

Monday. 21st April. 24 Hours.

The rest of yesterday was spent helping Quest set up her new computers before she got back to work, we were spending today preparing for the attack itself.

My kitchen had quickly become Quest's new command center, the stolen laptops were all over the place on countertops and even the kitchen table. They were apparently all running individual programs meant to defeat String Theory's own defenses and to keep the subverted defenses firmly under Quest's control. The only issue we had left was the security team itself, as they would still be able to manually override the doors and they would most likely do so as soon as we starting kicking in their doors.

Since they could just shut the doors manually, we weren't even going to bother trying to get them under control, I would be smashing straight through them instead. Out of curiosity, I asked Quest what would happen if the power went out, she had quickly answered that the internet would turn off and that the computers wouldn't be able to stay connected to the base. Obviously, this would be catastrophic, resulting in all the security immediately reverting to its original programming, ergo, not a good thing.

Thank god I had played my electricity bill already, but between the two-hour showers that Quest took and all these computers, my next bill was probably going to suck. Gaston had revealed at the last minute that he would be coming with us to the base, so he could try and talk String theory down.

While his heart seemed to be in the right place, this was a terrible idea for many reasons. Size Queen and I had both tried to argue against this, but he had pulled rank on us, he was now an additional factor we would have to protect and be aware of during a really important time. I wasn't willing to drag him along with me, in the off chance I was put in a position where I had to choose between saving him and stopping the device.

I knew which one I would pick, maybe I would miss the moon, maybe I wouldn't.

Gaston wouldn't back down, not even when I reassured him that I would be bringing String Theory to him anyway, he really was a stubborn bastard sometimes, eventually, we gave in and changed the plan. Size Queen would be staying with him, playing keep away, and defending him from the normies in the base.

If at any point they were attacked Gaston would be sent on ahead and Size Queen would deal with the threat, Quest even gave Gaston her taser in case he needed to fight someone off. Gaston took it with a fair amount of reluctance, apparently quite adverse to the idea of carrying a weapon, even if it was non-lethal.

By the time we had left my apartment building, Quest had the vast majority of String Theories base under control, not including the doors. Everything was coming together, and it felt amazing to have been a part of setting up something like this. We packed everything we might need into bags and then went and found the bus we had decided on.

We would have less than five minutes to get through the facility's defenses and at its center, we would find the G-Driver, surrounded by a large metal shell, apparently shaped like a gigantic pillbox. Gaston had explained that the outer shell was at least as thick as the vault door from the bank, that it was designed with no visible gaps in the container, and from what he had been told, the shell was completely unbreakable.

The G-driver couldn't be accessed before the shell opened, which left us with little recourse other than taking over the entire facility and then waiting for it to open. Which none of us wanted to do, because trying to contain everyone in the facility for an indefinite amount of time was a terrible idea and if the heroes were somehow alerted, we would be absolutely screwed. Therefore, the best option we had available to us was to attack after the container was already open, but the device not yet fired. The container would begin to open when exactly five minutes remained on the countdown.

The plan was simple, Blitzkrieg.

We would enter the facility when the container begins to open, the security team would no doubt start locking doors down almost immediately, and we would have to deal with any threats that weren't part of the electronic systems personally.

My job was to cut a path straight to the G-Driver, not stopping until it was in pieces.

Monday. 21st April. 11:50 PM. 10 Minutes.

The three of us approached the front gates of the facility, right out in the open, without bothering to hide. When I had been here previously it had been late at night, with not a lot of visibility overall. In the light of day, however, I could really see just how impressive the place was, from down here it looked massive.

We all set our watches in a countdown synced to ten minutes on the bus under Gaston's guidance, and the time was slowly ticking closer and closer to the five-minute mark. This was it, the moment of truth, the culmination of all our hard work. We stood in a tense silence watching the time tick away, every tick of the little hand was accompanied by the tension ratcheting up a notch.

"Alright," Gaston said suddenly, smiling. "Any second thoughts? Cold feet?"

I blinked at the question and the tension faded away.

"We've got this, Gaston." I smiled back at him; Size Queen just punched a giant fist into an equally large palm.

"You'll be great, Andy," Gaston said quietly, before settling down into a sprinters position. "Don't stop for anything."

When the timer hit five minutes, I ripped the gate out of the ground and blasted forward at maximum speed. I smashed the front door into the building and heard the massive gate land in the distance. Almost immediately I was being shot at and the bullets bounced off my armor, and I smashed the next door aside before sprinting straight past them. They tried to follow me with their guns but lost line of sight almost immediately as I tore through the hallways, they started running to catch up, but I was already at the next door.

This place was truly massive I realized, crossing the entire building would have taken a couple of minutes on its own, but with these doors were huge metal things, and the entire complex was like a square beehive, only instead of hundreds of honeycombs, it was hundreds of square rooms with metal walls and concrete floors.

Each door took a moment to thread wires between the tiny gaps and wrench it open, then I had to cross the distance to the next one and start all over again. I was getting more and more efficient at it as I went, refining my technique. I started spreading my wires straight out to the next door before I was even halfway through the closest one.

I was about halfway through the facility when someone shot something at me that I barely had the presence of mind to slap out of the air. Whatever it was immediately exploded next to me and I was smashed through the wall on my left. My vision went black for a moment before I came to a stop amongst the bits and pieces of the wall.

Fuck.

I struggled to my feet absolutely reeling from the explosion, if I hadn't had my armor up, and if I hadn't hit that thing away, I'm quite sure I would be dead, just like that, no do-overs. As it was, I was unsteady on my feet and the side of my head hurt from where I hit it when I briefly lost control of my wires, it made me furious, fucking normies. The guy had abandoned the big-ass gun he was carrying and started coming towards me with his hands up.

Fisticuffs?!?

I smashed him into the wall with a wave of my hand before stumbling towards the next door. I had lost my momentum entirely; I glanced at my watch and felt my stomach try to climb out of my throat.

00:00:47.

My stumbling walk immediately turned into a stumbling sprint, as I did my best to get my shit together. I speared thousands of wires straight ahead of me, ripping the next three doors out of my way before pulling myself into the air and blasting off down the hallway. Three more doors fell to my wrath before I had to slow down again, the final door lay before me.

The last door was massive, and it took at least five times as many wires as any of the others had to even move it. I thickened each wire into a cable and forced both doors back into the wall with a grinding of metal on metal.

I stumbled over the threshold and tried to take everything in at once, the ceiling had partially retracted and there was a woman on the other side of a glass panel watching the room. An enormous device rested on two robotic arms that were bolted to the floor. It was angled upwards towards the night sky, through the hole in the roof. The machine was humming, and it kept getting louder by the second.

It vaguely resembled a cannon, the bottom half was larger around than a person's torso and the entire thing narrowed to a point, only a couple of inches wide. A luminescent blue line wound its way around the thing from the bottom to the point in an elegant spiral. A large monitor was mounted in the center of the wall furthest from the door. Large red numbers ticked slowly downwards.

00:00:19.

I lashed out with my power and the room was filled with countless wires, they tore across the room and went straight into the hole at the top of the device. They filled it completely, before branching out into thousands more inside the machine, they groped and grasped, searching for cracks, gaps, or anything else I could find. I tore everything inwards, the shielding, electronic parts, and cables were ripped from the device.

It kept humming.

I pushed harder and tore one of the mounts from the ground tilting the device off target. I thickened the cables in the thin end and ripped the top three feet of the tube into a hundred pieces. The device was *still* humming, It wasn't enough.

I ripped the entire thing free of the ground, shouting incoherently and smashed it into the ground as hard as I could, shrapnel was launched across the room from the force, the lights on the ceiling started flickering, the humming finally stopped. I breathed heavily as I stared at the monitor on the wall, a bright red seven blinked back at me and it didn't change.

String Theory for her part was staring out at the room in shock, one of the mounting arms I had broken off the device was sticking out of the shattered glass in front of her. She pressed a button on her side of the door, and it opened suddenly. In her hand she held a detonator, String Theory held it tightly against her chest as if I might take it away, she walked forward until she stood next to the broken remains of the G-Driver. She didn't even spare me a glance, as if she hadn't noticed me.

Gaston stumbled into the room a moment later panting for breath, and String Theory turned to look at him.

"Gaston?" String Theory said, her voice was soft and confused. "Why did you?" She trailed off as her other hand made its way to the front of her shirt.

I didn't know what I was expecting to see when I saw String Theory for the first time, but this wasn't it. I expected viciousness, cruelty, and an impossible intellect, but only one of those things were present, instead, she seemed almost ethereal. She started to laugh, and it wasn't the malicious laughter you would expect from a supervillain or the maniacal laughter from those afflicted by insanity.

It was a messy thing, breathy and undignified, a shudder ran the length of her body. She covered her mouth to try and stifle it but failed at even that. She doubled over, clinging desperately to her shirt, choking, squeaking, and wheezing. Her laughter slowly fell away over the course of half a minute and she fought to straighten back up. She sniffed once loudly.

Oh.

String Theory wasn't laughing, after all, she was crying, I could see her face now, it was wet, and she rubbed at her eyes with the back of her hand, smudging her eyeliner.

"There are bombs," String Theory managed, still crying. "In the city."

Gaston took a small step towards her.

"We've already destroyed them," Gaston said gently as if she were fragile and might break into a million pieces. "That was the first thing we did."

String theory looked heartbroken and another sob racked her body, I tried not to look straight at her, somehow feeling a surge of guilt rushing through me.

I couldn't blame her, on the eve of her greatest accomplishment, everything she had worked up to her entire life, to this moment and we had just come in and swept it all away from her in an instant. Her moment of brilliance, reduced to nothing more than a, could have been, the G-Driver was gone.

"That's a lie, isn't it?" String Theory whispered brokenly, but he couldn't reply. "Gaston?" She asked miserably.

String Theory raised the detonator and neither of us moved to stop her, she clicked it four times, nothing happened for a long moment and then a distance noise echoed through the open roof of the room. I felt a pit open in my stomach at the noise, turning to Gaston uncomprehending.

How had she-

"How many?" Gaston asked horrified.

String Theory looked at him quietly before opening her hand, there were flashing red numbers along the side of the detonator.

There weren't three bombs, there was four.

The alarms suddenly turned back on, sending noise blasting throughout the room, all the doors we had forced our way past were slamming shut one after another until the massive door slammed shut with a thump.

Gaston had an anguished look on his face and String Theory was watching him quietly. A metal sheet suddenly retracted on the wall directly behind her, two barrels connected by a piece of metal poked through the hole, it spun quickly and let out a barrage of flashing projectiles that cut through Gaston in an instant. The gun retracted back into the roof a moment later and the metal was unmarred once more.

I watched Gaston fall backward onto the ground, without comprehension, someone had started screaming. Two creatures erupted upwards, and the world was washed away before them, they rose upwards for an eternity, stretching into infinity. I could see them, I could see them, but I couldn't understand them. There was no pattern in my head that I could find and draw similarities, they were immense incomprehensible entities from somewhere else.

I could see them, and they were vast.

When I woke up, everything was destroyed, the ceiling lights had gone out entirely and a forest of metal bars crisscrossed the room, thick metal posts had torn holes through solid steel doors and concrete floors. The roof had collapsed and through it, a measure of light illuminated the room.

There was a section of the room that had remained mysteriously unscathed and in the middle of all the chaos lay two bodies, but only one was breathing.

The full moon hung suspended in the sky, large, radiant, and intact.

Gaston was dead.

22nd April, 12:07 AM.

Size Queen found us soon after, and the colossal woman fought her way through the massive doors, at what must have been her maximum size, and when she started towards the metal obstructions. I moved them out of the way with my power, and she passed by unhindered.

Size Queen shrunk down to her normal size as she crossed the room and took a moment to pull me to my feet, neither of us said anything for a moment before we moved towards the center of the room.

I reached down and belatedly took the detonator from String Theory's hand as if it might somehow reverse what had just happened and she let me take it without a fight, she simply sat on the ground at stared at the body, I tried not to look.

"What do we do?" I whispered, crying.

Size Queen put her hand on my shoulder before she squeezed it once and then let go.

"It's time to go," Size Queen said quietly, pulling me away. "We can't stay here; the alarms will bring the police and then the heroes will respond if they aren't already on their way."

I tugged my arm out of her grip, I couldn't leave them here, not after everything we went through, I mumbled as much to her, unable to meet her eyes.

"Urchin, the job is done! Gaston's dead," Size Queen said harshly, but her eyes were wet. "Staying here won't accomplish anything, I'm leaving, and you should too."

Size Queen turned and strode to the door, she turned back once she got there and waited for me to follow.

"Andy." Size Queen said quietly.

I stayed where I was, and after a moment she left.

Everything was falling apart; Gaston was dead, and our team was fracturing, I didn't know what to do, my earpiece was broken, and I couldn't contact Quest.

I couldn't stop crying.

I finally summoned the strength to do something, I gently wrapped wires around the body and lifted it off the ground before doing my best to restrain String Theory's hands with wire. I helped her to her feet, and she followed me quietly, still without any acknowledgment. I moved as much of the debris out of our way as possible and started towards the entrance.

Size Queen's path was obvious, she left the same way we had come in. I had cleared a path from the entrance all the way in, and the doors had been resealed behind me, she had reopened them all, to get to us. I didn't hate her for leaving us behind, I had seen her face when she had looked down at the body.

I followed her path all the way back to the entrance, I looked for her, but she was nowhere to be found, I wondered if I would ever see her again. I made a platform of wires and stepped upon it when it was large enough to hold us. String Theory stepped up onto the platform without issue, her expression still vacant, the platform lifted into the air and I started towards the city, rising above the buildings.

I was headed straight for the ocean.

The city lights that had looked so beautiful only days earlier were now just lights, the beauty had been stripped away. When I arrived at the waterfront I barely remember having crossed the distance at all. The ocean lay beneath me as we flew, a flat dark plane of water, disturbed only by the reflection of the moon. I was numb, I couldn't feel anything, and when I thought back to this moment later, I would feel horror at having been so close to it.

The Protectorate headquarters grew large as I approached, growing to an absurd height to tower above me. I brought us around before landing on an area that was not covered by the perfectly smooth forcefield that surrounded most of the structure.

I stood waiting outside the forcefield until finally, three people approached, Miss Militia, Dauntless, and Velocity.

"Urchin." Miss Militia said quietly, glancing at the others.

It wasn't a greeting. Velocity nodded in understanding, Dauntless simply glanced at her without recognition of the name.

"Who are they?" Miss Militia asked calmly.

Indicating first, the coffin of wires and then String Theory.

Miss Militia motioned smoothly, unhurried, a pistol was in her hand, a moment later it was a knife, she kept her weapon of the moment pointed at the ground away from me. I started crying again, unable to help myself and Velocity shifted awkwardly, made an aborted motion before becoming still, Dauntless remained silent but looked distinctly uncomfortable.

Miss Militia didn't take her eyes off me for a second.

I lifted the body before placing it gently next to the forcefield, all three of them took an immediate step backward at the motion and I retracted the wires slowly until the body was revealed. I pushed String Theory gently towards the bubble and she stumbled a few steps before falling to her knees next to Gaston.

String Theory didn't make a sound of complaint.

"This is String Theory. She is a Tinker. There are bombs under the city," I struggled to form a full sentence. "Four, or there was."

"The explosion that happened ten minutes ago was her doing?" Miss Militia asked calmly.

I nodded silently, and nobody said anything more, so I continued after a moment.

"There's two downtown; one's west of the bank and the other is south of the PRT building." My voice was quiet as I listed it all off.

Velocity had raised his finger to his ear and started to talk quietly, too far away for me to hear what he was saying. Miss Militia suddenly stepped forward out of the forcefield, and Dauntless followed her silently, quickly flanking me from the other side.

"There's one in the commercial district, near that new shopping center," I kept going, "In the maintenance tunnels beneath the city, I don't know if there's more."

My face was wet, and I wanted to rub my eyes, but my mask was in the way. Miss Militia approached String Theory and restrained her properly when she lifted her knife to cut the wires I let them fall away.

"Those three shouldn't explode on their own," I added, "We cut the connection to the detonator, but she made another bomb after we shut it down and we missed it. "

Dauntless was standing right next to me now, and If I made a hostile move he would stop me.

"The man?" Dauntless asked quietly.

Velocity had finished with his call and stepped through the bubble on the other side of me.

"His name was Gaston, he was a good guy," I sobbed once, looking down at his unmoving body for the first time. "We tried to stop her, but he died."

I left suddenly, blasting upwards as fast as I could, Velocity still almost caught me, only the suddenness of my departure had let me escape, I could feel his hand brush the sleeve of my left arm, I slipped through his grasp and vanished into the sky.

They didn't give chase.

Author Notes (Old):

Well, that's the end of the String Theory arc. I will drop a smaller aftermath chapter tomorrow. The full chapter that comes on Monday will be the start of the next arc, I'll tell you now that it's going to be a strange one.

A time skip around a year, and a bunch of personalities from other media will be making an appearance to fill the roles of original characters and a group that was mentioned in canon but without any details. I've taken some liberties with one of the canon characters backstories and used it to facilitate this next arc. Hopefully, you guys can tolerate such a change.

Thanks for reading! Tell me what you think. Peace!

Authors Notes (07/05/2020): I gave myself the sads while editing this.