

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: A plan is decided upon and then enacted.

-x-X-x-

“... We’re going to have to thread the needle.”

Taylor raises an eyebrow at Jason’s words, causing him to elaborate.

“You’re right that just going to Legend with what we have now has too high of a possibility of failure to be a good idea. It just boils down to ‘trust us bro’ and that seems like a pretty poor plan, all things considered. But I also don’t think we can really expect to be able to take Calvert or Coil or whoever we’re really up against down by ourselves.”

Shaking his head, Jason frowns as he thinks it over for a bit longer before continuing.

“Our best bet is refuge in obscurity. Sure, Calvert knows about us... but he shouldn’t know what we know about him. And he definitely shouldn’t know what we can do together. Between your bugs and my overview of the city, we can map out everything with him being none the wiser, confirming whether or not he’s tied to Coil or IS Coil and then turning all that information over to Fletchette to give to Legend.”

It was a pretty good plan, as Jason saw it. The only issue was Calvert’s Power. And if he and Coil were actually two different people, Coil’s Power as well. Without knowing what they or he could do, there was always a possibility that their plan wouldn’t survive contact with the enemy. But... it was still the best they had.

Taylor nods along in agreement, showing that she believes the exact same thing. Then, finally, she looks down at all of the magical rings Jason has just finished identifying and sorting into piles.

“So... what’s the verdict about these? You said some were cursed but I noticed we have three piles instead of just two.”

Chuckling, Jason nods and begins gesturing with his hands to each pile.

“Yeah, so first off, these are all Cursed Rings. We won’t be using them, obviously. But this second pile is a bit more interesting in that each of these rings has a tradeoff of sorts. Instead of being purely bad or purely good, they each come with an upside and downside. These, for instance, are called ‘Power Rings’ and they steadily increase the physical damage that a wearer can do while also steadily increasing the physical damage taken.”

Taylor blinks at that, looking at the large golden ring with its red gemstone glittering in the artificial light of the apartment.

“... Huh. That seems like... a bad trade for most people.”

Jason nods in agreement.

“Yeah, they’re on the lower end of useful. These, on the other hand, are a bit more interesting. They’re called Armor Rings and while they decrease the physical damage a wearer can dole out; they also decrease the physical damage someone would take. And given that neither you nor I rely on beating people up...”

Taylor’s eyes widen as she realizes what he’s getting at.

“We can basically wear these Armor Rings without any appreciable downside!”

Smirking, Jason nods again. The Armor Rings are silver with light blue gemstones in contrast to the Power Rings. Most of the collection of magic rings turned out to be different tiers of Power and Armor Rings. Out of all of those, they have precisely three of the highest tier Armor Rings. Which is kind of perfect given Jason wants to wear one himself, give one to Taylor, and make sure one gets to Amelia as well.

... Though whether she'll wear what looks like an obvious piece of tinkertech or not is still up in the air. She does have to touch people in order to use her powers, making it somewhat impossible for her to hide any of the magical rings that Jason would like to give her for very long.

That's something to discuss later though, he figures.

“What about these last six rings? I assume these are all the ‘definitely good’ ones?”

Jason chuckles as Taylor unknowingly uses his own internal off the cuff description from earlier.

“Yes, these ones are all good... some are definitely better than others though. These in particular are called Heart Rings, and they provide even more regeneration on top of what we already have, basically healing us of any injuries over time. These others reduce damage taken, making us tougher, or increase damage done.”

Humming, Jason shrugs.

“I figure I’ll probably give the one that purely reduces damage done to Vicky to increase her fighting power and also maybe one of the Heart Rings in order to keep her safe since she’s almost always going to be a front line fighter.”

Taylor nods, even as she studies the piles of magic rings for a long moment before sighing and shaking her head ruefully at him.

“Your power is insane; you know that Jason? I’ve never heard of anything like this. The closest is Eidolon and even he doesn’t have the sort of variety you do. If there’s no upper limit on how many abilities you can eventually get... one day you’ll be beyond all of us. You’ll never stop growing.”

Blinking, Jason can’t help but be a little caught out by the tinge of melancholy in Taylor’s voice. Was she right? Would he one day grow beyond them to the extent that he wouldn’t even be able to relate anymore?

The thought was admittedly a little scary, but at the same time... all he had to do was be aware of the possibility and do everything in his power to avoid letting it happen. So long as he didn’t lose touch with his surroundings, it should be fine. Besides...

“Wherever I go, I’m taking you and the others with me Taylor. Whoever is willing to come along. After all, these powers of mine aren’t just for me. There’s the Blood Rituals and even these rings as examples.”

Grabbing a Tier Three Armor Ring from the middle pile, Jason makes a show of taking hold of Taylor’s hand and sliding it onto her middle finger. She blushes hard in response, staring down at the ring for a long moment before slowly nodding as she smiles up at him.

“Promise?”

Jason smiles right back.

“Promise. I won’t abandon you. No matter what.”

-x-X-x-

Ding!

Lucky Charm – Benevolence – 200 Points

A pretty simple Talisman, enchanted to give whoever holds it a little extra good fortune. Won’t save you from certain death but should give you a much needed edge at times. Can take any form you want.

You now have 100 Points saved up!

Bank.

By the next day, everyone has been contacted and is on board with the plan, reluctantly or otherwise. As it turned out, Lily, aka Fletchette, had already been thinking about potentially getting in contact with Legend given they didn’t know how deep Calvert had his hooks in Brockton Bay.

But she agreed with them that their evidence was a little flimsy at the moment and while she definitely vouched for Legend’s impeccable character as not just a hero but also a leader, Fletchette definitely saw the value in having some concrete data on hand before going to a member of the Triumvirate.

Vicky and Amelia agreed as well, but where things differed was in how Lily and Vicky felt about being sidelined compared to Amelia. Obviously, Amelia wasn't the type to go out and patrol the streets even before she left the Dallons behind and opened her clinic. But neither Lily nor Vicky were all that happy about the fact that their powers didn't make them very useful for Jason and Taylor's current mission.

In the end though, they both had to reluctantly concede that there wasn't much they could do to help except for staying away. After all, they were far more noticeable than Jason and Taylor so if either of them were caught hanging around certain areas of the city, it was possible they might give the game away with their mere presence.

Instead, the two agreed to patrol elsewhere in Brockton Bay to avoid being too connected to what Jason and Taylor were doing. In the meantime... Portent and Weaver were out on the hunt.

Technically, Jason's Focus Power was unmatched in information gathering, but the issue was his power only got so granular. He could see concentrations of red dots all over Brockton Bay that represented his 'enemies', but without being far closer and in some cases in person, he couldn't tell who those red dots truly were.

It wouldn't do to be making a map of Coil's operations and inadvertently include things from the Empire, ABB, or Merchants after all. That would only confuse the issue further and make things more complicated than they had to be.

That was where Taylor came in though. Bugs were... everywhere. Her swarm casually measured in the millions wherever she went, even when she didn't take a dedicated mass of bugs with her. Just moving around allowed for Taylor to sense a lot, though her ability to 'see' through her

bugs was a lot more limited than her ability to 'hear' through them apparently.

Together, they made for a rather terrifying duo. With some additional information about gang borders and what not provided by both Vicky and Lily, Jason and Taylor could take a map of the city and basically travel around Coil's perceived territory to get the lay of the land and check up on the concentrations of red dots within that area.

As expected, Coil had a series of secret hideouts. What was less expected was the discovery that most of his hideaways were actually underground. Maybe that should have been obvious, but one had to consider the logistics involved in not having just one underground lair, but several underground lairs.

There was a reason that the other major gangs didn't have all of their operations underground, and it was because building this many lairs should have been exorbitantly expensive. Not just in terms of resources, but also in how much it must have cost to hide their construction from the city.

Of course, it also spoke to Brockton Bay's incompetence in a way. The city government somehow missing a series of underground lairs under their own two feet was... depressing as it was predictable.

The more interesting thing is finding out that some of Coil's bases are actually hidden under the other gangs' territory as well. Almost like they're situated in places that Coil just hasn't gotten around to sending out his mercenaries to take over yet. But when he finally wants to, they'll have a secret fallback and regroup point where they can reinforce and get new supplies.

It's kind of the perfect setup and makes Jason all the more confident that they're on to something here. What's really interesting though is that they eventually discover someone who appears to be Coil based on the costume in one of his larger bases... while Thomas Calvert is across town in his office in PRT Headquarters.

Taylor is a little disappointed at first to discover that her theory seems incorrect, but that doesn't last for long. The more Jason sees, the more certain he becomes that only someone like Coil would have the resources and the confidence to pull off a conspiracy involving the PRT Directorship.

Their next stroke of luck comes when Calvert finally leaves the PRT Headquarters. Keeping an eye on his movements through Focus allows Jason to eventually realize that the man is heading directly for the underground lair they've tentatively labeled as Coil's 'main base'.

That's when things get weird, because the next thing Jason knows, Taylor is reporting that Calvert is getting changed. And by the time the PRT Director gets down to Coil's main base, he's wearing the exact same costume as the Coil that they'd scouted out with Taylor's bugs earlier.

Meanwhile, that second Coil apparently takes a hidden passageway and gets changed as well before departing from the lair in a nondescript van. Meaning... there are two Coils? Neither Jason nor Taylor quite know what's going on. Do both men have powers? Is Calvert pretending to be Coil for the real Coil, or is the first man a body double for when Calvert is working as PRT Director?

In the end, all they can do is dutifully take note of it in the observations and information they intend to send to Legend.

Only... it's around the time that Calvert-as-Coil gets deeper into the base that something strange happens. There's a lot of glowing red enemies in Coil's Main Base, but something Jason hadn't noticed until now was the two golden dots down in the depths of the underground lair. He only really 'sees' them at this point because he's watching Calvert-as-Coil so closely and that's exactly where the PRT Director heads.

Jason frowns and shares this information with Taylor, who frowns right back.

"People outlined in gold... so they're not enemies, but they are important?"

Grunting, Jason nods.

"Prisoners, maybe? What could Coil be doing with them down there?"

Taylor shakes her head.

"I don't know, let me get some bugs in with them to find out."

There's another period of silence as Jason closes his eyes to use Focus some more while Taylor does exactly that. Until finally, her breath hitches and causes him to turn back to her again.

"... One of them knows I'm there, Jason. They just spelt out 'HELP' in a way I could comprehend through my bugs. They must be prisoners. I... what do we do?"

Shit. This... complicated things.

-x-X-x-

Remember to go back and vote!

-x-X-x-

A/N: Will try to keep this up to date at the end of every chapter, get on me if I forget please. Though if it gets too out of hand, might have to change it at some point.

Jason's current banked points:

100 Celestial Points

Jason's current banked power:

= Lucky Charm (200 Points)

Jason's current powers:

= Flash Air (Gained in Chapter 1

= Transformation Pendant (Gained in Chapter 4)

= Keen Eye (Gained in Chapter 4)

= Blood, Death, and Demons (Gained in Chapter 6)

= Alchemical Prodigy (Gained in Chapter 8)

= Staff of Magnus (Gained in Chapter 13)

= Bind and Seal (Gained in Chapter 17)

= Hero of a Hundred Faces: Everyone's Leader (Gained in Chapter 20)

= Minor Regeneration via Blood Empowerment Ritual (Gained in Chapter 23)

(Taylor got Major Agility, Vicky got Major Intelligence)

= Restraining Order (Gained in Chapter 25)

= Focus (Gained in Chapter 28)

= Scarborough Fair (Gained in Chapter 30)

= Chaos Magic (Gained in Chapter 36)

= Major Regeneration via Blood Empowerment Ritual (Gained in Chapter 40)

(Taylor, Vicky, and Amy all got Minor Regeneration)

= A Collection of Magic Rings (x6 Cursed Rings, x12 Drawback Rings, x6 Buff Rings) (Gained Chapter 44)

= Jason: T3 Armor Ring + Blue Ring, Taylor: T3 Armor Ring + Expert's Ring, Vicky: Red Ring + T2 Heart Ring, Amelia: T3 Armor Ring + T2 Heart Ring (Handed out Chapter 46)