

Tuesday, April 15th, 2009.

There were five minutes left until class finished and all I could think was that it could not be over fast enough. There wasn't anything really wrong with Arcadia, I just *hated* being trapped inside all day.

Arcadia High was a particularly famous high school, at least to those who lived in Brockton Bay. It was located right in the middle of Downtown, the busiest and most populated section of the city. It played host to roughly two-thousand-five-hundred students, a somewhat large but otherwise relatively normal high school. Arcadia's call to fame was that it had *two* different superhero teams in attendance.

The Brockton Bay Wards and New Wave.

Arcadia didn't have any inherent quality that made it more special than any other school, although it *was* the nicest public school in Brockton Bay by a large margin. The reason why both of the superhero teams had chosen to go here instead of somewhere else, was that it was only two minutes away from the central business district.

Deep within the Parahuman Response Team building lay the Ward's headquarters, and they worked together hand in hand. The proximity made it easy for the Wards to reach their equipment when they were called to action during school hours.

The school itself cultivated a very professional demeanor; the staff affected attitudes of highly successful business-folk. The teachers were all young, confident, and dressed in suits. The students had been dressed to match with black business trousers, skirts, white long-sleeved shirts, black dress shoes, and black ties. If I was being honest, I thought everybody just looked like a little CEO in training.

My abnormal height and stick-thin limbs removed any chance of capitalizing on the same qualities.

I was currently sitting in class, staring at the back of the newest transfer student, who had for whatever reason decided to choose the seat directly in front of me. How tricky of them, transferring a new student in right in the middle of the year. Arcadia had a habit of shuffling new students into the school at odd times, sometimes it was a normal kid, sometimes it was a hidden cape, you could never really tell which was which. They did it this way to throw us off the scent, at least I thought that's why they did it, nobody had ever confirmed it. The new kid had short red hair, pale white skin, and a strip of freckles across his face. I studied him actively, trying to find something that would tell me if he was a cape or a normie.

Triumph, Aegis, and Vista, the three Brockton Bay Wards.

This kid definitely wasn't Vista, who was about five feet tall, on her best day, and also a girl. He probably wasn't Aegis either, because he had a much darker skin tone than the new kid. It *could* be Triumph, but it probably wasn't, the skin tone was similar, but the build was all wrong. Triumph was a big guy, with broad shoulders while the red-haired kid had a much slimmer build. Triumph had also been a Ward for more than a year at this point, surely they had snuck him into Arcadia by now.

Unless they were playing the long con, I stared at him for a moment longer before sighing. This dude obviously wasn't one of the Wards, I had spent a lot of time trying to figure out which of the students might secretly be a cape, but I've never had confirmation one way or another.

New Wave, on the other hand, wasn't even attempting to keep their identities hidden, in fact, they had turned around and done the exact opposite. They used to be called the Brockton Bay Brigade before

they had rebranded, and every single one of their identities was known publicly. The younger member's names had all been announced within *weeks* of gaining their powers and three of them were enrolled at Arcadia right now, while the fourth was still in middle school.

Laserdream, Crystal Pelham. Glory Girl, Victoria Dallon. Panacea, Amy Dallon. Shielder, Eric Pelham. Laserdream was in the year above me, while Glory Girl and Panacea were both in the year below me. Shielder would end up here eventually too.

I found it very strange that there were so many capes in one school, and there might have even been more of them as well, hidden amongst the other students. Hero's, Villains, or Rogues, any one of these kids could secretly be a cape.

It was entirely possible, *I* was one of them after all.

I always headed into the central business district when classes finished for the day. I would find a nice seat on a bench or a spot on a wall and just watch people. Today was no exception in that regard, I watched people go about their day, unaware that somebody was studying them.

There were all sorts of interesting things to observe, people shopping, others meeting up with their lovers, families eating meals together, or even groups of friends going to see the latest movie. All interacting with each other, with wants, desires, and needs.

I people watched until the sun fled from the sky, and the city began to grow dark. The darker it became the more the crowds began to thin out until only a few brave souls remained. Nobody wanted to be out too long after dark in Brockton Bay, it just wasn't worth the risk.

I hopped off the bench after I had nobody left to observe and pulled my hood back up before working my way to the nearest bus stop, but not even five minutes had passed before I heard something unusual.

A steady rhythm almost like a lumberjack chopping wood, each thump was accompanied by an exclamation of pain.

"Ah! Stop! Get off! Fuck! *Fuck!* Stop it! Fuck!" The voice was male, and strangely enough, it sounded more surprised than pained.

I leaned back to peer down the alleyway and witnessed a strange scene.

A man was laying on the ground, with his arms covering his face, while another man struggled to wrap a roll of duct tape around his legs. There was a third man launching a steady stream of kicks into the trapped man's midsection, each kick separated precisely by two-second intervals. All three of them wore matching lab coats, made of bright white material and each had the builds of men who had spent a great deal of time seated behind a desk. Behind the three struggling men, the alleyway branched off out of sight, but I could just see the rear end of a white van peeking out from the corner with its engine still running.

How mysterious.

"What on earth are you doing?" I spoke down the alley.

The man with the roll of duct tape jumped up in shock, before pointing his finger directly at me while the other man peeked around his shoulder. His coat fell open on one side, I could see a harness of some sort strapped around his chest, and a flash of silver lay under it, a gun.

"Ah!" The man pointed, looking worried and upset. "Get out!"

"Get out?" I asked.

"The Alley! Get out of the Alley!" Pointy shouted, finger shaking angrily.

I stared at him for a moment.

"Are you kidnapping him?" I asked curiously.

I turned my head to look at the man on the ground, he hadn't moved much except to angle his neck to stare back at me. The man with the gun was still holding him down with his foot planted firmly on his chest.

"Of course not!" Pointy denied, looking even more flustered.

The gunman slowly reached into his coat, how sneaky.

"I'm thirty-two, so *technically* this is an abduction." The man on the ground said weakly.

The man stopped reaching into his coat.

"*Shut up*, Gaston." The man said incredulously while pushing his foot down onto Gaston's chest.

The man turned back and whipped his hand out of his coat, brandishing the gun in my direction in an instant. The pointing man hurriedly stepped back out of the line of fire, looking nervous.

The gun glinted once.

I wasn't worried, I had already stacked the deck in my favor before I had even stepped into the alley.

"Sorry kid, wrong place wrong time." The Gunman spoke, putting on airs.

It was a fairly good line, but his voice was thin and reedy, so it fell just short of intimidating. The Gunman was still for a long moment before letting out a muffled grunt. Five seconds passed before he grunted again, and Pointy turned to him worriedly.

"Aren't you going to shoot him?" Pointy asked nervously, but the gunman held his silence.

"Martin?" Pointy pleaded, before reaching out and touching him on the shoulder.

Pointy glanced down at his hand before rubbing his fingers together as if he could somehow achieve synaesthesia.

"What?" Pointy said confused.

Martin suddenly began to rise off the ground and he grunted in surprise. Pointy yelled before grabbing his leg in a panic and began trying to pull Martin down and climb upwards at the same time. Pointy shouted the entire time while the still prone man just stared up at them both with his mouth open wide.

I couldn't help it, I started laughing.

The entire situation was so bizarre, scientists trying to abduct other scientists, what exactly had I just stumbled on?

I managed to pull myself together a few moments later, fortunately, my hood was still pulled up from earlier and it was rather dark in the alley, my face was covered in shadows from the hood, and the closest streetlight was directly behind me, I wasn't too worried about them seeing my face. I shook my head before generating some wires to cover my face anyway, there was no point in taking chances.

"Gaston was it?" I asked cheerfully.

Gaston wrenched his torso my way as best he could with his feet still taped messily together.

"Yes! I'm Gaston!" Gaston said happily, he scrabbled at the tape, trying to find the end of it for a moment before he slapped his hand against the bulk of it. "Can you help me out of this?"

I generated another wire and it glinted in the streetlight above my shoulder, before darting towards Gaston. The wire snaked under the tape and cut through it with a moment's work. I glanced over to Pointy, he had managed to climb about half a Martin high, and his lab coat hung limply beneath him as he did his best to hold onto Martin's arm like a limpet.

Martin continued to slowly rise into the air until finally, he rose into a beam of light from the streetlight, revealing that he had been covered in hundreds of thin shiny wires. They were pulled taut and branching off in every direction.

Gaston looked up at my work in total awe.

I'm so god damned cool.

Martin suddenly dropped his gun, and it fell through the air before landing on the ground with a metallic thunk. It fired once, flipping over from the force. Gaston yelped and ducked his head. I tried to jump backward and pull myself towards the nearest wall at the same time. Instead, I accomplished neither as I lurched backward, and flopped onto my back. I did my best to keep the momentum going and rolled back to my feet before I pressed my hand against the wall to steady myself.

I studied everybody for a moment, but there were no cries of pain, there was no blood, everyone was unharmed. Then Pointy lost his grip and fell flat on his back in the alley.

Gaston cowered. Martin grunted. I sighed.

Ten minutes later I finally made it to the bus stop and patted myself on the back for a job well done. Martin and Pointy were left wired together at the corner of the street, mostly uninjured. I say mostly because Pointy had managed to hit his head on the ground when he fell, so he actually had a concussion. Martin, in a strange twist of fate, had hurt his foot while kicking Gaston.

Gaston, what a name.

Gaston's arms were dirty and bruised from trying to defend himself, but he was relatively unharmed. The man had thanked me profusely, and before I could ask him anything he dashed away, he was so excited to be free of the tape that he had tripped over, going all the way down to his hands and knees before he caught himself.

I left barely a minute after he had.

I hadn't realized that I had lost my wallet until the bus driver told me, in no uncertain terms that I would not be getting on the bus without paying.

Asshole.

I quickly returned to the scene of the crime thinking that I may have dropped it somewhere, but the police were already there, having responded to the gunshot with haste. I checked the alley, but my wallet had grown legs and walked away.

I traced my path back to the CBD and then further back to Arcadia in hopes that I might have lost it earlier in the day. Neither hide nor hair of my wallet was ever found that dark and stormy night. Looks like I was walking home. Fuck.

An hour later I finally got home, surprisingly unmolested by the dark underbelly of Brockton Bay. Was it skill, cunning, or charm that had granted me safe passage? Probably all three, but who could truly know.

Brockton bay was a scary place at night, and not much better during the day. Anybody traipsing about willy-nilly in the dark deserves to get shanked. Junkies, gangs, and killers roamed the streets. Not to mention the caped assholes running around blowing shit up.

Empire Eighty-Eight, the Azn Bad Boys, the Merchants, and others, all with their own territories, rules, and goals. Not a shred of restraint between them. But tonight was a quiet night for once. I didn't have to stop any more abductions, the worst thing I saw was someone texting and driving. Can you imagine being that guy? What an asshole.

Speaking of assholes; Gaston looked about as bruised and battered as when I last saw him, as he sat in the kitchen of my one-bedroom apartment. His lab coat folded neatly beside him. He looks up from a bowl of cereal and waves unashamedly with the hand holding the spoon. I frown at him. He chews.

"There better be some milk left." He nods happily and points towards the fridge still chewing. I pour myself some cereal and drown it in milk before sitting at the table across from him. I take a mouthful. Chew. Swallow. Yum.

"What can I do for the strange man, eating cereal in my kitchen?"

He grins before launching into a gripping tale of adventure, danger, and a daring escape. He had helped to build something terrible he said, something that would change the world as we knew it, but he had a change of heart and tried to destroy it.

He told me how he was a good man once, how he could be a good man *again*, that, to save the girl he loved he would go to the ends of the earth, he told me how he'd fought off *twenty* men, as tall as they were wide, with guns for hands. He told me how he'd barely managed to fight his way free from that ambush with his life intact.

Wow. Not quite how I'd remembered the event.

"Gaston," I say to him. "You are so full of shit."

He grins. I continued to eat my cereal, chewing loudly.

"What has this got to do with me?" I ask.

"I need your help with something and it's kinda important." He says it like we're old buddies as if he hadn't just broken into the apartment of a fifteen-year-old boy.

Turns out the guy is the former assistant of a cape. A Tinker called String Theory. A tinker, for those unaware, is a 'superpower' that allows someone to make crazy shit. Tinker-tech is nearly always incomprehensible to other people and unable to be replicated or maintained without the person who made it, or another tinker of equal skill.

"String Theory? Isn't she that Villain that blows things up? Are you actually an evil henchman?" I ask, my mind spluttering. Were Martin and Tape-guy the good guys? Secretly hero's with names like Baskin and Robbins? Were they heroically abducting a villain's evil minion? Had I doomed Brockton Bay?

Gaston pauses for a moment, before pretending I hadn't spoken. Damn, nobody can be an asshole like Gaston.

His job had consisted of acquiring materials, buying equipment, setting up warehouses and other sites, hiring people, and delegating tasks to the peons (he *actually* called them that.) It turns out that String Theory has recently finished making her newest masterpiece, something called a G-Driver.

Gaston looks at me patiently, waiting. I sigh.

"Gee, what's a G-Driver?" I ask deadpanned.

His eyes light up and he jumps into a lecture, punctuating his words with gestures of the spoon.

"So a G-driver blows shit up." I cut him off at the two-minute mark while stroking my non-existent beard in understanding, *truly*, I am unfathomably wise.

"It's way more complicated than that!" Gaston says in a wounded tone. "You can't just--"

"That's really interesting," I continue loudly talking over him while still stroking my face and he deflates.

"Anything else?" I wondered, "What's her target this time?"

This G-Driver and the rest of String Theory's Tinker-tech apparently come with a countdown timer. The countdown starts the moment the device starts being built. She's been around a long while apparently and has figured out the intricacies of her power. She's worked out how to game the system so to speak.

Buy all the tools, equipment, and materials in advance. Setup and secure the workshop. Build the device in one session. The device is aimed at its target.

All that's left is the countdown, a countdown that has already begun.

6 days 5 hours and 30 minutes before String Theory blows up the moon.

"Why does String Theory want to blow up the moon?" I ask, resigned.

Why would you *help* someone blow up the moon? I should have let Martin get a few extra kicks in.

"Art." He says stirring the cereal. His eyes are unfocused, remembering something from the past. "She views her work as a form of art, and she wants to show it to the world."

"Okay then," I say as if that explains anything. "Crazy lady wants to make art. Fine. I can accept that. Why did you help her? Why did you stop helping her?"

He refocuses on the present and looks me in the eye. A gust of wind comes through the window and ruffles his hair.

"Because I love her," Gaston says with conviction.

Jesus Christ, is this guy from an anime? I get up and shut the window, none of that shit in my house, he waits for me to sit back down. I take a moment to gather my thoughts but the second I started to reply he just talked right over the top of me.

Asshole.

"It's because I love her that I *have* to stop her she's going to get sent to the Birdcage and I'll never see her again." Gaston looks agonized at the thought.

I watch as he clenches his hands tightly into fists like he's trying to *squeeze* the feels away.

"I *won't* let that happen." Gaston declares firmly.

"Dude," I look at him in disbelief. "She's going to blow up the *moon*, in six days."

"I love her." Gaston continues like he hadn't heard my protest.

I see his hair ruffle slightly and my gaze snaps to the window, it's still shut. Spooky.

"You wouldn't understand, you've never been in love." Gaston holds his head in his hands, peeking out at me from behind his fingers.

Gaston is clearly waiting for a response but I lean back in my chair because he's wrong, I understand perfectly.

I was in love once, a long, *long* time ago, back when my heart was still capable of such a thing, before *the betrayal*. Thirty-four days ago to put it on the calendar, almost a lifetime really, when I caught my first crush giving Thomas Payton a handjob in the park, I *try* not to dwell on it, but time has only muted the pain.

I look Gaston dead in the eyes and give him my answer.

"Hell no!" I cry and it comes out like a sharp thurst, rapid and without mercy. "This has *nothing* to do with me, *why* are you even in my house?"

Gaston's Anime-Esque determination instantly turns into the sads and I momentarily feel like I've kicked a puppy, but he bounced back a moment later, having steeled himself.

"I didn't want to do this," Gaston says apologetically, pointing the spoon in his hand at me threateningly.

Milk dripped from the spoon to the table.

"I need your help, *Andy Bowman*," Gaston says before he takes his other hand from his pocket and places my wallet on the table. "Otherwise known as, Urchin."

He's still brandishing the spoon as I stare him down and my mind raced, but not a shred of emotion appeared on my face. I knew he had figured it out as soon as I saw him in my kitchen, he knew I was a cape. Is *he* a cape? A Thinker? Do others know, am I in danger?

Do I need to move to a new city, change my name, and become the R-rated Cape, Bondage?!

Gaston would need to die, of course, nobody was allowed to know that the confident, daring, *and* attractive Andy Bowman, was secretly the confident, daring, and attractive cape, Urchin.

Over the next fifteen seconds, I slowly let an expression of rage cover my face, at the eleven-second mark, Gaston was starting to look uncomfortable, but he waited patiently for me to finish.

"You total *asshole* Gaston!" I yelled, lashing out and crossing my spoon against his own in an instant, but he immediately firms his hold in surprise.

A power struggle not unlike an arm-wrestling contest began, milk from both spoons is flung from the point of impact, tiny droplets splashing against the tabletop. How could he *do* this to me? After I went out of my way to save him. I beat up Martin and Tape-guy for this asshole, the betrayal stings.

It's the Thomas Payton incident all over again.

"You would betray *me*, after everything we've been through?" I silently thread wires under my sleeve and around my arm to give me a slight strength advantage.

The spoons are pushed inexorably towards Gaston. I am Inevitable.

Gaston struggles to hold me back before he makes a snap decision and switches to a two-handed grip, sliding his feet to a better position. The kitchen table weathers our combat stoically, as he uses the additional leverage to force me back an inch, the spoons shake violently.

So *this* is the power of a Scientist.

I stand abruptly, forcing him back until his chair only has two legs on the ground, milk sloshes over the edge of his bowl from the sheer forcefulness of my advance.

My bowl remains empty.

"What do you mean everything we've been through?" Gaston grits, his teeth gnashed together as I push him back, he prepares to play his final card but it's far too late, he desperately hooks his foot under the lip of the table, barely holding back the spoon, an inch from his face. "We've only just met!"

I watch him struggle for a moment, from where does he draw such desperate strength? Is it the power of love? The depths of his hatred?

He makes for a pitiful sight covered in milk, cereal, and his face is bright red from the exertion.

"It's over Gaston. I have the high ground."

"Wait!" Gaston lets out a yelp as I tip him over backward.

Gaston lands on the floor with a cacophony of utensils, furniture, and milk.

"I'll pay you." Gaston finishes lamely from the floor.

"Deal." I agree immediately, money is awesome.

"I haven't even said how much I'm paying you," Gaston says from the floor.

Flat on his back like a deranged turtle before he manages to sit up, I need to make a play before he retakes control of the negotiations.

"Twenty-Five-Thousand. Upfront. Cash." I say, looking smug. "In one of those cases, like the movies."

Gaston looks at me surprised but agrees to the amount almost immediately. I squint at him suspiciously, he agreed way too quickly, he didn't even *try* and haggle, have I made a terrible mistake?

Gaston gets up and shakes my hand.

"No take-backsies." Gaston grins at me.

Fuck, I think I've been had, this bastard had totally scammed me, I should have asked for double.

Gaston's got more than a decade of experience on me, I will have to draw upon all of my most cunning linguist skills just to stay ahead of this guy. Gaston picks the chair back up and sits at the table, I join him after a moment.

The mess remains on the floor, untouched.

Gaston steepled his hands in front of his face like he's Gendo Ikari, reaching up and adjusting his non-existent glasses with a finger, I can imagine the glint.

Nice.

"Alright Boss, how are we going to do this?" I ask, business face firmly attached.

Urchin the Rogue has evolved into Urchin the Mercenary now, *bitchin*.

Gaston outlines the plan, the goal is simple, we need to destroy the G-Driver before the countdown reaches zero. String Theory, unfortunately, has a backup plan. If we are detected whilst entering the facility, there are other explosive devices that she will activate and start blowing shit up in the city.

Three of them, if you want an exact count.

Spread out across the downtown and commercial districts each with a big enough yield to level a city block, *additionally*, if we set off the alarms while breaking in, the facility's *defenses* will activate. String theory will set off the bombs and the heroes will respond to all the shit blowing up in the city.

String Theory will most likely be the prime suspect, shes used bombs in the past and she literally announced Brockton Bay as her next destination months ago, fucking villains man.

The heroes will then come down on her like the fist of God, which will result in the G-Driver being discovered, String Theory getting sent to the Birdcage, and Gaston's dreams of saving the girl he loves shattered.

So to summarize; A stealth mission.

Objectives; Avoid Detection. Destroy G-Driver. Disarm the Bombs. Capture String Theory.

I should have asked for more money.

Authors Notes(a long time ago):

Hi, I've written some things over the past couple of years but I've always ended up deleting them. I've decided I would finally post something online and hopefully, I'll improve a lot in the process. There is nowhere to go but up after all.

The Urchin King is a story that takes place in Brockton Bay. The first arc will begin in the year 2009. Eventually, it will reach the day canon Worm begins.

I've built a timeline and taken some liberties with some of the canon characters and groups that existed but weren't shown or had a brief appearance. You won't be seeing most of them for a while.

If something looks particularly off please tell me and I'll look into it. I'm about 8 chapters ahead at the moment, with a second arc already planned out.