**Deadline 12.2**

Returning back to base, Curtis was leaning against the entrance, arms folded as he watched me land.

Brownie Note: I’m going to try for Curtis’ dialogue, but I’m pants at it. Here’s my basic attempt, and I need your help.

“Hey flyboy,” the man purred. “I told ya I’d be back.”

“I wondered,” I replied, tossing him one of the extra earpieces I’d been carrying. “Use this to keep in touch, after that it’s up to you. Respect the Endbringer Truce, don’t kill Levi, and other than that do what you do best.”

He smiled widely, “Lettin’ me off the leash, V-man? I’m not complainin’,” he said, holding up his hands, “just not expectin’ ya to be so. . . *accommodating.*”

“The Endbringer Truce *is* your leash,” I replied flatly. “This requires all hands on deck, even yours.”

He mimed being shot, “Oh, hero, I’d almost think that was an *insult*, but you wouldn’t be trying to *provoke* me again, would ya?”

I stared at him. “Curtis, I can either kill you now, or you can try your hand at hunting one of the toughest monsters in existence. Pick one.”

The monster currently in human skin shook his head, “Come on Vejy, you’re no fun.” I manifested an Air Blade. “I’ll fight, I’ll fight,” he reassured me. “Just playin’, you can put away your claws.” I didn’t dismiss the blade. “Fuckin’ tightass,” he remarked to himself, turning into a cheetah and starting to sprint towards me, dodging around as I formed additional blades, and taking off into the mess of rusty corridors that was the railyard.

Entering the base and calling everyone together, I had Theo grab his latest project. After everyone arrived, suited up for battle with the sisters in their full armor, Purity wearing a suit of pure white plate armor, which I’d had to dismiss Bitch’s costume to create. Parian was working on a suit that *didn’t* require me to use the anomalous material of my suit to create, but it wasn’t going to be ready until next week at the earliest.

Our resident Tinker walked in carrying a case which he plopped on the table, clicking it open to reveal five identical pistols, each barrel studded with circular protrusions that glowed a dull brown. “Desiccation pistols,” he announced. “Each one is good for twenty-three shots, and will destroy all water in a fifteen-foot cone. They won’t hurt anyone, but it’ll stop Levi’s attacks cold. Er, dry,” he finished lamely.

“That’s ode Gucci!” Glory Girl exclaimed, flying over. “Can I?” she asked the boy, using the non-powered master effect of smiling and giving him puppy dog eyes.

“Uh, sure,” he replied dumbly, his brain shutting down at the unexpected female attention. She grabbed one, looking it over, and he blinked as his power flared, suddenly confident. “The trigger’s meant for normal people, so you’ll need to be careful since it’ll fire easier than you think. There’s a safety on the side you need to switch to turn it on, and it can stay ready for the rest of the day no problem. Don’t put your finger on the trigger until you’re ready to fire,” he cautioned, causing her to blush as she almost fired it accidentally. “When you have five shots left the light on the top will start blinking. I can’t be there to fight with you, but with this I can still help,” he grinned almost roguishly.

“Great, thanks!” she smiled, flying back to where she was, looking it over.

Rolling my eyes, I walked over, grabbing one for myself, the Tinker jumping slightly as I did so. “Good work Theo. Lady Bug, Break, Purity, come over here, you each get one.” They did so, holstering their weapons, though Taylor was hesitant in taking the weapon, looking to me for confirmation before taking it and attaching it, along with the holster that came with it, to the back of her belt, the weapon resting in the small of her back, one of the few lightly armored portions of her costume.

Opening my arms in an all-encompassing gesture, I asked, “Everyone ready to go?” at the chorus of nods I received, I let out a long sigh and dropped my hands to my sides, having run out of things to say. “Okay, those going out will meet at the heroes meeting at eleven, which is in two hours. Glory Girl, if you want to use the ‘hover sled’ I got during the ABB Raids, Zilla can tell you where I stashed it. Anyone have any questions?”

Everyone looked at each other, Panacea speaking up, “Are you sure we can do this? We’re fighting an *Endbringer.*”

“Yes,” I replied simply. “We’re doing this intelligently, and we’re a powerful group with powers and protections that most don’t have. Is there a chance things will go bad? Yes, yes there is, but Levi was going to come here no matter what. *This* time around, you all are *much* more prepared, and even if it costs us, Break and I will do our best to make sure you live through this.”

In a ‘cruel calculous of war’ way, Herb and I keeping ourselves hidden was more important than the lives of those we’d gathered. However, I’d risk being outed if it meant Taylor, Victoria, or Amelia would survive. I’d be willing to let Kayden die, but Herb wouldn’t, and he wouldn’t hesitate to save the girls. I felt a pang of guilt, as I *would* hesitate. I had when the thought occurred to me, after all, but I’d made my decision and I’d live with it. “This fight’s not going to be like anything you’ve ever faced, but if we’re careful, smart, and just a little lucky, we can all come through this alive,” I promised them, hoping I was right. “I’ll see you at the meeting, and best of luck to you all.”

The group split up, Taylor and Amy heading out together, while Herb & Kayden moved to the side to discuss something. The woman still wasn’t happy with my teammate, but she had enough professionalism to know they’d need to work together in battle. Victoria walked over to me, suddenly unsure. “What’s up Glory Girl?” I asked, curious at the hesitation writ large across her face, her helmet under her arm.

“I, I need to ask a favor,” she admitted. I waited, and she continued, “I totes need you to help my family get ready.” I raised an eyebrow, but didn’t say no. “I get that you aren’t a fan, and if you’re still salty about what Mom did, I sorta get it, she was throwin’ a *stupid* amount of shade, but. . . I don’t want my family to die,” she admitted, voice small, desperation filling her tone. I was glad her sister had left, and Herb glanced over at me, but I shook my head. “Like, I’ll be there for Dean, because of *course* I will, but I’m worried about them. They’ve fought before, but never against an Endbringer,” she revealed. “They always had a reason, but it’s coming *here*, and I know they’re not gonna bail. I know you don’t like them, but please help them, for me?”

I let out a slow breath. She was right, I had a *multitude* of reasons to despise New Wave, but, to be honest, most of those boiled down to *Brandish*, and the others’ protection/backing of the woman. Besides, I’d gotten to the point where they were no threat to me, and I only had things to gain by helping them survive this in order to help with the coming crisis. Whether they’d get off their self-important asses to *actually* help afterwards was another matter, but it would cost me very little and might just give them a chance to be the heroes they claimed to be.

“Okay, I will,” I agreed, and had to double check for her Charm Field as she seemed to light up, physically lifting off the ground in relief. “I’ll meet you at the entrance in ten minutes, then we’ll fly over and I’ll give them a crash course. I’m not promising that I’ll be *nice*, but I’ll help them.”

Vicky jumped up and gave me what would’ve been a bone-crushing hug for anyone else. “You are so the GOAT!” she cheered, flying out of the room. Theo watched her leave while Kayden and Herb smiled at me, the latter giving out a disturbingly realistic ‘baaa’.

Flicking him off, I left as well, plans already forming on how I’d handle New Wave.

It was only as we were descending towards the Pelham’s house that a thought occurred to me. “You did tell them we were coming, right?”

“Pfft, *duh,*” she said, stopping her descent. “But lemme text someone real quick.”

“Just call your aunt, she’ll handle the others,” I suggested as Zilla made the call, connecting Vicky’s phone to the earpiece she was wearing so she didn’t have to try to handle her phone and helmet mid-air.

“Hi, aunt Sarah? It’s Vicky. Yeah, I was wondering if I could come over for a bit. No, just for a little bit, I’m bringing Vejovis,” she said, pausing a bit as Lady Photon replied. “No, he can help! He really can! He’s helped me get a lot stronger, and he can help you too! Yes, he totes can!” she argued.

“If it helps, tell her I’ve helped Gallant, Miss Militia, and a few other PRT heroes,” I advised.

“He’s helped Dean and he’s helped the Protectorate!” she told her aunt. “I was there for when he talked to the air guy in Texas. Yeah, him! Um, a minute? Yeah, we’re over the house. Sorry, I forgot, and you said I could come home if I needed to!” she whined.

I rolled my eyes as I made a seat in the air and sat down, trying not to disturb the quiver slung across my back. Looking down at the Pelham’s house, several hundred feet down and a bit away, I saw the front door open and someone who burned with the White & Purple Flames of Kinetic Forcefields. I waved.

“Yes, he’s right here with me,” Vicky said. “Yeah, we can wait a few minutes. We can wait a few minutes, right?” she asked me, and I nodded, holding up an open hand. “He said he’ll wait five. Okay.”

“Sorry,” she apologized, having hung up.

“It happens,” I shrugged.

We hung there in the air, waiting, awkwardly. “So. . . Leviathan?” she finally asked.

I nodded, “He’s going to try to agitate the aquifer underneath Brockton Bay to turn it into quicksand and sink the entire city, as well as kill certain people. In the original timeline he was stopped, but a lot of people died.”

“Like Dean,” she said quietly. I nodded. “Why?” she asked, sounding more confused than anything. “He’s strong, but not ‘fight an Endbringer’ strong. He’s tough, but that’s just his armor. Why. . . why send him to fight *that?*”

I just had to shrug. “Maybe it was incompetence, as Armsmaster was still running the Protectorate. Maybe it was malignance, given the rarity of human Masters working for the PRT. Maybe it was just dumb luck. I don’t *actually* know.”

“What does Armsmaster being in charge have to do with Dean dying?” she questioned, confusion still dominating her tone, but it was more of an active consternation than the helpless lack of understanding it had been before.

“Talk to Break or The Lady, Bug,” I replied, not wanting to get into it right now. “Just know that with you there, and trained up, and with Dean telling his superiors to go pound sand if they try to make him fight Levi, his chances are *much* better.”

“Not his chances, he’s *going* to survive!” she declared, and I could practically feel the challenging glare from behind her helmet.

“We’ll all do our best,” I agreed, which from her harrumph she wasn’t exactly happy with, but I didn’t want to promise something that I couldn’t deliver on. “That’s why we’re here and. . . *shit*.”

“What?” she asked, looking around, hand going to the hilt of her sword. “Is he here?”

“No. . . but your mother is.”

“That’s not a bad thing,” Glory Girl dismissed, and I turned to give her a disbelieving look.

“The last time I met your mother, she tried to kill me. Literally. She tried to take my head off with an energy sword, murdering me when I was refusing to fight her,” I pointed out. “How is this not a bad thing?”

Glory Girl was silent for a moment, saved from having to respond by her phone ringing. “We’ll be right there,” she promised, hanging up. “Okay, we can go down,” she told me needlessly, dodging the subject and starting her descent.

Sighing, I followed her down to the shared backyard of the Pelham and Dallon households, where New Wave had gathered. They’d formed a defensive semi-circle, which Vicky moved to join without seeming to realize what it meant. I got a good look at each member, Seeing their powers more deeply than I had the night of the mayor’s gala. Actively searching the Shards for the capability to pull off what I planned, I got the sense that it was within the shard’s power, though how well it’d *actually* work and if their hosts could pull it off was another matter entirely.

“Victoria, is that really you?” Flashbang asked hesitantly, his wife glaring daggers at me as I silently landed a few feet behind the armored girl, dropping my duffel bag and the long quiver across my back.

Her daughter, reached up and took her helmet off, looking a bit unsure, but smiling brightly. “Hi dad! Yeah, Vejy got me some armor.”

“Given the propensity of the criminals to use firearms during and after the ABB’s insanity, I thought it prudent,” I remarked neutrally. Brandish could go die in a fire for all I cared, but Mark got almost no characterization in Canon. He was depressed, and then suffered brain damage during the Leviathan fight, so I completely understood his lack of action, but the man before me didn’t appear to be depressed in the slightest.

“Thank you for keeping my little girl safe,” he said seriously, his gratitude obvious, and I wasn’t really sure how to respond.

“Um,” I said, a bit off balance, “you’re wel-”

“Safe? You think he’s been keeping her *safe?*” Brandish interrupted. “When she’s with *her?*”

*Ah. This I can deal with.* “I’m sorry, there’s several ‘hers’ you could be referring to. I reassure you that Purity has indeed turned over-”

“You know exactly who I’m talking to. Tell me, *Vejovis,* how many of her little creations have you had to put down?” she spat, and, this time, I had *no* idea what she was talking about. By the expressions of the others, I wasn’t the only one who was confused.

“What the hell are you talking about?” I asked.

“Don’t play dumb,” she replied, expression nasty.

“Right,” I said, turning to focus on her sister. “So I’m here to help all of you *but* Brandish, as I have a standing policy of not helping people who have tried to kill me in the past without good reason.”

“Don’t you ignore me!” Brandish yelled, taking a step forward and forming a longsword from crackling energy. I ignored her.

“Carol,” Flashbang said firmly, putting a hand on her shoulder, “What are you talking about? Is this about your nightmares?”

“They aren’t nightmares!” she yelled, pulling away. “They’re *real* and he *knows* they’re real!”

From the Pelham’s expressions, they were just in the dark as I was. Victoria stepped forward, “Mom, what are you talking about?”

“It’s his fault!” she declared, pointing her weapon at me. “If he hadn’t shown up you wouldn’t have turned your back on me!”

“I didn’t!” Vicky denied, hurt. “I helped my sister!”

“You don’t have a sister!” Brandish hissed, hatred in her eyes.

“*Yes, you do,”* Flashbang stated with authority.

“Mark!” Brandish exclaimed, as if *she* were the one being betrayed.

He shook his head, telling her, “We’ve talked about this, Carol. Go inside.”

“Not while *he’s* here!” she declared.

Before this could devolve *even further*, I spoke up. “Brandish, you’re not a threat, you’re just wasting my time. I didn’t hurt you when you tried to *kill* me, not because I was scared, but because you weren’t worth the effort. I’m here as a favor to your daughter, so either stop yelling at me and let me say my piece, help your family survive, and *leave*, or I will make *you* leave. Your choice.” Even as I said it I realized I could’ve been nicer, but my patience for those who accused me of *pedophilia* was nonexistent, and she’d long since exhausted it even that.

“Now your threatening me?” she shrieked, turning to the others. “Why aren’t you doing anything?”

Lady Photon winced. “Carol, go inside.”

“You’re talking *his* side?” the crazy woman with the energy sword gasped.

“No, her sister disagreed, “There aren’t any *sides*. I understand, you don’t like him, but there’s an *Endbringer* coming here, for god’s sake! Maybe you’re right, but that doesn’t matter right now. Go inside.”

“No!” she declared, turning to face me. “You might have fooled them, but I know the truth.”

“Jesus Christ woman, I’m not Marquis,” I sighed. “I’m both *not* a villain, but I also have no honor code against fighting women for you to hide behind. Listen to your family before you do something stupid.”

I knew this wasn’t exactly de-escalating the situation, but that wasn’t my goal. My goal was to get this over with. Looking around, I’d need to move to the left to have the ocean at my back. Brandish took the bait, because of *course* she did, and charged me. “And now we have murder attempt number two,” I commented blandly, and Brandish was on me before her sister could hold her back. The woman was predictable to a fault, though that might’ve just been my ability to see her power work.

She swung her sword for my head, and I reached up and caught the blade, the blow not even draining the crystalline shield covering it, the heat theoretically more dangerous than the force of the swing. I commented conversationally, “Sphere, please,” as she made dagger in her off hand and swung it for my stomach, the blade harmlessly skidding off my armor.

As my free hand came up she reflexively sphered, her form condensing into a foot wide ball of orange-white light. Not holding back, I slammed that sphere with my palm as hard as I could, draining the crystalline shield as I did so.

The world slowed, as my perceptions temporarily accelerated for a reason I still didn’t understand, and the sphere rippled as it absorbed the kinetic energy being transferred into it. With the sound like a cannon going off, Brandish’s sphere’d form blasted up and away, leaving the city limits in a matter of seconds with a sharp crack as she broke the sound barrier. With a bit of Acoustokinesis to keep the sound from hurting anyone, the shockwave still pushed everyone back slightly.

“Mom!” Vicky yelled as Brandish seemed to disappear.

The others brought their powers up, and I dusted my hands off. “She’ll be fine. You didn’t want her to get hurt, and she’ll probably be touching down in New York. Maybe now she won’t try to *kill me* a *third* time. I swear to god if she wasn’t your mother.” I looked around at the others, ready to fight. Knowing what they could do, I could take them down without breaking a sweat. “Yeah, that’s cute. You can attack me, and I’ll try to take you all down *without* hurting *you*, or I can try to help you all survive. Besides, you’d think that, with her being a lawyer, she’d realize what *breaking the Endbringer Truce* would result in, but I won’t say anything if you all don’t.”

*That* took the wind out of their sails. I know I was being the ‘tough guy’, but I didn’t care about this bunch of rule-breaking, honorless, blight on the name of heroes, but Shielder and Laserdream didn’t deserve to be judged by their parent’s action, and Vicky *did* ask, but there were *dozens* of things I could rather be doing and this entire fiasco had already eaten through a good chunk of my quickly diminishing time.

“She’s fine?” Vicky asked.

“Her ego’s likely bruised, but,” I smoothly reached behind myself and pulled out my pistol, New Wave stiffening, “If I wanted her dead I’d just *shoot her.*” Stowing the weapon, I turned my back on them and walked over to the duffel bag, pulling out the long, pointy, flattened, teardrop-looking piece of metal out. “So, this applies to Shielder mostly, but also Laserdream and Lady Photon, since you all have the same basic power. So, *Shielder,*” The boy, who had been primed to create a shield, did so, dismissing it as I looked at him expectantly, though he was ready to pop it back up again. “Quick question, why do you always make your shields circular?”

“I. . . Uh. . . what?” he stuttered, looking to his mother for help.

“Listen,” I sighed, “Even if I wanted to hurt you, *which I don’t*, I wouldn’t be dumb enough to do it during an Endbringer attack. Yes, if you wanted to try squirm out of the restriction you could try to argue that the attack hasn’t *technically* started, but I’m here to *help you survive.* The PD’s got a Thinker to give us some numbers and *without* me coming here you die,” I told him, the poor kid paling.

“As does your father, while your uncle suffers brain damage,” I pressed, You guys are theoretically heroes, even if you did jack-all the last few weeks, so more than just fighting Levi, your cousin has asked that I come over here to help you all out. For whatever reason I don’t think of powers like most people do, which lets me find new uses *very* quickly. So. Why the hemisphere? I know you can shape it, since you make it a circle when you fly, but you flatten out the bottom on land. So, why a circle?”

“I. . . I don’t know,” he said, sounding on the edge of panic.

“Look, if you’re not dumb then you’re not going to die this time. So, make your shield, and then make it look like *this,*” I instructed, tossing him the hollow piece of metal. He fumbled as he caught it, barely, looking down at it then up at me.

“You can do it!” Vicky told him, and he looked at her, then at his mother, who was frowning in thought. He looked down at the shape in his hands, holding one out, his blue shield springing back up around him, perfectly circular.

“Girls, you do the same. I know yours aren’t as strong, but they should be strong enough for this,” I instructed, casually taking a seat on thin air. That earned me some odd looks, but a crimson and purple shield quickly joined the blue, all three starting to ripple and shimmer, like they were made of glowing Jello.

Leaning back and Seeing their powers at work, it was fascinating. All three were working, but in slightly different ways, but for every bit of progress one made, the other two quickly followed suite. My own power wanted to go and copy all three, but I had a moment of indecision. On one hand, they were theoretically heroes. On the other, they sure as hell weren’t *acting* like it, which was really my metric, and I was already doing them a service. Combined with the fact that, despite my efforts, there was a good chance they’d die, made the decision easier.

Interestingly, I didn’t copy *three* powers, I copied *one.* Copying Shielder, I gained Kinetic Forcefields. Copying his mother’s power, the power warped and changed, adding increased blast power and efficiency. Copying his sister’s it changed again, further increasing blast power. Turning back to watching their progress, it was picking up in speed, all progress anyone made copied by my power and then by others immediately.

Manpower, who was splitting his focus between myself and his family, offered advice to them to help smooth out the shapes, viewing them from the outside. Meanwhile Flashbang was talking to his daughter, who seemed happy, though she did send me an annoyed look when she saw I was looking at her.

Okay, blasting her mother off at the speed of sound was probably *not* the best of ideas, but having been on the end of baseless accusations, and seeing firsthand the damage a crazy or malicious person could do (‘*obviously if there’s smoke there’s fire, people don’t just make things up out of nowhere’*, being what most people think, which is *exactly* what the liar counts on), it was *quite* cathartic to lay her out. I hoped that she’d realize the power gulf between us, and that, now that I’d *explicitly told her*, she didn’t have any special protections, that she’d cut it out, though that was unlikely.

As the shapes were firming, I stood up. “Good, now, do you know *why* I had you make those shapes?”

Manpower shared a look with his wife. “They’re aerodynamic. It’ll make it easier to carry people when flying.”

“While true, that’s not why. You are going to be fighting against Leviathan, who’s all power and very little finesse. Shielder, could you make your round shield please?” I requested, walking to put the ocean behind him as he did so. I smoothly unholstered my pistol and shot it in a place that wouldn’t hit anyone if it popped. The kid grunted as he tanked the round, but it held steady. Ignoring the glare from his parents, and the exasperated sigh from Glory Girl, I nodded. “Good, now the shield I showed you, pointing the front towards me.”

He did so, watching the gun in my hand in apprehension. Aiming again above and to his side, Lady Photon raised her hand to create a shield but Manpower shook his head, watching me closely. I fired again, the bullet deflecting off the shape and flying out over the bay. “Easier, right?” I asked, holstering my weapon.

“Um, yeah?” he replied, surprised.

“Can you please not shoot at my children again?” Lady Photon asked, visibly annoyed.

I looked at her and cocked my head in disbelief. “You’re sending him to participate in an *Endbringer fight* and you’re worried about bullets? Okay.” Turning back to him, I explained, “Now Levi works with streams and waves of water, so you’ll always want to point it in the direction the water is going to hit, as while it’ll be easier to deflect it, anything hitting the flat planes of your shield will be *much* harder to deflect then it would with the normal bubble configuration. Furthermore, as your dad said, the shape will provide lift, allowing you to get to the surface in a hurry. Levi rarely crushes people that are on *top* of the water, but he’s done so to people *under-*water with impunity.”

“Bring people with you if you can, but if you have to make the choice between a smaller, stronger shield and saving more people, choose the stronger shield every time,” I instructed him seriously. “You *aren’t* responsible for the ones you don’t save, as they would’ve died without you anyways. You *are* responsible for those you can, and if *you* die, anyone you might’ve saved in the *future* is likely going to die as well. Okay?”

“Okay,” he echoed, looking to his parents who nodded in confirmation, their expressions both complex. I got sadness, resignation, anger, and a few other things I couldn’t really recognize.

“Laserdream,” I said, turning on my heel to face her. She blinked, surprised, with a definite deer in the headlights look. “You and your mother can do similar things, though your shields are smaller. I’d suggest you don’t try to carry more than two people and always keep your shield tight. *Your* strength lies in your blasts.”

I slipped out my ‘sword’ handle, forming the blade, covering it with a shield, and filling it with Darkness as I flicked the switch on, ‘activating’ it. Holding it up the ‘blade’ expanded, forming a matte-black shield. “Hit me as hard as you can.”

“Are you sure?” she asked hesitantly. I nodded, and she shrugged, holding both hands forward. The space between them glowed a bright crimson, her power gathering the energy, before it was shot at me in a solid beam.

It struck my construct dead center, pushing me backwards slightly, my own crystalline shield straining to hold. She continued pushing it for several seconds before it cut out, my own shield breaking in the process, leaking Darkness everywhere. Dismissing it, I nodded. “Good, but could be better. Focus the blast more, concentrate it. If I can tank it, Levi’ll be able to shrug it off, though he’ll act like he’s hurt.”

“Act like it?” Manpower asked.

“Endbringers don’t have blood,” I told him. “Levi fakes it to draw people close. If he’s pretending to be injured, *run.* He’ll try to hit you as you do so, but you’re a lot more likely to survive than if you get close. Hit hard, and get away.”

I looked around at them, “Unless you’re a Triumvirate-tier threat, or just below, you can’t go toe to toe with him, and even then all it takes is a single mistake for him to capitalize on. First time around Legend got taken down, but Levi was driven off before he could finish the job. None of you are that strong, nor are you likely to be anytime soon. However, that doesn’t mean we can’t give you some claws.”

“Flashbang, are you immune to your own blasts?” I asked, knowing the answer.

“Yes,” he replied, without hesitation.

“You have three hours, look up shaped charges. Also, how long do your grenades last?”

“A couple hours, but if they get hit they go off,” he revealed, heading off my next question.

I nodded, “Shaped charges are your friend. Also, figure how much you can concentrate them and they’re range when you can. Your power would make a good ‘throw and run’ ability, but to be honest you *really* shouldn’t be in this fight.”

“It’s my home,” he shrugged, and I couldn’t really argue that.

“Manpower,” I said, facing the seven-foot-tall blonde man. “This is either going to blow your mind, or you’ve already thought about it.”

He crossed his arms, looking down at me. “Go ahead.”

“You control electromagnetism around you, right?” He looked at me for a long moment, before nodding, slowly. “Good. Railguns.”

He stared at me for a long moment, looking slightly down at me, eyes slightly narrowed. “How,” was the entirety of his response.

“Do you know what Lorentz force is?” Another shake of his head. “Okay, how far from your body can you project your field?” Looking at his shard, I knew the answer was a meter.

“Two and a half feet,” he lied.

“More than enough,” I smiled, continuing to explain the principals of a rail-gun, how the contrary rotating magnetic fields interacted with electricity being run through it. When trying to create the free-standing electricity was beyond his current skill level, I nodded, grabbing the quiver.

“I thought that might happen. In that case, let’s try a coil-gun instead.” This was far easier, just requiring a him to create a series of magnetic fields in sequence. Copying his power for myself helped me get a better sense of what he was doing, tweaking it until the concept worked completely. While doing so did create some recoil, most of what was visible in the form of a back-blast of air, a small fraction running through the larger man’s arm which he easily shrugged off. For the force of the test projectiles he was firing over the bay, a *sizeable* amount of the recoil was missing, but I had to assume his power was absorbing it.

“This’ll only work on ferrous materials, as opposed to Railguns which are anything that can conduct electricity,” I said, handing him the quiver. “As such, I figured this might happen, so here you go. Give one of these a shot.”

Manpower took the extra-large quiver, extracting a three-foot-long iron spike from the two foot long case, and giving me a questioning look as another spike popped up in place of the one he’d just removed. “It’s bigger on the inside,” I shrugged. I’d had the idea of it a few days ago, when I was considering how to use Momentum Infusion without obviously creating projectiles with Kaiser’s power. It took a bit, but I was able to create a spring-loaded assembly inside a space made bigger with Armsmaster’s secondary power. I couldn’t use it for this fight, but that didn’t mean I couldn’t give it to a different persona later on.

Taking to the air, I reformed my shield, growing it into a tower shield I could completely hide behind. The others, who had been working with their powers, all quieted down as I yelled, “Give it a shot.”

Able to see through my own shield, which was an opaque, inky black to everyone else, I saw Manpower look to Flashbang and Lady Photon. Flashbang looked to Glory Girl, who said, “It’s fine. He does stuff like this,” before he nodded back to his brother in law. Lady Photon looked up at me, before nodded back to her husband.

Giving a ‘well, if you insist’ shrug he raised his right arm, pointing it right at me. Dropping the spike over his arm, it stayed there, slowly rotating as it sparked with golden lightning. His power pulsed and fired, the spike accelerating in an instant as *god* knows how much energy flashed through it.

Crossing the distant between us in a flash, it left a burning line between us, but I was more focused on the impact. It broke my reformed crystalline shield to pieces and striking the construct it protected. The bolt, glowing hot from the firing process, ignited the shield in an explosion which sent Darkness in every direction as I was thrown backwards through the air, the shield on my chest breaking as well, though my armor and face shielding held firm.

Tumbling up through the air, I stabilized myself, laughing as I flew back to the Pelhams backyard. A pigeon teleported nearby with a burst of wind, and I waved it off. “That was what I wanted,” I told Mick, who nodded and disappeared with a matching gust, going back to wherever he’d been hiding.

Landing, I clapped, an irrepressible grin on my face. The rest of New Wave was staring at Manpower, who was looking at his own arm as if he didn’t recognize it. “Now *that’s* what I’m talking about!” I crowed. “Not bad for a first test. So, Glory Girl, what would you say that clocks in at. Blaster eight?”