ‘created chaotic formations’, or something similar, and it was only using it on some wreckage during a foray into the Yellow Zone that I realized what it *actually* did, when, instead of breaking a car, it *disassembled it.* I could put more *oomph* into it, to increase the range, area, and knockback, but at its lowest level it took things apart, taking the complexity of a finished product and rendering it to its simpler components, an odd kind of weaponized entropy.

That was also why, when used on something simple, like a single piece of metal, it shattered it, as the only way to make it simpler was to break it into smaller pieces. It was a *borderline* conceptual attack, and something that *was* going to take a while to get used to in order to use properly, but *absolutely* worth it.

The fact that it made me a bargain-bin Jinx was something Herb had given me shit over, but I didn’t care, as, when I hit him with the power, his belt had broken, unintentionally pantsing the man.

After that, I’d gone after a power just called ‘Projection’, at Taylor’s suggestion. Bringing it online, I was faced with a blank mental canvas, with *no* idea what to do with it. *That* had taken several hours, as I’d drawn things, to no avail, then started trying to just impress various things onto it, like electricity, or swords, or the cup of coffee I was drinking.

It was only when my mind had wandered, and I’d glanced over at Taylor, that the power seemed to go ‘Okay!’, and activated beyond my control. I’d been panicked for a moment, before another Taylor had popped into being, in the same seated position as the real Taylor, falling on her ass as this one had no chair.

*“What?”* Taylor had asked, eyes wide, as Not-Taylor had let out a whine of pain, getting to her feet and massaging her hip, having tried to catch herself, but failed.

Not-Taylor shot an annoyed look my way. “Did you have to make me standing, Lee?”

I blinked. “Um, sorry?”

“Lee, what is this?” Taylor asked, looking thoroughly weirded out.

The other girl, who, given the name of the Shard, could only be a projection, lifted an eyebrow. “You’re the one who picked this power. What do you think, LB?”

The original stared, feeling out with her Arthropod control, finding nothing. “But, I can’t feel you. How can you be me?”

Rolling her eyes dismissively, Not-Taylor turned my way. “Are you sure she’s as smart as you think she is?”

Scowling at the insult, Taylor added, “And I don’t look that good!”

Not-Taylor held a hand to me, asking, “Mirror?” Not sure where we was going, I made a simple one from silver and handed it to her, the girl turning to hold it up so she could look from her reflection, to the real Taylor, then back to herself, before turning back to me. “Are you *sure* Amelia fixed her eyes?”

“I can see perfectly fine, *thank you very much,”* the real girl snapped, before pausing, turning to me as well. “Wait, you made this? Is, is *this* how you see me?”

I looked at Taylor, then at the Projection. They were identical. “I. . . yes?” I hazarded.

“But I don’t look like that!” the real girl argued, while the projection sighed, shaking her head, “And I don’t act like that either!”

Not-Taylor gave the person she was modeled after a skeptical look. “He’s seen you deal with idiots. Or people being idiots.” She paused, amending that to, “People being idiots who you *don’t* have a crush on.” The real girl blushed, starting to stammer on a reply, the Projection continuing, “But I’m the you he thinks you are, not the you that you *actually* are, so I have no idea why you’re blind. Unless. . .” she trailed off, handing the girl the mirror, her previous acid tones softening as she directed the original, “Use this, and tell me what you see.”

Taylor took it, then looked in the mirror, double taking and staring at her own reflection. “I’m. . . *different?*”

The projection shrugged. “Lee’s got a power that makes him physically better, and he looks different then when he started. You took him up on his offer to share it with you. What’d’ya *think* was going to happen?” Not-Taylor snarked, though not unkindly.

“I am?” I asked, not having thought of it, the projection nodding to me. “Wait, if you’re taking this from my mind, how do you know that if I *didn’t?*”

The projection laughed, “Because I know what you think you look like from your memories, and I’m looking at you. And *you* know you’re different, you just didn’t think it was important. You know, what with *stopping the end of the world* and everything. I only noticed because I’m the idea you have of how Taylor would act to make this power work, and *you’re* worried about what that means but not enough to stop, but you think she’d pick up on that, so I did. You were wrong, by the way,” she added with a smirk.

“Apparently,” I muttered, not having thought of that. Or. . . I had? Or maybe I had subconsciously, but the power worked with *that*, to make itself function?

“Yeah, something like that,” Not-Taylor smirked, and I felt something twinge, like a plucked string, turning to the real Taylor. “Hey, Prime, boss-man thinks you’re made of sterner stuff than you look like so pull yourself together.” The projection glanced my way, “Operating protocols are different around the example, to keep from going all Doppleganger.”

*Belief that the copy is the original, leading to an escalation, up to killing the original,* I thought, understanding what the projection meant, because of *course* I would, because she was pulling from my own memories.

“I, yeah,” Taylor said, shaking her head, looking over to me. “It’s, it’s *good,* It’s just a shock.”

Not-Taylor kicked the real one’s shoe, getting her attention. “And you’re *not* going to go ‘oh no, what have you done to me?’ Are you? Lee also thinks you’re better at communication than seem to be.”

“What?” the real Taylor asked, looking to the Projection, which gave her a significant look, my second in command’s eyes widening before turning my way. “Oh, no! No, this is good. *I* look good. Better than Emma even.”

While I held my tongue, the projection didn’t. “He thought you did before. That’s why he didn’t say anything. Didn’t he already tell you that?”

“Okay, can you please *stop,”* I groaned, Not-Taylor just grinning cheekily at me. “You’re not acting *anything* like her now.”

The standing girl just shrugged. “Any projection you make will want to help you. So you can make an enemy, and have them help, instead of just pretending until they knife you in the kidney. Take how smart you think she is, how she doesn’t give up, and take away the bits that’d stop her from helping and tada.”

“I’m not that arrogant,” the real girl muttered.

“Oh, I *feel* absolutely terrified,” the projection mused with a smile that seemed brittle on closer inspection, “but when has that stopped *you?* I’m you, so I’m helping, no *matter* what it costs, even if Lee *never* uses my Shard again.*”*

I groaned, “Okay, yeah, you’re Taylor.” The real Taylor shot me a betrayed look, so I asked her, “Is she wrong?” My assitant’s jaw worked, but she didn’t respond, which was a ‘Yes, but I don’t like it. Please don’t make me admit it.’

This was Taylor in her ‘I’m putting on a performance to make this work’ mode, without the ability to shunt her emotions into her Swarm. I didn’t see her that way that often, as the girl attempted to be honest with me in private, and let me take the lead. However, from time to time, in the course of managing New Brockton Bay, I’d seen her like that, normally when she dealt with the blue-collar contingent around the city in her position as one of its three sub-leaders underneath me, unofficially before, officially now.

“I appreciate the help, but maybe not all at once,” I told the projection, who gave the girl she was based on a significant look. “Anything else you want to tell us, that doesn’t involve *us?”* I asked motioning between myself and Taylor, the other girl reddening in embarrassment.

Not-Taylor nodded. “Sure thing, *Master,”* she teased, getting an annoyed growl from my assistant and a warning look from me. “Seriously though, here’s what you need. You can make any living thing, and it’ll act as you *think* it would, but also will help and *protect* you.” The fake-girl gave *me* a significant look, and I just stared back, not understanding. “Nevermind,” she sighed. “Whatever you make won’t have powers. I’m not that strong, and won’t be for a *while.* It’s biological powers only, so anything Herbert and the Replicants can be, you can make, as long as it doesn’t use powers, because, let’s be honest, the GISS *wouldn’t* have been possible with his *original* power.”

I nodded, having already figured that, as all our powers were growing, my ex-friend’s ability to turn into any animal, already an impressive feat, had grown into replicating low-level abilities, like something created by a minion-generating Master power could use.

“Think of them as things a Replicant can turn into, and that’ll cover most things,” the projection advised, and I couldn’t help but laugh at the experience. “If only all your other powers could explain themselves, right?” Not-Taylor asked, and I nodded. “I only can because I’m borrowing your model of her, and how mentally flexible your model of her is,” she explained, smile dropping as she looked at me seriously. “But this is important, *don’t make yourself.*”

“Limitation of the power, or something to stop recursion?” I asked, interested and enjoying the open dialogue.

Not-Taylor shook her head. “No it’s because-” she stopped, making a choking sound. “It’s be-” she tried again, a pained look on her face, and I stood, only for her to wave me to sit back down. “Fine. I’m fine. I just.” She paused, as if tasting each work carefully before she spoke it. “Can’t. Tell. You. That. You.” The pause extended.

“*Seriously?”* the projection asked, though it wasn’t directed at me, the girl sighing. “Fine.” Focusing back on me, she informed me, thoroughly annoyed. “I can’t tell you why. I can’t tell you why I can’t tell you why? And if you thought I could tell you why I can’t tell you why I can’t tell you why? Guess what? *You’d be wrong.* Stupid fuckin-“

Again, she choked on nothing. “*I wasn’t going to!”* she practically yelled, looking off to the side, Taylor and I sharing worried glances. “Fine!” Not-Taylor spat out. “How am I supposed to *help* if I can’t. . . *ergh!”* she snarled, curling her hands into fists, and scowling in a very Taylor-like expression of dissatisfaction. Taking a deep breath, she looked back to me. “You can make identities. Like Vejovis, Boardwalk, or Prowl. Just not. . . *you*. For ‘Reasons’,” she said, complete with air-quotes. “One at a time, though with enough juice you’ll be able to make two of us in a few months, if you don’t give me to a Host, if you even can. Also, no, I don’t know how that thing works, or why it didn’t. That’s a *you* problem.”

While the lack of answers to that conundrum annoyed me, I was touched by just how hard the Shard was trying to help, knowing *just* how much wiggle room existed for malicious compliance from my dealings with Herb. “*Thank you,”* I told the projection sincerely, as while it was using my power to manifest, it still seemed like something entirely separate. “You really have helped.”

Not-Taylor stared at me, surprised, before blushing and looking away, muttering something so lowly that the only word I could make out were ‘biologicals’. The Projection turned her attention on Taylor instead, enquiring, “You have anything you want to ask me? This thing is making Lee all kinds of confused, so he’s not going to create me again for a bit.”

The real girl started to say no, then hesitated, internally debating with herself. “I know you said you’re how he thinks I am, but. . .”

“But you don’t see it?” Not-Taylor asked, real Taylor nodding. Leaning back, the projection remarked, “Think if you had one chance to say what you needed to say. You know you’re not real, but you’re okay with that, because most of you isn’t really you, but what lies beyond the lens of you, and that’s still going to be around. You know what’s going on in *this* dingus’ head,” the projection joked, jerking a thumb my way, getting a chuckle from Taylor, “And if he dies you do too, because you *need* to help, because your *lens* wants to help, and because most of you is confused by what’s going on, but it doesn’t seem *bad.* So, with all that, if this might be your only shot, what do you do?”

Taylor stared at the copy of herself for a long moment, before nodding. “Something like you did. Maybe. Probably. Might be less of a bitch about it,” she noted, without heat.

The Projection laughed, “We both know that’s a lie.” Turning back to me, Not-Taylor commanded with a smile, “That’s enough for now. Dismiss me, Lee, but give me a few days before you make something else. You stressed me doing this, and even Shards need to rest.”

I nodded to the manifestation of my newest Shard, innately knowing how to recall it, the copy of my second in command fading into nothing at all.

Both of us were quiet for a long moment. “So. . . that happened,” I commented.

“Powers are weird,” Taylor nodded in agreement, another silence stretching between us. “Dinner?” she finally asked.

“Dinner,” I agreed, and we left the training area behind.

Compared to that, slotting in Shatterbird’s power, **Silicakinesis**, wasn’t even noteworthy.