

# Title Page

# Copycat Conundrum

The Elle vs Mason Arc/Mason's Villain Arc

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Thank you so much for checking out our fic! We have poured a lot of our time and thought into this story and I (Fanta) am so excited to share it with y'all!

This story requires a tiny bit of outside context; this story takes place in Mid September- Late October of 2023, (During Drizzle Season 2023, and within the development of Chill Season 2023) and is told primarily over the shoulder of Elle, our protagonist.

There is also some sensitive content in this story,, such as self harm, suicide attempts, and some colorful language. (I'd rate this story 16+) Readers discretion is advised; Your mental health matters <3

Please note we aren't expert writers, so our writing isn't perfect! But please enjoy this project I most likely spent way too much time on!

# Main Story!

“Why? Why did you ruin him?!”

Mason exclaimed from a higher ground. C-7K was as good as gone now, and it was her fault. Elle looked up in his direction, clearly angered. Otto wanted this update, he was practically begging for it, as well as a cyborg could beg. He was out of date and rusting, Elle couldn't just sit there and watch it grow worse!

“Ruin? No no no, we fixed him. He was so out of date and his suit was rusting, so we updated his code, gave him a new suit, an aerospray that actually works, and overall made him work and operate better, so now he isn't running on the cyborg equivalent of Windows 95!”

Mason looked on in disgust, but did not have a chance to add his opinion before Elle continued.

“He was neglected, just like your other creations. You have a habit of that, you know? You just toss your work aside when it isn't the way you want it! Believe me, I KNOW how it feels to be neglected and abandoned by the people who created you, and it fucking sucks! I believe no being, whether organic or mechanical, should ever have to feel like that.”

“Spare me your sentimental nonsense! You kidnapped him!”

“No I didn't! Otto CAME to ME! He knew I would do it, and I did!”

“It's 'C-7K'! You programmed him to think otherwise, didn't you?”

Elle rolled her eyes in annoyance. Would he ever get the point? She wasn't trying to steal him, it just pained her to see something with so much potential go to waste.

“No, I didn't. He CHOSE to go by Otto again, as he told me he felt like I gave him a part of his humanity back!”

Mason looked down, angered. He slowly scaled down the platform he was standing on, and approached Elle. Now, Otto was just another thing Elle could get right and he couldn't. No matter how much he studied her work and tech, he could never understand why her stuff worked and his didn't.

“Oh great, now he's just one of your 'perfect' and 'no flaw' creations! Believe it or not, I know what I'm doing! We might have different ideas, but we share the same goal as inventors!”

“Mason, Name one thing other than Otto that didn't immediately blow up in your face.”

“The creation of Rebel! Sure, it didn't exactly go to plan, but he didn't explode!”

“Metaphorically it sure as hell did! He fuckin' hates you! Sure, I'll give you props for creating organic life, Frankenstein style as I'm no bio science nerd, But it wouldn't have hurt to try and care for or about him! Instead of tossing him to the side!”

Mason crossed his arms and turned his head.

“Whatever. I don't need YOU to tell me how flawed MY inventions are! C-7K was perfect until you and that good-for-nothing octoling ruined him!”

Elle's eyes widened slightly, before looking at Mason, her vacant eyes now filled with anger. She raised her inkbrush, as if ready to strike him.

“Good for nothing? That is my SON and don't you DARE spit on his name!”

“You're not even his mother! He isn't biologically connected to you, so you have no right to call yourself his mom!”

“Oh wow, is that the same fucking mindset you have about Rebel? Just because you two don't share any DNA does not mean you're not responsible for him! Whether or not you care to admit it, Rebel is YOUR son, and you need to take responsibility.”

Mason looked down at Elle, slightly amused how she got all worked up about her 'son'.

“You know what? Enjoy your new little cyborg you stole from me while he lasts. I'll be back to take back what's mine.”

With those words, Mason spun on his heel and super-jumped away, back towards his lab. Elle slowly lowered her brush, letting the anger fizzle out, and process what just happened. She began to wonder if what she did was bad, and to her, Zach, Talon, and Ruby, it wasn't. She saw someone in need of help, and she helped! Before she could think anymore on the morality of the situation, she turned and jumped to the palace to her workshop, to find Ruby and Zach.

At the workshop, Zach was busy fixing one of Ruby's dualies, as Ruby watched on, until they heard the door swing open. They turned to see Elle standing in the doorway, head down and expression blank.

"Help. I think I pissed off Mason."

The other two came up to her, with Ruby taking her brush and setting it aside, and taking one of her hands. As she took her hand, Ruby noticed that they were shaking, which was very uncharacteristic of Elle. Zach had noticed that her face seemed pale, like she was scared. Normally it was others who were scared of Elle, given her scarred appearance. Zach needed to know what happened.

"Woah woah- wait. What do you mean 'pissed off Mason'? What happened??"

"Ok so you know how we gave Otto that upgrade he had been asking for? Well, Mason saw that as us trying to steal him and 'ruin C-7K' and I told him it wouldn't have happened if he didn't neglect his creations and he got even more mad, and then called you a 'good for nothing octoling', and I don't have a right to call you my kid, and then he stormed off saying he's gonna be back to take back what's his and now I'm scared."

Zach looked at Elle, now concerned. What the hell is wrong with Mason?

"Okay, first, Ouch- and secondly, I'm not sure what he means by 'taking back what's his', unless he's referring to Otto, but nonetheless, we need to brace ourselves for whatever Mason is planning."

Zach quietly wrapped his arms around Elle, pulling her in for a hug. Elle silently returned the hug with her free arm, pulling Zach closer to herself. She didn't care what some old fossil thought. Zach was her and Ruby's son and she wasn't about to let an old fart like Mason hurt him. Ruby had decided that she and Elle should take in Zach, as they saw how much he loved having people to look up to. Ruby joined in on the hug, and gave Elle a soft kiss on the cheek. Elle looked slightly forward, and tried to keep herself composed, even though she felt like she was about to cry.

"I'm worried he's gonna go after everyone. Even if it's just me, it puts you two and Ciel in danger. He knows the one thing I can't do is fight my family."

Ruby looked down at Elle and wiped a tear off her face.

"Nightlight... We've been through our fair share of shit, and we've always come out triumphant, right? I promise this time won't be any different."

Zach let go of Elle and took her other hand.

"For the time being, let's just stay here and chill for a bit, while you calm your nerves, okay mom?"

Elle gave a silent nod as she looked up at both of them. They got up and went over to the couch they had in the corner of the workshop, and Elle and Ruby sat down, with Elle kicking off her boots and curling up on Ruby's side. Zach had gone over to the small counter with their brewing stuff, and started making himself some coffee.

"Do you two want drinks while I'm up?"

Ruby looked up first, while continuing to rub Elle's back.

"I'll take a tea if you don't mind. You want anything, Hon?"

"Coffee... Black..."

Elle spoke quietly and mumbled, but Zach knew what she wanted, it was the same every time.

"Alright, a tea and two black coffees, Got it!"

Zach began making their drinks along with his, while Ruby continued to comfort Elle. Neither of them had ever seen her so shaken up before, it was almost scary seeing Elle this upset. Elle had been through her fair share of shit, from agent work to other minor annoyances, but nothing on this scale before. After a few more moments of silence, Elle began to voice her thoughts.

"I... I knew what we were doing wasn't, you know, entirely in the right, but it wasn't entirely in the wrong either, right, Ruby?"

"I wouldn't think so, if anything you were doing both Otto AND Mason a favor, right?"

"Well, yeah, Otto was so rusted and outdated he was creaking like an old door, and speaking like he was born in the 80's. I thought I was doing the right thing, I didn't think Mason would become this hostile..."

Zach looked up from the machines, and grabbed some mugs out of the cabinet above them.

“According to Term, Mason is a perfectionist when it comes to his work. If something doesn't meet his *ahem*- high standards, or if something blows up in his face like it usually does, then he gets all cranky and irritated until it's perfect, often skipping sleep just to work. Apparently if we can't see his work the same way he does, he'll get into a hissy fit. Especially if we mess with it.”

He paused and shook his head, thinking about all the times Mason had done the same thing to Elle.

“Actually, now that I think about it, upgrading Otto could be considered payback for all the times Mason has messed with the things you've created! Think about how many people would still be alive if he never touched the respawn patches!”

Elle sat up a bit and looked at Zach.

“I'm still mad about that! He's constantly trying to copy me! Is he jealous or something?”

Ruby looked down and thought, putting her finger on her chin as she spoke.

“He could be, actually. Think about it, he's close to a decade older than you, probably has been doing science for as long as you've been alive, if not longer, and *still* hasn't made anything other than Otto that hasn't blown up in his face, whether that be physically or metaphorically. You've been making successful and groundbreaking tech since you were like, what? 12? You're basically a child prodigy, he's bound to envy that.”

Zach looked down and lightly chuckled. It would explain Mason's obsession over Elle's tech, but it's funny to think an old guy like him would be jealous of a 4'8" lesbian with wings.

“That's a bit upsetting, Mason being so obsessed with copying mom. Even Rebel would laugh at that, if he found that out.”

“This just in; Fossil jealous of a blind midget lesbian!”

“I'd read that headline.” Ruby snorted as she laughed.

Elle gave a light giggle before curling back up against Ruby, playing with Ruby's hand. Ruby sat and looked at her wife, and began thinking more about how to handle the problems at hand. She knew Mason has a habit of “stalking” people, mostly the royal family, Elle's turf war team, and Red Fang, with the highest people of interest being herself, since Ruby is also a scientist, Elle for her “golden brain”, Sail, mostly because hardly anyone can figure them out, and Princess Soda for her sleep deprived shenanigans. On the other hand though, there's a few people that Mason hasn't gotten to yet, and she thought they could be important in stopping whatever Mason was about to try.

“Now that I'm thinking about it, we could ask for help from the people that aren't in Mason's database! It's impossible for him to have stalked *everyone* we know, right? Perhaps we have some allies!”

“We could do that, but we need to be careful. For all we know, Mason is out trying to stalk people as we speak. We need a distraction and to keep him away from people he hasn't gotten to yet.”

Elle spoke, but not looking up from Ruby's hand.

“Think the Mimics could help? If we get Jeremy and the twins to mimic me, and make it look like I'm in 3 places at once, it could keep him distracted from everyone else.”

Zach looked at the machines, which were busy making their drinks, and thought.

“That's perfect, actually! With him distracted, we can warn everyone else!”

“We might need to keep Rebel away for now, even though I know how satisfying it would be for him to beat the snot outta Mason.”

Zach crossed his arms and tilted his head to the side a bit in confusion.

“Why? Isn't Rebel one of the strongest people we know? Taking Mason and his stupid little ‘platinum retrievers’ would be no problem for him.”

Elle looked up at Zach, still holding Ruby's hand

“Mason created Rebel, so he knows exactly how to disable him.”

Zach looked over at the machines, which were done making their drinks, grabbing the two coffees with his left hand and the tea with his right. He handed the tea to Ruby, and a coffee to Elle, who sat up when it was handed to her. He started to speak as he sat down, while beginning to sip at his coffee.

“Should we start planning after our drinks?”

Elle nodded and looked at Ruby, as a worried expression grew on her face. Ruby knew the look, and knew Elle just needed someone to say her words for her.

“Should we call the mimics and Soda now?”

“Yeah, let's get them distracting Mason ASAP.”

Ruby unmuted her communication chip in her jaw, and called for Princess Soda.

“Hey Soda.”

“Yeah? What's up?”

“Think you could bring yourself and the Mimics to the workshop?”

“Sure! Let me call them over and we'll be there in a few minutes!”

“Thanks!”

Ruby muted the chip and the three sat in relative silence while waiting for the princess and her assistants to arrive. Elle had been shaking the entire time, and avoiding eye contact with Ruby and Zach. Ruby knew Elle had some form of anxiety, and knew she had these panic attacks, but even in the nearly 5 years they had been together, she had never seen Elle get this bad. Perhaps she always hid how bad it really got, since she's admitted she's done that since childhood, and it's an old habit she never broke.

Zach never imagined Elle having this bad of a shutdown. To him, Elle was always a strong and brazen person, who never backed down when challenged. She was always pushing the limits of her and Zach's mechanical abilities, and always managed to break the mold with her creativity. That's part of the reason they wanted to upgrade Otto, was to see just how talented they were. And with Talon's help, the three managed to take something incredible, and make it even better. Otto seemed happier too, he said he felt more refreshed and lighter after his update. They were just trying to do the right thing, and Mason had his head too far up his ass to notice they were trying to help.

The three were taken from their thoughts by Soda knocking on the doorframe, with all three mimic octopi behind her. The three wore matching suits, with the only distinguishing feature being a different symbol on their shoulder. The three stood behind Soda, arms folded behind their backs, and looked almost straight forward.

“I'm here, and as requested, the mimics are with me. What happened?”

All three looked up to the princess, and they signaled for her to join them in their corner. Zach spoke up first, since he knew Elle wasn't going to say much, if anything at all, and Ruby was more focused on comforting her wife.

“So, in short, Mason threw a tantrum because we ‘messed up C-7K’ and threatened to ‘take back what's his’, and we need some help.”

“What kinda help?”

“We thought if we can keep Mason away from people he hasn't ‘taken notes’ on, we can rally some help from others to take him down if something were to go down. Since his main focus is Elle, if we can make it look like she's in multiple places at once, it will keep him away from everyone else. Which is where the mimics come in.”

The three perked up at their mention. They all shared a glance at one another before looking back at Zach, who looked over at them while he continued to talk.

“We need you to mimic Elle for a while, and keep Mason distracted. We need him away from everyone else while we warn everyone to stay away from him.”

Jeremy paused in thought, then looked up at the others.

“Mimicking Elle... Okay that's doable. What weapons would we be able to use?”

All three of the mimics looked over at Elle, who was still curled up on Ruby.

“Mostly a brush or a charger... if you use a charger, make sure to wear the glasses over your eyes and not on top of your head...” Elle stated, her voice hoarse and weak.

“A... Charger? Aren't you blind? Like all the way blind?” Jamie questioned.

The twins looked at one other, confused. They didn't know much about Elle, they only had a few interactions outside of the palace, since she spent most of her time in the workshop with Zach. How on earth does she use a charger?? The Stanlin family name must really hold up with its eldest daughter being a blind sniper. Jayden knew she was skilled, but sniping targets you couldn't see was impressive.

“How do you snipe something you can't even see?”

“Echolocation. My hearing is more sensitive than yours, I can hear things most can't.”

Soda chimed in, not wanting to just stand around and not help. She felt she owed it to Elle to help, after the years the two had known each other and the ways they've helped one another. So she asked Zach.

"What can I do to help?"

"Warn the others. No doubt that Mason has information on all of us here. Tell Term and Satie too, we need them ready to be our first line of defense here when Mason inevitably goes after us. Make sure Ciel is warned too, we're unsure if Mason knows about the relationship she and Elle have, she could be in as much danger as Ruby and I."

"Got it. I'll warn Robert and Harriet, and tell Harriet to keep a close eye on Ciel."

She turned and headed out the doors, to warn the other royals. She wanted to prevent as much physical fighting as she could, Soda was tired of having to fix the throne room doors. The group then turned back to Jeremy, who was having Elle say things into a recording box. The three mimic octopuses can't mimic voices on their own, so a while back, Zach made them a special voice modifier to help them match the voice of who they mimic. Meanwhile, the twins were fighting with contacts to change their eye color from orange and purple, to the same glossed over pale green and brown that Elle had. Jeremy looked over at the trio by the couch, as he picked up a brush.

"Elle, Zach, Ruby, are we free to depart?"

The three nodded and dismissed them. Jeremy looked at the twins who were blinking to get the contacts in place properly, and with a quick spin, the three took on Elle's small appearance, and were surprised how light she was. The twins immediately were puzzled by how she even remained upright.

"Elle, how on earth are you not blown over by wind? You're as light as a feather!" Jayden said, trying to remain standing

"Dude, did you always have this fin?" Jamie asked, inspecting the fin on himself, and the other two.

"My boots have steel plating and the soles have steel in them, and the fin has been there for about 2 years I think."

"Jayden, Jamie, let's figure out where we're gonna lead Mason. I'd say out of Splatsville, so I'll take Hammerhead Bridge. Jayden?"

"Flounder Heights. I'm good at parkour and jumping around. Jamie?"

"Humpback Pumprack, Elle spends a lot of time there flying."

"Perfect. Let's get going."

The trio left, with Jeremy taking a hand from each twin and darting out of the workshop, the three mischievously giggling as they did so. As they left, Zach and Ruby shot each other a glance, smirking.

"Hey mama, bet you \$10 Jeremy ends up dating both of them by the end of the year."

"You're on." Ruby challenged, as she giggled to herself. She knew she was gonna win, even though Jeremy spent most of his time with the only other mimic octopuses around, she knew he was never going to admit his feelings to them, unless one of them did it first.

Elle finished her coffee and set the mug down on the table, and curled up more next to Ruby. Ruby finished her tea and put the empty mug next to Elle's and moved Elle to be sat on her legs, her face on Ruby's chest. Elle silently unzipped the top portion of Ruby's jacket, and laid her head down, wrapping an arm around her wife's waist.

Zach also finished his coffee, and took the empty mugs to the counter to clean them later. He set the mugs on the countertop and went back over and sat next to Ruby, curling up next to her much like Elle was before. Ruby put her arm around Zach, while he held out his hand towards Elle. She grabbed Zach's pinky finger, and dozed off rather quickly. He looked down at Elle, and back up at Ruby, with a worried face.

"We need to protect her the best we can while staying out of his reach. God only knows what would happen if he catches her..."

"I don't even wanna think about it. She's been through enough; orphaned and homeless, agent work and sanitization, that war with the salmonids, and not to mention all the other struggles she has mentally, it's too much... she's barely 19, we can't lose her now..."

"Yeah... I can't lose another mom, especially not you or Elle.."

"You aren't going to lose us. We're strong, and we'll get through this, Okay?"

Zach nodded and shifted his weight, leaning into Ruby, who had scooted him closer. She began rubbing his back along with Elle's who had now began to make a soft purring sound, a common behavior among inklings. Zach eventually dozed off, with Ruby doing the same soon after. The three took their much needed nap in the relative peace of the empty workshop, with the only disturbance being Prince Robert peeking in to check in on the three after hearing of the situation from Soda.

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*"Are you serious-? Elle took the ONE thing I've successfully made in my image and she upgraded him! Not just that but she dares to insult me and my work! Just who does she think she is? How on earth is she so good at this despite being so young and inexperienced?! She thinks she's SO mature when the real truth is that she knows NOTHING about parenting, and here she is calling that 'disappointment' a son! How am I being bested by a kid who is literally BLIND?! This little act of hers will not stand any longer. She is going to pay for everything..."*

"KYLE!"

"Y-yes sir? You didn't need to yell my name.. I'm in the same room as you.."

"Whatever,, Here's the plan- I'm sure you know of a little, blind inkling who goes by Elle Stanlin, yes? I want you to go and figure out what that annoying little *twat* is up to. She mustn't intrude on my work any longer! She has been a thorn in my side for LONG ENOUGH!"

"If it's not too much trouble to ask, *why* am I doing this? I mean, I know how much you resent her for '*stealing*' your inventions and outclassing you, but.. Is it really worth all this fuss? She simply helped out Otto and made him operate a lot better. You *did* pretty much stuff his already decaying body in that metallic suit.."

"She took one of MY creations and upgraded him just to spite me!"

"I'm sure upgrading Otto--"

Tck.

"It's C-7K!"

"I-I'm sure upgrading C-7K just to spite you wasn't her intention... He was hurting real badly and needed some help..."

"I don't need to hear any more excuses! She has taken something of mine and she needs to pay for it! Now, go see what that annoying pest is up to and report back as soon as something happens!"

"Y-yes sir..."

*"Good. I'll make sure she learns to not mess with me. Now, where do I begin~?"*

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Over the course of the next day, the trio stayed in the workshop, working on making sure everyone's weapons were up to date and not broken. Otto was also there, as since Mason's tantrum, Otto became Elle and Zach's assistant rather than Mason's. It was his own choice, he was happy to help them in the workshop over being a test dummy for countless lethal science experiments; The most lethal thing Elle had done was stick a low power jetpack to Otto's back.

They knew they needed to be 100% ready for whatever Mason was planning, because knowing Mason, it could be bad. He had a habit of blowing things out of proportion, and they feared that this would be no different, with his crazy ideas for machines and gadgets.

Elle was working on her charger, making the shots more potent and higher power, a simple modification for her to do. Though, she was struggling to focus; her mind wandering to thinking about what Mason was planning. Even though he was still relearning normal emotions, Otto could tell Elle was stressed, and he wanted to offer help in any way he could.

"Hey, Elle, do you think it would be good for you to take a short break to ease your mind a bit? The stress you are under is affecting your work."

Elle looked up at Otto and put her pliers down, and leaned back in her chair. Sure, she was stressed, but it wasn't a big deal. At least, not to her right now.

"Rebel and the rest of Red Fang are having a training day at Mincemeat Metalworks in about an hour. I remember you said that you wanted to ask for their assistance. If you want, I could escort you there."

"I guess I could use a break..."

"Then let us get going. From what I remember about the Twins and Jeremy's reports from this morning, Mason is still camping out at CrabLeg Capital, and does not look like he is going anywhere. Let us get to asking for help before his 'notetaking spree' happens."

Elle looked up at Otto and nodded. She got up, threw on a flannel shirt, and grabbed her brush and her charger, and clipped them to the ink tank on her back. The pair left, and kept Term and Satie in the workshop to guard Zach and Ruby.

Otto began to take Elle to Mincemeat Metalworks, keeping a watchful eye, in the event Mason was wandering about rather than hiding at CrabLeg Capital. Otto knew that he too had to be careful, since he was also a prime target for Mason, and if he got snatched, it would mean that all the work Elle had put into him would be removed in favor of Mason's clunky and old hardware.

Elle hovered behind him, only flying a few inches above the ground so if she and Otto were jumped by Mason, she could grab Otto and fly straight up to avoid him. She was paranoid about the whole situation, and it definitely showed. She hadn't slept much, and hadn't eaten much either, choosing to instead spend her time fixing weapons and trying to improve them. Along with the current weapons, the new catalog and season upcoming, she was due for a delivery from Sheldon; the new weapons and specials that were going to be introduced. Elle knew that the key to her success in getting Mason to stop would be one of these new weapons.

Elle and Otto arrived at Mincemeat Metalworks, and Elle gave Otto the okay to head back to the palace. She awaited the arrival of Red Fang, hoping that they would show up sooner rather than later. She knew that most of the members were already 'observed' by Mason, but there were two that she knew didn't have notes. She also knew this is where they meet up and train, since she's followed along with Hop before. She hovered above the main part of the stage, just in case *he* was gonna show up. According to Jamie, Mason was camping out at Crableg Capital, which was on the edge of the main city and overlooked Hagglegfish Market and the bustling pier around it. Mason must have found out of her fear of heights or something, since she wouldn't go near there or Moray Towers because of some past occurrences. From what Jeremy had said, Mason was going on about "kidnapping" and "borrowing" some tech and ideas from Elle, which worried her greatly. Her tech was mostly for others benefit, like prosthetic limbs, or like her glasses; she focuses on helping people, and with Mason getting ahold of it, it could be used for bad things.

Elle shook the thoughts from her head, choosing to not think about the bad. She knew she had to warn Hop to be careful, Sail and Isaac to lay low, Marisa to keep Bomber away from Mason, and Rebel most of all. Rebel was a creation of Mason's, designed to be a carbon copy of Term. And when that didn't work, Mason threw him aside in favor of other projects, seemingly with little remorse. With Rebel being Mason's own work, Mason knew how to permanently disable him too, and she needed Rebel to stay far the hell away from him.

Elle was distracted from her internal rambling by the excited chatter of Lucius Harper; his loud, and cocky demeanor could be recognized in any crowd. He was being followed by the rest of Red Fang, which included Sail, Isaac, Marisa, and Rebel. She also saw Marisa's wife, Eden, and Lucius' wife, Steph following behind, they often came with to watch their partner train. She also spotted Shiver from Deep Cut, who was holding Rebel's arm as they walked, and was relieved to see someone of higher importance in the Splatlands to warn. Without further hesitation, she zipped down to the ground and landed a semi-short distance away, far enough to not be noticed, but not on the other side of the stage.

Down in the center of the stage, Eden, Steph and Shiver gave their partners a light kiss on the cheek before going up on a higher ledge to watch. Steph took her rabbit, Beep, out of her special carrying case and put a light harness on her, and began to pet and play with her. Eden pulled out her Switch, and began playing Stardew, with Shiver watching from over her shoulder. Elle quickly looked around for Mason, knowing that everyone in the area is of high interest for his "notes", to make sure no one was followed.

Elle crept out of her hiding spot, slowly walking to the group, keeping her hearing focused to follow the sounds of their voices. She was so focused, that she walked directly into a stray scrap of metal, causing her to trip and fall, essentially face planting the floor. The sudden noise of her small body hitting the ground followed by a strained groan, caught the attention of the others, who looked over in her direction. Elle used her Inkbrush to help herself get up, brushed the dirt off her shirt, and looked in the direction of the others.

"I could use some help. I pissed off Mason."

The group stood and shared looks with one another, all concerned as to how Elle could piss off Mason. Marisa got closer and led Elle to the others, and signaled for the other three to come down and join them.

"Pissed off Mason? What's he being cranky about now?"

"So you remember C-7K right?"

"Yeah, that cyborg Mason made."

"So me, Zach and Talon may have fixed him up and gave him better gear and hardware and Mason isn't happy about it."

The group continued to share concerned looks, now worried for Elle's safety. Marisa continued to ask about what happened.

"Why wouldn't he be happy about you upgrading his best work? If anything he should be appreciative of the work you've done."

"That's what we thought too. But he has his head too far up his ass and too much pride to admit he's jealous of me and my skills."

Rebel snorted and laughed at Elle's statement.

"That old shit is jealous of YOU? No wonder he tried to 1-UP you with those respawn patches a few years back."

"Yeah and look where that got us." Isaac chimed in, pushing up his sleeve to show a faint lime-green stain on his arm, showing where he was wearing a faulty patch. "It took almost a year to respawn me, and with yours it takes about an hour."

"Half of them didnt even work after he fucked with them! Lanie would still be here if he didnt fuck them up!"

Sail said, now holding her arm over one of her many tattoos, specifically the one of Lanie's name and birthday.

Lucius spoke up, now holding Steph's hand.

"I think we all have a reason to hate Mason. He's just annoying and old."

Steph came up and put her hand on Elle's shoulder, and looked at her.

"Elle, don't worry. We won't let him hurt you over this. What can we do to help you, Zach, Ruby, or Talon?"

"Lay low. Isaac, Eden, the two of you haven't had notes taken on you, right?"

Isaac thought, and shook his head, with Eden doing the same.

"Good, keep it that way. If he's got notes on you, there's a chance he's going to try something to hurt you."

Marisa took Eden's hand, and Sail took Isaac's and looked at Elle.

"Don't worry, Lefty, We got your back. If anything, we just have to make Professor Old Fart stand up and he dislocates his hip."

"Or replace his stupid gluten free shit with normal bread" Isaac added on.

Elle looked at the group, now giggling at Sail and Issac's remarks. She gave a small smile, and walked over to a box and stood on it, so she could give everyone a run down on what she felt they could do to keep Mason at bay.

"Ok, here's what we can do. Lucius, Steph, keep the kids safe and try not to engage with Mason if he spots you. Marisa, Eden, keep a low profile, and warn Bomber. As far as I know, Mason's notes on him seem rather indecisive. If we can keep Bomber a mystery, he could help us out a lot. Sail, Isaac, keep an eye out for him. According to my decoys, Mason is planning something at CrabLeg Capital, and looking to 'borrow' some tech from me. Shiver, warn the general public in the next stage rotation. Try and schedule CrabLeg as much as you can to keep Mason out. Knowing him, this could get wildly out of hand if we can't stop him soon. Rebel, keep eyes on your crew and make sure the rest of our friends know. I'll warn the rest of the Agents, as well as the Squid Sisters. I think that covers everything right now."

Everyone nodded in agreement, and turned to Rebel. He issued them leave to warn the people they knew, and begin the tasks Elle gave them, and told Elle to stay for a minute.

Shiver came up to Elle and took one of her hands, and gave her a gentle hug.

“Don’t worry Elle, we won’t let him get away with any of this. No one makes threats on this scale and gets away with it. Not on my turf. We got this, and we got you.”

“Thanks Shiver...”

Shiver let go, and turned to Rebel to give him a kiss on the cheek. With a whistle, she called Master Mega to take her back to the recording studio, so she could warn the others about Mason’s plans.

Rebel turned to Elle, who was fidgeting with her brush, and led her to a dimmer, more out of sight place in the scrapyard, and sat down on the ground.

“Elle. What can I do to help?”

“Keep yourself away from Mason. I know beating the shit out of him is a dream of yours, but he would know exactly how to take you out. The last thing Red Fang needs is you gone, and I know how important you are to your peers, whether you want to believe it or not.”

Rebel looked off to the side in annoyance, but understood why he was being told to keep far from Mason and decided not to fight it.

Elle sat next to Rebel on the ground, and took her other weapon off her back and set it next to her brush on the ground. She looked out in the distance, and continued to talk to Rebel.

“I know how you feel about him, Rebel. I, probably know more than anyone, understand your feelings about him, since I’m not much different than you. I was also abandoned by the people who created me. When she learned I was born with low vision, my own birth mother threw me to the side when my brother was born. I wasn’t ‘perfect’ and I was thrown out, just like you were.”

“You... were? I just assumed you ran off like Satie did.”

“I was neglected and abused until I was around five. I ran off the day after this happened.”

Elle pointed to the scar over her left eye, still visible under the green sanitization mark on that side of her face. Rebel took a closer look at it, and saw just how deep it actually went, which is shocking considering Elle was still alive. Elle looked back at the floor and continued speaking.

“I stayed with Megs and Isaiah until I finished school, then back into the streets I went until Marie found me. It took ages to actually get back on my feet because of what Diane did. Trust me, there are things I would love to say to her, and perhaps punch her in the gut for all that she caused, but I hold my tongue for my own safety.”

“I know it’s for my safety, but won’t all of you be there if a fight goes down?”

“Sure, *if* Mason doesn’t try to catch you alone. That’s what I’m afraid of. I know Mason, and he would try something like that.”

“Fair enough. OK, so along with staying away from him, what else can I do?”

“Like I said, keep an eye on the rest of Red Fang. If Mason doesn’t destroy you physically, he’ll do it psychologically. He knows what happened with the whole... fight with Harriet, and he knows that losing another member would push you over the edge.”

“Hmm. Alright. I’ll do my best to stay clear. Trust me, we aren’t going to let him get away scot free.”

Rebel looked over to Elle, who was looking down and playing with the tip of her bandana to keep her mind calm. Normally, if someone went to him for comfort and help, he wouldn’t know what to do, or not even bother to help. But seeing Elle this shaken up just didn’t sit right with him. It was so out of character for her to be scared, so Rebel knew he couldn’t just dismiss her fears and concerns.

Mason could be classified as a downright creep and stalker, with the way he “keeps an eye on” his peers. He watches and scribbles down a bunch of “notes”, which are usually negative comments or weird questions he can’t say out loud without getting splatted.

“You mentioned alerting the other Agents. Want me to go with you to gather them? I think it would be wise for you to be accompanied for now, until Mason is taken care of.”

Elle looked up and nodded. “Let’s not waste time then. Let me tell Megs.”

She stood up and tapped her jaw, unmuting the communication chip in her jaw to talk to Megs.

“Megs. I need some help.”

*"What happened?"*

"I'll explain when I get to Alterna. Call all the agents and tell them we need to have an emergency meeting. Get Term and Satie. I'll have Rebel with me when I get there."

*"Got it, I'll contact everyone"*

"Thank you."

Her words seemed to trail off as she muted the chip, her eyes seeming more vacant than they usually were. Elle clipped her weapons to her back and followed Rebel back to the small parking lot where his motorcycle was parked, and he handed her a helmet. She clipped it on, climbed on the bike with Rebel, and they took off to the center of town, where the way to Alterna was.

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Arriving at the central square, Elle and Rebel hopped off the bike and headed to the sewer grate to Alterna. They jumped in, and were swiftly met with the cold tundra weather, making both shiver. Elle met up with Megs, Callie and Marie, and awaited the other agents' arrivals.

Jenna, Isaiah, Bomber, Lucius and Steph were already there, Steph with her son Adein bundled up and in her lap. Antonio arrived shortly after Elle did, and he was followed by Evan. Term and Satie arrived last, making that all the agents. Elle looked up at Megs, worried.

"I don't know what to say... or what to make everyone do..."

"You got this, Elle. We are here to help you, and we won't let you down."

"Thanks..."

Elle gave Megs a quick hug, and they traded spots, Elle standing on the crate Megs was sitting on, and Megs at her side. The group of agents stood around the crate and looked at Elle, awaiting instruction.

"Thank you for meeting with us on such short notice. As you might have heard, I've apparently pissed off Professor Fossil, and now he's trying to plan something that could hurt a lot of people. There are some things that I could use your help with, to either keep myself and my family safe, or to make a dent in Mason's plans."

Elle started to dole out tasks to everyone; Megs to guard Alterna, Bomber to lay low and keep out of sight of Mason, Antonio and Evan were to stay on lookout and report any sight of Mason outside of CrabLeg Capital, Jenna and Isaiah to watch over Inkopolis, Steph to protect her family and mostly Lucius, and Term and Satie were to keep the rest of the royal family safe.

"Wait, if Mason is after you, what are you going to do to keep yourself safe?" Isaiah asked, worried that Elle had made plans for everyone except herself.

Elle thought for a minute, then realized that she thought about everyone else's safety, but not her own. To her though, it didn't matter. As long as everyone else was safe, Elle was happy.

"I'll be okay. I know how to defend myself."

The agents began to leave in pairs, following the instruction to not wander alone. Term and Satie offered to escort Elle back to the palace, to which she accepted, and she began to head back with them. As they left, Megs turned to the Squid Sisters with a worried face.

"She's looking out for everyone except herself again. I love her to bits but... she needs to learn to value her own life more..."

Marie looked at the horizon and put her hand on Megs' shoulder.

"Do you want me to stay in the city to keep tabs on her?"

"That might ease my anxiety, so yeah."

"Got it. I'll keep you posted."

Marie swiftly took after the others, planning on meeting with Shiver and Frye to explain her plan. Elle was getting a protection squad whether she liked it or not.

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Meanwhile at the castle, Zach was still hard at work making sure all the weapons in the palace were up to date. Ruby was sitting on the couch, mindlessly scrolling through her phone to occupy herself.

"Hey Zach, I think I'm gonna take a quick cat nap. I didn't sleep well last night."

"Sounds good, Mama. I'll follow in a few, once I get this Splatana finished up."

"Sounds good..."

Ruby yawned and got up, and left for her and Elle's room, nudging a guard on the way out to stand at her door to keep watch. The last thing she wanted was for Elle to come home to an empty bed.

Ruby changed her shorts to sweatpants, slipped off her jacket and got in the bed, only really planning to take a short nap. Climbing into bed, she heard something tap against the window, but didn't think much of it, figuring it was some branches of the nearby tree swaying in the breeze.

She couldn't keep her eyes open long enough to wait for Zach, falling asleep holding onto a small green squid plush.

The tapping against the window didn't stop, only getting more and more aggressive, until there was a click.

The window swung open, and a small figure made its way into the room. The figure crept to the bed, tiptoeing its way to Ruby.

There was another noise, Zach opening the door and walking in, closing it behind him. He noticed the figure as soon as he walked in, but pretended he didn't. If it was who he thought it was, he wanted to surprise attack him to avoid any unnecessary fights.

However, the figure's goal shifted slightly, now focusing on Zach. The figure knew Zach would cause problems for its plan, and needed to deal with him first. Zach continued to pretend the figure wasn't leering closer, all while preparing himself for a fight. The closer he could lure the figure to him, the better.

Swiftly thinking of a plan, Zach moved to the dresser and pretended to be looking for a change of clothes, but also had positioned himself to be able to view the rest of the room behind him, if this figure tried to jump him from behind. All that mattered to Zach in the moment was protecting Ruby, and he knew that she was a major target for this figure.

Observing Zach's search into his dresser, the figure snuck out from behind the bed, and began tiptoeing to Zach, careful to not make any noise as it crept ever closer. It wanted to take him out in silence to avoid causing a scene, knowing there was a guard right outside the door.

Zach noticed the figure making its way to him, and knew he had to act swiftly. He was racking his brain trying to think of a way to take out the figure quickly and with enough force to take it out if it came to that.

*"Think Zach, think! You were in the army, you know how to defend people!"*

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed both the figure getting mere feet away, and Ruby stirring in her sleep. He had to act fast.

Just as the figure got close enough to reach him, Zach spun around and used his elbow to strike the figure in the jaw. As he completed his spin, he was now facing the downed mystery figure, and it was exactly who he thought it was.

"Wanna try that again, Mason? Or maybe want to get the fuck out of my moms' room?!"

Mason got up, and now Zach could see him clearly. Mason's face was covered in dirt, with a clear outline of his goggles, and there were bags forming under his eyes.

Mason stood up, cracked his knuckles and grimaced at Zach. He wasn't anticipating the former soldier to be such a thorn.

"Really? Must you always ruin plans? You always seem to worm yourself into situations you don't need to be in. Now, get out of my way and we can make this painless."

"Or, here's an idea; Get. The fuck. OUT!"

"Fine, let's do this your way, Pest."

Mason charged at Zach, his fists back like he was swinging for a punch. Zach caught his hand, and used the leverage he had to try and twist Mason's wrist behind his back.

-Mason and Zach are physically about the same size, but Zach is stronger. Thus, Zach can overpower

Mason quickly

-Mason gets one good punch in and knocks out Zach

- Zach hitting the floor is what makes Ruby snap awake

- Mason takes Ruby; she sends her SOS before Mason jams her chip

Zach tried to sit himself up, now aware of the sudden headache he had, and the full pain in his knuckles. Opening his eyes some, he was greeted by Elle hovering over him, seemingly concerned about his physical state. "What happened...? Mom...?" He muttered.

"Are you okay? What happened? Where's Ruby??"

"She's not here?!"

Zach shot up, looking over at the empty bed and open window.

"Shit! I didn't realize he came here for her! I thought he was here for me!"

"Who came here??"

"Mason. He must have snuck in through the window. I saw him in here, and I tried to fight him off, but he must have hit me in the head and I passed out..."

Elle looked over at the window and sighed. "And he took Ruby while you were out and she was asleep... That *bitch!* At least she was able to send out her SOS..."

She helps Zach up and checks to make sure he wasn't injured outside of a dull headache, and pulls him in for a hug.

"Mason wants to play dirty...? Fine. Let's play his way. I won't hold back..."

~~~

It had only been one night since Ruby's disappearance, and everyone was on edge, especially Elle. Ciel had never seen Elle this panicked before, although the circumstances for this kinda panic hadn't presented themselves in the time Ciel and Elle had known each other.

Ciel knew she couldn't sit idly by watching her girlfriend panic so bad she was forgoing eating, so she decided to take matters into her own hands. She knew that whatever "notes" the Fossil had taken in her were rather inquisitive yet unsure, like she was a mystery, and she wanted to use it to her advantage.

"*I need to see Momma. She'd know what to do and how to help*" Ciel thought.

Ciel went to find Harriet, so she could let him know she was going out to get Elle some help. She passed the workshop on her way to the library, and stopped to check on everyone. She poked her head in the shop, seeing Elle, Zach, Otto, and Jeremy all working on weapons again. Seeing Elle looking so frazzled didn't sit right with Ciel, and only fueled her desire to help more, so she resumed her way to the library.

She got to the library and spotted Harriet with his sketchbook in a window, sketching away without a care in the world.

- talks to Harriet in the library so he knows where she's going and when she should be back (safety concerns all that)

- she goes off, and tells Harriet that if she isn't back by that night, to raise the alarm and start looking for her (she knows she was a target, wanted to make sure someone would look for her if she didn't return.)

- she gets to the shore where she usually swims to the smokeyard, and looks around to make sure she wasn't followed

- just as she jumps in, she gets snatched by mason and he scurries to the lab

- cut to evening with Harriet being super on edge and snappy (i'm not entirely sure how he would react tbh)

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(another Mason interlude, bringing ciel to the lab, and shortly before he ended up separating ruby from ciel)

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Late in the morning, a day after Ciel's disappearance, is when Deep Cut did their daily news report after that hour's stage rotations. Harriet had special requested to have an alert issued for Ciel and Ruby, stating that if anyone found them, they were to be returned to the palace. Harriet and Robert were sat on their throne awaiting the broadcast, along with Princess Soda, and Elle, Zach and Otto all stood with them, along with Jeremy, Jayden, Jamie, Term and Satie. At this point, no one would let Elle, Zach, or Otto go anywhere alone, in fear of Mason kidnapping them.

The familiar jingle of the SplatCast rang out, but was swiftly interfered by an outside source, making a loud static noise before fading out to a dimly lit room, filled with science equipment. Elle and Otto recognized it instantly; Mason's Lab. By now, everyone's attention had turned to the screen, which still remained mostly vacant.

"Good morning, everyone~."

Elle froze.

"I hope you all are enjoying your morning so far, but alas, I am the harbinger of bad news. Well, bad for you, that is."

A small figure appeared from the shadows, being none other than Dr. Mason himself. There was visible dust and dirt on his cheeks, and his white lab coat was now a musty yellow, stained with dirt and foreign chemicals. He stepped into a spotlight and looked at the crowd he was now broadcasting to, giving a slight smile with malicious intent.

"You see, I used to live the life of a humble inventor and scientist, creating gadgets and things to share with the world. But, one of my prized creations was... stolen from me and was ruined by an... inferior being. So I think some payback is in order."

He stepped aside and a second light came on, showing a holding cell of some sort with a figure on the inside. Everyone froze when they saw who was inside.

"This specimen is a Inking-Salmonid hybrid, known as your dear Princess Ciel. She lives amongst the royal family, and is dating the reckless disappointment of a prince, Prince Harriet. She will be staying with me for some... analysis and research, and soon, she will be a perfect replacement for my dear Cyborg."

As he spoke, Mason had walked over to Ciel and had lifted her head by the chin with his finger, giving a cynical smile. Ciel looked at his hand and snapped at it, baring her teeth in an attempt to scare him off. Mason swiftly moved his hand and kept his smug face; Ciel did this anytime he got close to her.

"Hostages aside, I am here to declare my plans for this trashy city, destroying it and everyone in it, and remodeling it into my perfect society! Unless I get a few things in return. Those being; my prized C-7K, and the main problem herself, Elle Stanlin. This concludes my message, have a good day."

Elle, still frozen in shock, looked up at the screen, and was about to say something before his voice continued.

"Oh, and Elle, a message from me to you. I hope you're ready, because once I get you, I'll make sure you know how it feels to have EVERYTHING taken from you...~"

Mason grabbed something off screen to his left, and pulled it into view, and began chucking. He had a second hostage, Ruby. She was clearly in distress, and it appeared that her hands were tied up behind her. There was a strip of duct tape over her mouth, presumably to keep her from calling for help.

"Oh, don't think your little "son" is safe either. I'll be going after him very soon~."

The screen went black, and it fizzled back into static, then to the Splatcast, showing a very frazzled Deep Cut.

"We're back? Ok we are back, and we apologize for that. As you heard, Mason has hostages and wants to trade them with Elle and Otto or we get destroyed. However, I made a promise to Elle to protect her and her family, and I don't intend on breaking it. Everyone should keep an eye out for Mason, and report him as soon as you see him. We have got Crableg Capital in rotations more now, as that's where Mason has been spotted the most." Shiver stated, determined to keep her promise to Elle and protect her people.

"C'mon Splatlands! We aren't going to let him hurt one of its royals!" Frye shouted.

Big Man looked off to the side and thought.

“Ay? (Isn't kidnapping and holding a member of the royal family, like, illegal?)”

“I don't know actually let me look it up”

Frye pulled out her phone and started typing, letting the other two continue with news. Deep Cut continued with its stage announcements, but it was soon interrupted again by Frye.

“What do ya know? Mason is actively committing treason. How bad of a crime is that?” Frye continued to type and read, now completely curious of how much trouble Mason had gotten himself in.

Soon they signed off, and the throne room was left in a stunned silence. That silence was swiftly broken, however.

“See?! I TOLD you that she was kidnapped! But NO! No one wanted to believe me! Why would anyone believe Prince Quiver? Especially about his own GIRLFRIEND! I KNEW what I was talking about but NOOO no one ever FUCKING listens to ME!”

Harriet had gotten up and stormed out, slamming the door behind him. His angry ranting could still be heard behind the closed doors, until another slam was heard, with Harriet presumably locking himself in his room.

“I guess I should've done something... I was the one who didn't take him seriously...”

“Well, I didn't either...”

The two elder royals shared a worried look to one another, then looked over at Elle, who was being surrounded by Zach, Otto, and the twins. Zach and Otto each had a hold on one of Elle's hands, and the twins each had a hand on one of her shoulders. Elle had a stone cold glare, looking straight ahead.

“I... am going to fucking DESTROY him!”

She used all her strength to try and break Zach and Otto's grip, trying to zip away to Mason's lab. She couldn't get out; being stopped by Zach's hand around her waist, and Otto's arm over her chest. The twin's grip on her shoulders tightened as the combined strength of the 4 was just enough to counter Elle's.

“Let GO! He has both of them! I have to get them free!”

Elle continued to struggle against the others for a minute, then gave up when she realized the others wouldn't. She slumped to the floor, defeated, and looked down.

“I have to do something... I can't just leave them in his hands! You saw Ciel, it's only been a day and her scales are falling out! And he's got MY WIFE tied up and muted!”

“Mom, I know we need to do something, and quick, but we sure as hell are not letting you go anywhere by yourself. You being alone is exactly what he wants, and god knows what might happen if you get captured.”

“But-”

Zach knelt down and pulled Elle into a tight hug, and spoke softly to her.

“I can't risk losing my family again, I don't want to risk losing the people who I care about the most, and I am going to do what I must to protect them. And that includes keeping you from doing anything stupid.”

Elle hugged Zach back, wiping a few tears off her face with the sleeve of her sweater.

“Love you, Mom.”

“Love you too kiddo...”

Zach helped Elle to her feet and with Otto's help, they went to the workshop to continue working on Elle's armor and some other weapon upgrades. Soda watched them walk off and turned to Robert, worried.

“We really need to do something. This is escalating far too quickly. Jayden, Jamie, go back to distracting at CrabLeg. Jeremy, keep an eye on Elle and Zach, and rotate with one another throughout the day. Term, Satie, stay on high alert, and keep watch on Harriet.”

The group nodded and split up, going off to their assigned tasks. The twins did a quick spin and took on Elle's look, Jayden picked up a charger, and nodded to his brother, zipping off to the city. Jamie grabbed his brush and followed, heading to Inkopolis to the skatepark, just in case Mason went there instead of CrabLeg.

Elle, Zach and Otto arrived at the workshop and were surprised to be greeted with Harriet leaning up against the wall, coat around his waist and picking at his nails. His head snapped to the left to face them when they walked in, Otto noticing his pupils were thin slits; mimicking a snake's. Zach jumped at Harriet's appearance, Not only spooked by his eyes, but simply his presence in the workshop; Harriet would never enter the shop of his own choice.

"Harriet? What are you doing here?" Otto pondered, also confused by Harriet's presence.

"Well, obviously I need some help kicking Mason's ass, since he has MY girlfriend locked up and NO ONE here wanted to believe me that she was."

Elle flinched as Harriet raised his voice, bringing her arms closer to her chest and she closed her eyes as if bracing for impact with something. Remembering an offhand comment from Ruby about Elle's childhood, Harriet took a breath and stated he wasn't mad at the trio, more just irritated with his brother for not listening to him when he said Ciel was taken.

"Well, what kinda help can we provide?" Zach asked, still trying to understand why Harriet wanted their help.

"I've noted what the three of you have been working on, and I saw the armor Elle was making. If I'm going to verse Mason myself, then I would like one too."

"I think we can handle that, they aren't too hard to make."

Elle nodded and went to her workbench, and started working on an extra suit as she put her headphones on. Harriet looked a bit puzzled at Elle's silence, since she usually couldn't keep her mouth shut, and her intense focus on her work was worrying.

"Any reason she's so... quiet? It's unlike her."

"She is under immense stress, and is choosing to bottle it up. Despite my efforts to tell her it is unhealthy, Elle continues to keep her feelings to herself." Otto responded, as he was also concerned about her silence.

"I think, as much as I hate to say it, I think she bottles it up to avoid showing weakness. Elle tries to keep a facade up about her bravery and boldness, but deep down she's terrified of being seen as weak. That's what she was her whole life according to Megs and Mama, seen as weak and defenseless."

The pair looked up at Zach, who had made himself and Elle coffee. He placed Elle's mug on the desk next to her and nudged her hand, grabbing her attention and earning a quiet "thank you" from her. He walked back over to the other two and continued talking.

"She bottles it up for us. She fears that we won't see her as 'good enough' and with the way her mind thinks, her thinking she's not good enough snowballs into 'we are going to stop loving and caring about her and that she isn't worthy of anything'."

Zach looked down and sipped at his coffee, and Harriet looked over at Elle, who was softly humming to her music. Harriet knew Elle had it hard growing up, but he never imagined that the way she was raised would have such a stark effect on her way of thinking. "*How does she think that being perceived as weak would make us not love her? Those two things don't even remotely correlate with each other!*" Harriet thought.

Zach looked back over at Elle and thought about what could be done to at least ease some of her stress. He caught a glimpse of Jeremy walking in the shop, and thought of something.

"Hey Jeremy. I have an idea."

"Does it involve explosives or questionable weapon mods?" Jeremy asked, unamused

"No. We are going to get Elle some extra backup. And I need you to be my backup so I'm not alone."

"Okay... Who do I need to mimic?"

"No one. Just stay with me and help me if I get attacked. If something happens, you run back here and get Soda and Robert."

"Got it. Let's go."

The duo said their goodbyes and swiftly left, telling Elle they'll be gone for a day or maybe two, leaving just Harriet, Otto, and Elle in the shop. Harriet sat on the floor near Elle's workbench, letting his snake, Se'Kai, slither up to him and around his arm. Otto stood at the door and kept watch on the pair, at least until Jeremy and Zach returned.

Zach and Jeremy approached HammerHead Bridge, intending on crossing it to Inkopolis to get help from some of Elle's friends in the city, but they had to abort their plans when they bumped into someone.

Kyle.

He looked like he was expecting them, and his body language indicated that whatever was going on wasn't going to be good.

"Oh, Hey you two. I have a problem."

Zach looked on, concerned, but encouraged Kyle to continue.

"So I think Mason is starting to suspect that I'm helping you guys, and wants me to prove that I'm on his side and not on Elle's. And he wants me to do that by bringing you back to the lab."

"And what if you don't?"

"I go into captivity just like Ruby, Ciel and eventually you, and will be forced to fight Elle. If I'm kept up, I can't get information to Elle and the royals, and if she can't plan for what Mason is doing, she's going to lose. If we can reduce the number of people she has to fight, the better."

Zach thought for a minute, then turned his attention back to Kyle.

"Shit. OK. Take me with you then. Jeremy, Tell mom exactly what happened. Make sure the royals know too, and don't you dare let her think that this is her fault. Keep her safe for us."

"Oh, Jeremy. Take this. I made a copy of Mason's notes on everyone, so you guys would have all the same info he does, and might be able to help you counter what he's planning. Take it to Elle and whoever is left, they'll need it."

Jeremy nodded and ran off, back the way they came to alert the royals and give the notes to Elle. Jeremy knew to take his time heading back, warning anyone he could about what had happened.

Zach looked at Kyle and held his wrists out, ready to accept his fate as a temporary prisoner.

"Is Mason really gonna believe that you came willingly?"

"He knows I'd do anything to protect my mom. If anything, just say I surrendered to you or something."

"I guess that would work"

Kyle took a zip tie out of his coat pocket and tied Zach's wrists together, and led him back to the lab. They walked in an uncomfortable silence to the lab, Kyle starting to regret ever becoming Mason's assistant, and Zach more worried about Ciel and Ruby.

"Ruby and Ciel are okay, right...? They aren't injured?"

"I can't promise not hurt. Mason has been especially cruel to Ciel. He's got her muzzled and separated from Ruby, and won't even feed her if she acts out. Even if they do get fed, it's not a lot. Whenever he's out, I sneak them actual food so they don't die of starvation. And those trials with those stupid sunglasses have made Ruby so sensitive to light that she's blindfolded herself to stop the headaches."

"Sunglasses?"

"Mason is being unoriginal once more and stealing the idea of the HypnoShades that Octavio used a few years ago on Callie. Except these are more harmful to your head and cause massive headaches to the user. So, basically Ruby, since Mason can't even get close to Ciel with being bitten. Hence the muzzle."

"I knew Mason was a shit person, but this is downright sadistic!"

"Tell me about it. It hurts having to basically sit on my hands and watch him do this."

"And all because he's got too much pride in admitting Elle is better than him. There's a reason no one likes him, his head is too far up his own ass to see that he doesn't need to have the best in the market to be considered good."

"There's no use in trying to talk sense into him now, he's too far gone."

"I thought as much."

Arriving at the lab, Zach saw Ciel, leaning up against the bars of her "cage" and muzzled. Her scales were noticeably missing, save for the golden ring of them barely visible under her bangs. Mason quickly grabbed Zach, threw him in the same holding place as Ruby, and cut the tie around his wrists. Zach also caught a glimpse of Mason; he was even more rugged than his announcement that morning, and there was not a hint of sanity in his voice. Zach looked around the cell, and saw Ruby slightly curled up in the corner, blindfolded, just like Kyle has said.

"Mama...?"

Ruby turned in the direction of the voice, and lifted up a part of the bandana covering her eyes.

"Zach? He got you too?"

"Long story..."

Ruby grabbed Zach's arm and pulled him closer to herself, and wrapped her arms around him protectively. "Wow, talk about pathetic. I've had you here for barely 5 minutes and you ran straight to your mommy, not that she really is one. She's more like a pathetic excuse for a scientist and doctor. Like seriously, how awful is it that she's an octarian and can't say a word in her native language. And I thought you were brave and independent, guess I was wrong."

Zach looked up from Ruby and saw Mason's cynical smile on the other side of the bars.

"Just shut the fuck up. You'll get what you deserve soon. Elle isn't gonna let you get away with *any* of this." "I'd like to see her try."

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Back at the castle, Jeremy slipped into the throne room, where the pair of elder royals awaited him, at his request. The pair looked on with worried expressions, as all Jeremy's text said was "I need to speak to both of you; It's about Mason". Anything mentioning Mason was a call for urgency; the royal family could sense that everything was coming to a climax.

"Jeremy, what happened? Where's Zach?" Robert questioned.

"About that. We ran into Mason's assistant, Kyle, who is the one who's been giving us information. The problem begins with Mason starting to suspect Kyle helping us, and he sent him out to prove that he was on Mason's side and not ours. So Zach willingly gave himself up to be a prisoner. And now he's in Mason's hands. Kyle can continue to try and send us information, and I feel his attack on us and Elle is coming very soon. So that's what happened, what's the best course of action?"

Jeremy smiled nervously, in clear distress.

"Well, Elle has to know about this, if she thinks Zach got taken by force it's only going to cause her to spiral faster than she already is. Her mental state is declining rapidly, and now that her last bit of hope is gone, she's definitely going to break soon. I've... seen this before. It isn't pretty." Soda stated, now fully aware of how fast Elle could completely lose herself from stress. "She and Harriret still won't let us in the shop for some reason, you're going to have to tell her. What we can do is stand outside the doors and listen on, just in case something bad ends up going down. I can call Megs in the event she breaks down."

"That seems like a plan. Let's hope she can hold herself together though. I don't think anyone in that room knows how to comfort people."

"You act like I'm any better, I still can't pin down exactly how I feel about my own sister. And that happened over a year ago."

The trio made their way to the workshop, letting Jeremy lead them. Soda was looking through the notes from Kyle, and stumbled over a few pages about herself.

"Babe look at this. There's a whole page about me at Wahoo World and the circle."

*"Has a strange obsession with the centre platform at Wahoo World. I tried to walk onto the platform to enquire, but I got splatted as a result. Perhaps it's a place of comfort? She won't let me get close enough to the platform to ask her any questions, and it seems she actively avoids me."*

"Yeah I avoid him, he's fuckin' weird."

Soda continued to look through the notes, and at the back of the binder, was a group of papers held together by a few binder clips, with the name "Alicia" written on the front page. Flipping through the many pages, Soda noticed that they were all notes on Elle. From behavior, to relationships with her peers, and even her early childhood, which to most was a complete mystery.

The last 10 or so pages all contained one phrase, repeated again and again, in increasingly messy handwriting

"These last few pages are so weird. They're under Elle's notes. Look."

Robert took the binder and looked at the writing, a look of concern flashed across his face.

“This...This just says ‘I hate her’ over and over... for a concerning amount of pages. Mason is... jealous...of her and her skills, and is taking it out on Elle and her family...”

“Exactly. We need to put a stop to this ASAP. Not only to stop Mason, but also for Elle’s own well-being. I don’t know how much more of this she can take.”

The trio made it to the workshop doors, and Jeremy hesitantly pushed them open, peeking his head inside.

“Elle,” he spoke softly, “We have an update for you.”

Elle perked up at the mention of her name, and looked over at Jeremy walking in the room. She put her tools down and walked closer to him, signalling for Harriet to come over with her.

(mental breakdown part one bc Zach :<)

Elle sat at her workbench and looked over the notes. Skimming through the binder, she saw there was very little on the page labeled “Mason & Marisa Rhodes”.

*“Mason? That’s what Bomber’s name is? Ew.”*

Looking at what little was actually written on the page, it was much more barren than other pages.

*-Mason is on par with Project 071 (Rebel) in terms of strength, speed, and skill.*

*-One hell of a fruitcake.*

*-Marisa seems to be exempt from the salmonid features. Perhaps they do not appear on females.*

*-Not much is known about either twin; investigate further if they can be found.*

Elle looked at the page, and turned on her mic chip.

“Hey, Bomber? Can you swing by the palace? Tell them that Harriet and I requested you.”

“Uhh, sure thing? Is everything okay?”

“I’ll... Explain when you get here. SeaBass can tag along if he wants.”

After Bomber said he and his husband were on the way, she muted her chip and went back to flipping through all the notes the Fossil had on her friends. She finally got to the back of the binder, and saw her section, and saw it was almost triple the size of any other section. She seemed confused seeing her legal name on the front, but began looking through it anyway, seeing all the very detailed accounts of her life. *“How could have known all this? Not even Megs or Isa knows some of this stuff...”* she thought. Harriet peaked over her shoulder and looked on with her, glancing over the notes about her.

“This guy really is obsessed with you, isn’t he?” Harriet commented.

“Tell me about it. There’s shit in here from when I was a young teen that not even Megs and Isaiah know about. But that isn’t what caught my attention; it’s the fact he seemingly knows nothing about Salmonids and how their waters affect Inklings. Bomber’s page here is almost completely blank! Aside from a comment asking if he’s deranged or not.”

Elle flipped back to Bomber and Marisa’s page, showing Harriet just how little was there in comparison to the others. “I’m thinking, if we get an army of people that Mason doesn’t know much about, we could get an upper hand. Which is why I called Bomber over.” She continued.

“Won’t he be able to study Salmonid stuff like that since Ciel is with him?”

“This is Mason we’re talking about, he’s too focused on me to think rationally. Besides, everytime he gets near her she tries to bite him.”

The two were interrupted by a knock on the doors of the workshop, followed by Jeremy peeking his head in.

“Bomber is here as you requested, Elle. SeaBass is here too.”

“Send them in here, please. Thanks Jeremy.”

Jeremy gave a small nod, and opened the door more to let the other two in, and closed the door behind himself. Bomber and SeaBass walked into the workshop and a wave of concern hit them as soon as they saw the state of the shop, which was messy and disorganized, very uncharacteristic of Elle and especially Harriet to

be. Their concern deepened when they got a closer look at Elle; Her vibrant hair had faded slightly, and they could see the dark circles under eyes once she looked up from the binder.

“Hey you two. We need some help. Fossil has very detailed notes on everyone, minus you and Marisa. He doesn't know shit about Salmonids, and we need some help from the others. Like Coco.”

“What do you mean he doesn't know shit? He's been practically interrogating me every time he sees me.”

“Look at it; there's nothing here! He can't understand you!”

Elle showed the notes to Bomber, and he looked equally as shocked to see hardly anything on the page. He handed them back to Elle, and took Seabass' hand.

“With Ciel captive, won't he learn?”

“Nope. He's too focused on me to take time to research Ciel. And she bites.”

“Wild. Ight, I'm in. What can we do to help?”

“We need to get to the Salmonids. That's what Ciel was *trying* to do when she was taken. I wouldn't dare go there alone, I'd get lost in a heartbeat.” Harriet commented. “Since you're more familiar with the different grounds, maybe you can escort us there.”

“No problem, we can hitch a ride from Coco. SeaBass, head home and let everyone know where we will be, alright?”

SeaBess nodded and gave Bomber a quick kiss before leaving to tell everyone where the trio were headed.

-Bomber leads Elle & Harriet to the shore, and calls for Coco

-Coco takes the trio to a close Salmonid settlement where Mama Flipper Flopper was waiting

-Bomber explains to the higher Salmonids about the problem, and asks if there is anything that they can do to help/ anything that can even be done

-Mama explains that she and the other Highers can't do much of anything without causing more issues for the city

-Harriet says that since Coco is on good terms with the city, they could have Coco be a scare factor at least, and a last resort if Mason is too much

-Mama is okay with that idea, and thanks the group for their battle to get Ciel and the rest back to safety

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(other Mason interlude; he is hard at work on his stolen projects, and observing Zach specifically)

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(Intro based on the above blurb, this is a placeholder.)

Back at the shop, Elle was still hard at work making Harriet's armor. Harriet was still sitting near the workbench with Se'Kai, ambiently listening to Elle work. He had noticed that she pushed her sleeves up, showing some wraps around her forearms, but he didn't think much of it.

The doors to the shop opened, with Jeremy walking in and closing them behind him. He had a paper in his hand, and the expression on his face gave away the tone of whatever was on that paper.

“Elle. I have some bad news.”

Elle perked up at her name, sliding her headphones off her ears and around her neck. She walked over to Jeremy and took the paper that was in his hands.

*\*Alicia,*

*All three of them are with me. Your pathetic little 'family' is in my hands now, and if you want to see them again, meet me at CrabLeg Capital on October 30th at 11AM. Be prepared to fight, since I won't be letting them go so easily.*

*And don't bother getting help from your pathetic posse of friends either, I've learned from other's mistakes and won't go down so easily.*

*See you soon Alicia~  
Mason."*

Elle froze. *"I haven't used that name in over a decade... how the hell did he figure that out?"*

Harriet took the paper from her hand and read it himself, puzzled at the foreign name on the top. He looked back to Elle, who was still frozen in fear and shock, and reached out to her shoulder to try and provide at least some comfort, but before his hand even moved, Elle had dropped to the floor in tears.

Otto caught her fall, holding her close to his chest as they slowly sunk to the floor. Harriet knew this was something beyond his ability to help, so against his own desires he called for Soda. She's the only person Harriet could think of to help Elle.

"Soda."

*"Harriet? Where are you? Are you okay? We've bee-"*

*"Workshop. Now. Elle is crying."*

*"...On my way."*

Soda and Robert quickly darted into the shop, and were greeted by Otto still on the floor with Elle in his arms, Jeremy kneeling down next to them, and Harriet standing nearby.

"Harriet, what happened? We've been worried about all of you!"

"Just read this. I think this explains it." Harriet hissed, holding out the paper in his hand for Soda to take.

She and Robert read the note, then looked at Elle, who by this point had passed out from both mental and physical exhaustion. Otto had gotten up and was holding her like a small child being carried to bed.

"She has been 'bottling up' her feelings and emotions, and I believe it has finally caught up to her. I believe Mason's threat is what pushed her over the edge."

"Understandably so, he's got her family hostage and is outright insulting her friends! This is bad. Otto, take her over to the couch and lay her down. She clearly needs the rest."

Otto nodded and laid her down, and Soda knelt by her side to better figure out what to do. She noticed the stained wraps covering the majority of her forearms, and grew more worried. She tapped her jaw and contacted Megs.

"Megs, I need you or Isaiah at the palace, stat. Bring Marie. Elle relapsed."

*"Oh dear god, okay, be over in ten."*

"Thank you."

*"Relapsed?"* Harriet thought. *"Does that mean she..."*

A short while later, Megs and Marie arrived at the workshop, both looking slightly frazzled. Megs took Soda's place and started to examine the wraps, which upon closer inspection they were stained green on the outermost layer. Megs began to undo the wraps, muttering *"She's gonna hate me for this..."* as she did so. The green stains became more and more vivid, until the final layer, where the stains were as bright as her hair.

The final layer came off, revealing her forearm, and it showed several deep cuts along the surface.

"Oh my god... that's worse than I anticipated..."

Harriet winced at the sight of Elle's arms, having never seen injuries that extensive himself before. *"Good lord, that's horrible! And she did that to herself? No wonder Ruby said she couldn't have anything sharp..."*

The group remained near Elle, silently watching Megs tend to her wounds. Marie had picked up Elle's hand and looked under her nails, seeing the dried blood under them.

"It was her nails. Should we tell her to trim them?"

"After this stupid copycat is dealt with. She's gonna need all the help she can get with this fight. The morning of this 'meetup', I'm organizing a meeting with all the agents plus Harriet to come up with a plan. Soda, you and Robert keep an eye on things here that morning."

"Wait, why do I need to be there?" Harriet asked, unsure of why his presence was needed.

"Do you want Ciel back or not?"

"Fair enough."

Soda and Robert soon left, with Jeremy following, leaving Harriet, Otto, Marie and Megs with Elle. Harriet sat down on the floor, letting Se'Kai coil up around his arm again, but he remained close to Elle. Something about seeing those scratches and old scars up close for the first time didn't sit right with him, and he felt the inner urge to at least try and comfort Elle, whenever she woke up.

Megs was still in the same spot as before, now holding one of Elle's hands in her own. It pained her to see her childhood best friend in this much of a mess; Megs knew how long it took for Elle to work through all the shit she had been through and now all that progress was essentially reset with Mason's pathetic tantrum.

Marie sat by Megs' side, looking at all the scattered parts and weapons around the shop. She knew Mason was up to no good, and with his tendencies to not have his own ideas, it was something easily countered anyway. Her pondering led her to an idea about the hypnoshades that DJ Octavio used a few years back, since he did mention Mason asking about them not all that long ago.

"Hey Megs, I think there's something we can prepare for."

"And what would that be?"

"Tavi mentioned that Mason asked about those shades a few months ago, and if he's planning on using them in the same manner as Tavi, I have a counter. The Low-Tide Ink. We have Jenna shoot the glasses off like how I did to Callie a few times. Think that could work?"

"It could, if the wearer stays still long enough for her to shoot them. It's a hard shot to make, especially from a distance."

"If Elle can make the same shot blind, I think the Metro's best sniper can make the shot."

Mention of the Metro caught Harriet's attention; he had heard tales about the DeepSea Metro and its inhabitants, but didn't think anyone came from there, especially a person. His pondering look had caught Megs' attention, who had then questioned his look.

"What? Never heard of the Metro before?" She teased.

Harriet paused and looked over at Megs and Marie, who were now both looking in his direction.

"I have, I just never heard of people being *from* there. Is that where Jenna came from?"

"Kinda. She doesn't remember anything from before her time in the metro, just that she was in the Octarian army, and her first initial. When us agents went down there, we all got lost and had to escape back to the surface. That's where this scar came from."

Megs pointed to the green stain over her right eye, which extended to her hair and part of her iris. Getting a better look at it, Harriet noticed that it was glowing slightly, and it was pulsing, in rhythm with what he could assume was Megs' heartbeat.

"Not long after Jenna, Evan, and Quilly got out, the remainder of the sanitized goons captured Elle while she was on Recon for the area. Unlike me, she almost became sanitized, while I was only brainwashed. That's where her scar came from, and the teal fade in her hair; It used to fade to yellow. When she was rescued by Pearl and Rina, she had brought SeaBass back with her, since he was held prisoner there."

"I... Had no idea she had had that happen... and I thought what Ruby told me of her childhood was bad."

"I can tell you first hand how bad it was. I was there. She came to school one morning with a bloody rag over her eye when this happened. She... was only five... and it was by her own mothers hands..."

Megs looked over at Elle's resting face and sighed lightly, remembering how scared Elle was that day. Harriet looked at Elle's face, seeing the scar over her eye. It looked faded and old, and now learning it was fourteen years old really set in place for him just how messed up Elle was from her past.

"Five? Did she at least get it patched up correctly?"

“Well, not exactly, she was begging the nurse to not call her family in fear of being reprimanded. She ran away from home that night and started living with Isaiah and I, and that was the last time she saw her biological family.”

“When I learned all this, I knew I had to take her under my wings. Elle had so much potential so young, and giving her a space where she could do whatever she could imagine helped her so much.” Marie added.

Harriet looked back at Elle’s scars, now questioning how she hadn’t died yet.

“I know what you’re wondering, prince. How is she still alive, right?” Marie commented.

“Yeah, if she’s been through all that and is still standing, how did she do it?”

Megs paused and looked down at the floor.

“She almost didn’t. Twice. There’s... A reason we don’t visit Moray Towers anymore, and why all us agents wear these bracelets.”

“You mean that pink band on her wrist?”

“Mhm. Elle can’t take hers off without it sending a ping mine, Isaiah’s or Ruby’s. These things are also linked to the chips in our head so we can talk to each other.”

“Elle had a nasty habit of wandering off when she was upset, often with no end destination, just off for a walk in the middle of the night without telling anyone where she was going. Happened a few times to me and Steph when they were still doing agent work.” Marie added.

As the three spoke, Elle had slightly blinked awake, unsure of how long she was out or even where she was now laying down. Megs had noticed Elle waking up thanks to her grip in her hand wasn’t slack, Elle was holding it back.

“Megs...? What are you doing here....?”

“Oh, hey! You’re awake... Soda called me here because she saw the wraps.”

“I... I’m Sor-”

Megs cut off Elle’s words with a tight hug, not letting her continue.

“Don’t apologize. You don’t need to. I’m not mad, none of us are. We’re just worried...”

Elle looked off into the distance and teared up, tightening her grip on Megs and squeezing her with what little strength she had left. Marie had moved to be sitting on the couch with Elle, a hand on her back and rubbing it in a comforting way. Harriet looked at Elle with a worried expression, as it really started to hit him just how much this was affecting her.

Megs moved to Elle’s other side, with an arm around her, and holding one of her hands. Harriet put Se’Kai down, and sat in front of her on the floor.

“Elle, what can we do to help?” Megs spoke first.

Elle rubbed her eyes with her free hand, and cleared her throat.

“I might need some help finishing the armor... Mason’s note said the 30th, and that’s the day after tomorrow... I don’t think I can get them finished on my own...”

“That’s doable. How can we help?”

“I did the most difficult part and cut all the parts... I need help getting everything in place since it needs to be on the person who’s gonna wear it...”

“We can help. Just tell us what to do, you know I’m a fast learner.”

Elle nodded and stood up, taking Megs and Harriet over to where the pieces of the armor set were, and instructed Harriet to wear the armor so Elle could fit it to him. He stood there, doing as he was told and watched Elle carry on with her work. Her silence still worried him, and he could tell it worried the other two as well, with the looks the three shared. Marie was busy texting Isaiah and Callie, who were equally as worried about Elle, trying to think of a solution to face Mason.

As she was holding part of the chestplate in place, Megs thought of something to try and help.

“Hey Elle, if you think the others would be of help in a fight like this, Me and Isa can host another meeting the morning of this “meetup” to try and formulate a plan. At least, so you and Harriet won’t have to do this alone.”

Elle took the screwdriver she was holding out from between her teeth, and poked it in her hair. She looked to Megs with a somewhat lost expression, as if her will to fight was slowly dwindling.

"I know they would be willing to help, just figuring out *how* they could help. I don't even know what Mason is planning himself, all Kyle told me was he was making some kinda mech suit. Which is why I made the armor to counter it. Kyle hasn't been able to relay anymore information to me, thanks to Fossil having a very close eye on him. All I have are these notes on all my friends, which is basically a bunch of questions that would earn Fossil a throat punch, and 10 pages saying he hates me."

"Then we need to be prepared for anything. Aerial, ground, weapons, hand to hand, anything. Jenna's gotten really good with that hoverboard you made her, and Steph is a stealth flier, and you have wings, aerial is covered."

Marie chimed in, "I know some hand to hand, it was something Gramps had taught me and Cal when we were little. We relayed that to all of you when we recruited you."

"Heh, I know how to fight, mom. All these scars aren't from nothing."

Elle opened and closed her fist, looking at all the small scars littering her left palm and knuckles. Harriet glanced over with a look of concern, having never noticed the scars there, and also choosing to ignore the fact that Elle casually calls a celebrity 'mom'.

"I'm almost scared to ask, but how did all those... get there?"

"Oh, I was kidnapped by some sanitized goons and kept in a test tube for a day or two and when I woke up I punched the glass of mine and SeaBass' tubes and broke out, then almost died on the metro ride back up. That's where this scar up here is from, had to get the sanitized ink out."

"...I knew I shouldn't have asked."

Elle, Harriet and Marie continued to work, while Megs started contacting all the agents to be prepared for a fight. She also called Soda and Robert back into the room, to explain her plan, and so they could check in Harriet. Harriet kept quiet, and his eyes remained thin slits the whole time they were working. According to Elle, they had been like that ever since Ciel had been taken, which by this point, she had been gone for at least a week.

Megs agreed to stay the night with Elle and Harriet, to keep an eye on them and offer her assistance whenever needed. Elle kicked off her boots and curled up on the couch, grabbing her pillow and holding it to her chest. They waved goodbye to Marie, letting her return to the Alterna camp to start preparing everything for this fight.

*"Soon this will all be over and I'll have my family back"* Elle thought, just wishing that this never happened in the first place. She just wanted her family back, and was willing to do whatever it took to get them back. Soon her eyes felt too heavy to keep open, and Elle drifted into an uneasy sleep, but it was better than not sleeping at all.

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"Tomorrow's the day, Kyle. Is everything ready?"

"To my knowledge, yessir."

"Good, good. I will make a last check at the Capital to make sure everything is in order. You are to stay here and not let them out. Understood?"

"...Yessir."

"Good. I will return tonight."

Mason turned to the door, giving one last malicious smile to his prisoners as he left, slamming and locking the door behind him. Kyle looked out the window to watch him leave, making sure he was completely out of sight before speaking to the others.

"Alright, he's gone for the day. Finally I can give you real food, not this gluten free crap."

Ruby, Zach and Ciel perked up at the mention of food, not having had a solid meal in at least a few days. Kyle switched off the bright fluorescent lights overhead in favor of a small warm light in the corner, giving Ruby the relief of being able to use her eyes for a while. Kyle grabbed some fast-food bags, and some small drinks, and started giving them to the three, Ciel taking the longest due to the increased defense on her cell. She had

already broken herself out 4 times, and Mason was getting irritated by it, putting more and more locks and walls every time.

"I know it isn't much but-"

"Are you kidding? Cold fast food is better than nothing. How does he even eat that gluten free crap? It barely passes for food." Ruby cut Kyle off before he could finish, grateful for the little he managed to secure.

Kyle sat down on the floor in front of the two cells, trying to conjure ways to make the inevitable fight as easy for Elle and the others as possible. He knew he couldn't do much without Mason noticing, with his insane attention to detail. He would know if Kyle messed with whatever he was working on, or if the three he had hostage were let out for some fresh air, or even if the door to their cells were opened.

"Hey, Kyle. We might have a loophole in Fossil's plans."

Kyle perked up at Ruby's voice; startled by her voice.

"What do you mean?"

"Before I even met Elle, I was in the Army. When I heard the Inkantation, it set me free. Those glasses he's been using don't... affect me anymore. I've just been pretending they work, but all these stupid shades do is give me a headache. I just have to keep up the act and purposely miss all my shots. Think he'd notice?"

Kyle paused and thought. He completely forgot about the Calamari Inkantation, which almost every octoling on the surface has heard. There was something so otherworldly about that melody that it completely broke through DJ Octaivo's brainwashing shades, and made you feel real emotions for the first time. He remembered the first time he heard it, and it made him feel things even he couldn't explain.

"I don't think he would. If you've been acting all this time it should work. I mean, I don't see why it wouldn't."

"Perfect, I'll keep up the facade and only go for a large group."

"Are... you sure that's gonna work, mama...? I know we tease him for being an idiot, but he isn't stupid, He might see through it..."

Ruby looked over to Zach, who now appeared worried.

"Zach, if I've been faking this whole time and not even Kyle noticed, I doubt Mason would. I'll be okay."

Kyle looked over to Zach, who hadn't even looked up from his drink, and became more worried. Ever since being thrown into Mason's lab, Zach had been tired. His eyes were dull, and his hair had stopped responding to stimuli, which was a clear indicator something was wrong.

"If you say so... I just don't want you getting hurt... Mom is worried sick about you, and she's stressed out of her mind, she hasn't eaten or slept since you got kidnapped. I think... she relapsed..."

Ruby's eyes widened slightly, immediately fearing the worst.

"Are you sure?"

"I think she was trying to hide it from me... but... she was wearing a sweater and had some bandages on her arms. I want to say Harriet saw it too, but neither of us didn't want to bring it up..."

Ruby looked off at the wall, now more worried than ever about Elle.

"Oh god... she probably thinks this is all her fault, us being here... And she's tearing herself up over it..."

Kyle looked down at his phone, and saw a new notification.

From Elle.

Hey, it's Megs. Elle is currently putting some finishing add ons to her and the prince's gear, and Harriet is getting everything ready. I'm here after Soda called Marie and I to the palace after Elle passed out from exhaustion, after reading the ransom note. Otto is giving the other Royal staff protocol for tomorrow, since we don't know the outcome (planning for the worst)

Elle had a really bad breakdown after bottling her emotions up, and Harriet had to call Soda in to help. Soda called me when she saw Elle's relapse. Marie and Isaiah are getting the rest of our squad ready, and I'm keeping Elle and Harriet company here in the workshop.

If you can get this message to them, please tell Ruby, Zach and Ciel that they have been working to do everything they can to get you home, and they love them.

Thank you

Accompanied by the text was a picture, presumably taken when Megs was first called over. It was of Elle asleep on the couch, with Marie and Harriet talking while Megs was looking over Elle.

"Guys, Megs just texted me about Elle. She's not doing too great, but Megs, Otto, and Harriet have been with her."

Kyle showed the text to the others the text and accompanying picture, and suggested taking a picture to send Megs of the four in the lab. After Kyle sent the picture, Ruby was still shaken, mostly at news of her wife's relapse.

"She was doing so well, and now this whole thing has got her so worked up, I haven't seen her this bad since her sanitation..."

Ruby pulled her blindfold back over her eyes and leaned against the wall. Zach finished his drink and leaned up against Ruby, being way too tired to give thought about anything else. The lack of caffeine had definitely got to him.

Kyle saw Mason coming back through the fence, so he quickly gathered the evidence of the fast food and threw it away, and turned the lights back on. Mason swung open the door and threw his keys at Kyle, and sat at his desk.

"So, everything is in order, and everything is working as it should."

"For once." Ciel's voice commented.

"Silence, Salmonid! I didn't ask you! *Ahem*. However, I must continue my work on these fancy little glasses, generously given to me by DJ Octavio--"

"You stole them."

"QUIET, CIEL!"

Mason slammed his hand on the top of the desk, making Kyle jump.

"I don't need your *snarky* comments, Princess. Once I manage to get these on your face you'll be as silent as a mouse. And that goes for all three of you. You'll be my perfect little weapons against this *annoying* midget you call a wife and mom. Seriously! What has she done to make her *soooooo* significant? All she's done is bested my and my technology, made fun of me, and stole something I MADE! I mean *really*? Honestly she--"

"Correction, Mason. She improved your tech, called you out on your wrongdoings, and is generally just *better than you*. *You're* the one who's stolen her tech, and fucked it up mind you, costing HUNDREDS of lives, you're the one who *abandoned* Rebel when he quote 'came out wrong', and *you're* the one who was basically letting Otto actively decompose! You're NOTHING compared to her, so stop pretending you are! We were only trying to help, but you're Mr. Goody-Two-Shoes and had you head so far up your damn ass to realize she was only trying to help you. God, and you fuckin' wonder why no one likes you? You're an asshole!"

All eyes turned to the voice, it being Zach's. He held onto the bars of his cell, and looked like he had the strength to bend them out of pure anger. The lack of caffeine had *definitely* gotten to him.

Mason stood up and walked over to the cell, face stern and his blank eyes holding an equal amount of anger as Zach. Zach held his ground, placing himself between Mason and Ruby, ready to defend Ruby.

"You want to repeat that, Pest?"

"Yeah, I do. You're a *good for nothing squid who doesn't have a single original idea of his own*."

When Mason heard what Zach had so willingly repeated, he stared at Zach with a silent rage. Without so much as a warning, he tased him. Zach yelled out in pain before he had dropped down on one knee in front of Ruby, holding his arm where he had been tased. Mason scoffed and had threatened to tase him again if he acted out of line. Zach grimaced in pain.

"You'll pay for this, you white haired hag..."

"QUIET! ENOUGH OF ALL OF YOU!"

Mason went back to his desk, silently working on the shades.

Zach collapsed on the floor next to Ruby, tears welling his eyes. Ruby began taking the taser barbs out of his arm and getting it patched up to the best of her ability. Kyle remained by the front door, not wanting to anger Mason any more than he already was. The lab remained in a tense silence for the remainder of the evening, until Mason left for his quarters for the night. The three were already resting, leaving Kyle to his own thoughts.

*"I have to do something. I'm not going to sit idly by and help him. If Aaron has taught me anything, it's to never back down. Don't worry Elle. I'll make sure he pays for this."*

~~~

The mid-morning sun shone down on the snow of Alterna, making it a bit blinding, but overall giving a touch of warmth to the otherwise freezing campout. The small group of agents gathered around the small crate that Captain Megs sat on, awaiting the arrival of the others. Isaiah was helping gather all the upgraded weapons Elle and Harriet brought, and sorting them into who would use what weapon, While Elle was helping Harriet into his gear. Megs was looking over the layout of CrabLeg Capital, trying to find as many back routes and hidden areas as she could, which was a challenge as most stages these days did not have a single flank route.

"Why are the stages so linear? No wonder turf is so mundane these days."

"Tell me about it. It's so easy to get splatted as a backliner. It's annoying." Jenna added on.

As the two looked over the stage map, Isaiah was still sorting all the modded weapons and handing them out to their respective users; they were modified to cater to the users strengths. Isaiah looked at the splatana made for Harriet, and looked puzzled by the way it was modified. He turned to Elle.

"Where did you get the stuff for this mod? This looks highly illegal."

"I have my connections." She responded, hardly phased by the question. She continued making final adjustments to the armor, and handed Harriet the muzzle she designed. The prince made a face.

"Really? You want me muzzled?"

"It's for our own sake, Quiver. You're venomous. You accidentally bite Ciel? In her current state she'd die."

Harriet rolled his eyes and held it in place, letting Elle secure it. After setting it in place, they regrouped with the rest of the agents, who had finally made their way to Alterna. Megs took her place on her crate, handing the maps she was looking over to Jenna, and Elle stood in her usual place on Megs' left side and Harriet beside her. Megs began.

"Thank you for getting here quickly. Today is the date that Mason has set. We are to follow Lieutenant Elle and Prince Harriet's lead today, and to give it our all. Bomber is already at the Capital, with Coco, scouting the area and staying on standby. Lieutenant, is there anything to add?"

Elle lifted herself off the ground and looked out at the collection of agents in front of her.

"Thanks, Cap't. Thank you all for being here today, I appreciate the help. If at all possible, please try not to cause too much damage to my family. They are in a very malnourished state right now, any harm could be lethal. Ciel especially."

"Try to focus everything onto Mason, he is your primary target. All we know is that he has a mech of some sort, so all of your weapons have some mods to counter it better." Harriet added.

~~~

(short Mason interlude to show him forcing the shades on everyone, and handing them weapons. Mason arrives at CrabLeg, and sets up the fog machine. Little does he know, he was followed by Baxter and Bomber)

~~~

Scaling the tower to meet Mason, the fog became thicker and thicker, causing the visibility to dwindle as they reached the top. Elle and Harriet were leading the group, hand in hand trying to keep their stress levels down. They knew this was not going to be pretty, but they were ready to fight for their loved ones.

"You guys keep climbing, I'm taking myself and Quiver to the top to try and get an aerial view. Remember to keep your mics on and communication clear. I know he's up there waiting for me, but I'm not sure if he knows how much backup we brought."

Elle took Harriet by the wrists and pulled him up into the air with her, taking him over the top of the tower, seeing the foggy rooftop.

"Can you see them down there, Quiver? Or is the fog too thick?"

"I can make out some glowing lights, and some kinda robotic suit? That must be Fossil. Be careful Birdie, he might have eyes in the sky."

“This is Mason we're talking about, that man can't pilot a drone to save his life, let alone in this dense fog.”  
“That's true. What an idiot...”

Elle lowered herself and Harriet to the ground, and landed next to him. “*This is it*” she thought, her anxiety spiking the instant her feet touched the ground. She fluttered her wings in an attempt to clear some of the fog, trying to better what little vision she had left. Harriet squinted and saw a large figure emerging from the fog, along with three pairs of glowing eyes.

“I don't like the looks of this. Those glowing eyes seem familiar...”

“Glowing eyes? Oh no... He *did* do it. Those are HypnoShades, they brainwash the users and make them do the bidding of whoever programmed them.. Tavi used them a few years back.”

Elle reached for Harriet's hand for comfort, now that she fully realized what she was up against. The large figure continued to make its way towards the pair, and towards the rest of the group who had just arrived. The thudding of the figure was also becoming louder, shaking the rooftop with every step.

“Well, well, very good observations, Stanlin! Those *are* HypnoShades on your beloved little family! Glad to see you've finally joined us.~”

Mason's voice echoed through the fog, and his silhouette loomed over the pair standing in front of him. He leaned down to continue his speech, getting right up in their faces

“Hope you and your pathetic posse of friends are ready to fight, Alicia.~ I don't plan on letting them out of my control so easily.~”

Harriet looked up at him. “Stand down, Mason! You have done enough! Just let them go, and we can be CIVIL about this!” he exclaimed.

“Really? Civil? This is Mason we're talking to.” Elle commented.

Harriet gave Elle a look; annoyed by her comment. But out of his periphery, he saw the same sets of glowing eyes getting closer. He reached for his Splatana, and drew it at the ready. Looking back at Mason's figure, he grabbed Elle's arm and pulled her out of the way of a metal claw.

It cracked the concrete as it crashed down.

Elle looked up and saw the mech suit now towering over her and Harriet.

She also saw the glowing eyes getting closer, now realizing who they belonged to. She locked up, her eyes filled with fear.

“Ruby...?”

“Aww, the small but brazen Alicia frozen in fear?~ How cute. You're gonna get defeated by your own family, as dysfunctional as it is!~”

Mason pointed his hand out as a command, and right on que the three figures jumped out of the shadows to the pair. Elle glanced behind herself and saw the rest of the group reaching the top, and had to think fast.

“Everyone! Now!” she shouted.

Ruby approached them first, her shots from her dualies seeming calculated and precise. Ciel charged directly to Harriet, their splatanas clashing as they met. Harriet tried to lure Ciel away from the rest, and swatted at her face to get her muzzle off. Zach charged at Elle, barring his roller and swung. Elle narrowly missed, and countered with her brush.

Mason looked almost satisfied that his distraction was working, keeping Elle and her group away from himself. His new minions seemingly doing exactly as he wanted. Ciel keeping the prince distracted, Zach luring Elle away from the group, and Ruby keeping the other agents distracted.

Ruby however, wasn't under his ruse, and had a plan. She had been slowly leading the group of agents around the perimeter of the building, to Kyle's hiding spot.

- Ruby goes for the larger group, Zach to Elle and Ciel to Harriet. This results in several smaller fights, with Elle struggling to keep up a fight in fear of hurting Zach.
- Ruby is missing her shots on purpose, also allowing Kyle to sneak to the hero's side
- Harriet is swatting at Ciel's face, to try and knock the shades off her face, but is only causing scratches to be made on her face.

- Elle ends up striking Zach with the handle of her brush, breaking Zach's arm. Elle hears the bone snap, but Zach is unphased, and this when they figure out the shades block pain receptors.
- everyone is too focused on the Trio to notice that Rebel is trying to take things into his own hands with Mason
  - Unsure of how he does it, but Mason "kills" Rebel, with Rebel landing on his back unresponsive.

Rebel skids across the ground towards the larger group, landing on his back. Right in front of Lucius. He froze. Memories of his past came flooding back, memories he would have rather forgotten about. All the fear and trauma of his childhood returned to him, causing him to fall to his knees. He couldn't lose him. He had to do something.

Mason had turned away to deal with Elle once more, leaving the larger group in a tense silence. The remainder of Red Fang quickly placed themselves between the chaos and Rebel, who still remained unresponsive.

Sail broke the silence.

"Harper, take him to your lab and keep him stable. We'll hold off this fossil for as long as we can. Get Rebel. To safety."

Lucius nodded and scooped up Rebel, and used his tail to rip open a portal directly into the depths of an underground lab, swiftly leaving without another word. The remaining trio turned back to the fight, Marisa catching a glimpse of a pair of people zipping by overhead.

"Things are 'bout to get a bit easier; Backup is here!" she mentioned to the others.

The three looked up to see Steph and Jenna flying in to help, both with chargers in hand. They swooped in, headed to the fight and took aim, aiming for the glasses on the trio's faces. The pair drew their chargers at the ready, and took aim.

*BANG*

Ciel made a grunt, and stopped mid air as her special faded almost instantly. Harriet jumped to catch her, doing so just before she hit the ground. He cradled her tightly with one arm, using his other to summon Se'Kai for protection. Se'Kai coiled himself up to act as a shield for the prince and princess, taking them out of harm's way.

*BANG*

*Thunk*

Zach's roller hit the floor, and he soon followed. He landed with another unsavory *snap*. He shrieked out in pain, leading to the Squid Sisters' attention to drift to him and Elle. Ruby also heard it, and took it as her queue to take her own glasses off and rush to his side. The three dashed to Elle's side and took Zach out of the line of fire, now clearly seeing the bruising around his arm.

Seeing now that he was without an army, Jenna and Steph changed their objective to distracting Mason. They charged at him, Steph headfirst towards him, and Jenna on her hoverboard still with her charger in hand. Jenna moved to his left, trying to get him to swing in her direction and away from Elle and the others, and Steph from the other side to disorient him.

Breaking his attention away from Elle as soon as he saw the two making their way towards him, he looked left and right trying to think of a course of action.

"Oh for the love of- now I have to deal with this psycho hybrid and a sniper?"

Mason was having a difficult time trying to focus on both at the same time so he focused more on defense and counterattacks.

Being the first within range of the professor, Steph spun herself around and swung down with a heavy roundhouse kick, targeting his neck to try to immobilize him quickly. Mason reacted quickly and used one of his metal tentacles to block Steph's kick towards his neck, but little did he know, Jenna was a short distance away from him taking aim to help Steph from afar. Mason used that same tentacle blocking Steph's kick to push her back before he pulled out his clash blaster with his normal arms to shoot at Jenna. Jenna jumped out of the way and continued shooting at Mason, each shot aiming towards his legs. Mason jumped over the attempted

shots at his legs, but he was quickly caught by his ankle from Steph and he got slammed on the ground on his stomach.

“You two are as annoying as flies, you know that?!”

“Only as annoying as you are, professor!” Jenna replied with a laugh.

Mason grimaced and regained his footing, and jumped up to meet the pair eye to eye.

-Mason swats at them both, Jenna dodging but Steph getting hit. He miscalculated.

-Steph emits electrical shock when she's hit, temporarily freezing the mech; Jenna uses the small window of frozen mech to shoot Mason out of the air.

- Killer and Steph get split and hit the ground, Killer standing and ready to fight

-Everyone is so focused on Steph and getting her out of harm's way that no one noticed Mason taking Elle and ripping off her ink tank and holding her by her wrist

-Callie is the first to notice that Elle isn't with the group.

-- Mason says; “oh, Looking for someone? She's right here~” while one of the tentacles has a hold of her by the wrist.

- Mason was standing at the edge of the stage, holding Elle over the edge, leaving the group in shock.

Killer sneaks away and flies under the stage to catch Elle if she falls.

- This is where Baxter and Bomber make their appearance, unknown to Mason.

- “remember Moray Towers, Alicia? Remember those suicide attempts? Here, let me help you~” or something like that

- Baxter flies up himself to shoot the arm holding Elle, freeing her and Killer catching her and bringing her to Ruby and Zach.

Killer brought Elle back to the ground, near the larger group. Callie handed Elle her ink tank and she clipped it back on. Elle turned to face Mason, who was now angrily staring her down as he started to move closer to her.

“You! You know what you are? PATHETIC! You're pathetic and weak! You're NOTHING compared to ME!”

“Me?! Weak?!” Elle scoffed; her hair starting to fizz.

“I wasn't done! You're nothing but a lowly, good for nothing, mechanic, who LOVES to take MY creations, make them better than me, and call them your own!”

“Really? So says the COPYCAT! Just about everything you've ever made has been stolen off me or others! You can't have an original thought to save your own skin!”

Mason leaned in closer to Elle, getting just feet from her.

“You know what? You should have offed yourself all those years ago, it would have saved everyone the headache of dealing with you now! You don't and won't amount to ANYTHING in your PATHETIC life, Alicia!”

Elle paused.

“*Really?* You'd stoop so low as to tell me to kill myself? Listen here Mason. I'll show you 'weak'. I'll show you 'pathetic'. Because that's what you will be; ONCE I'M DONE WITH YOU!”

“*COME AT ME THEN, YOU WORM!*”

Elle's hair flashed, and she did just as Mason commanded.

She charged at him, leading with her fist, letting the adrenaline of her special take over.

The rest of the group looked on in shock; they had never seen Elle get mad enough to use her natural special. It was like a Splashdown on steroids. The first splash knocked Mason over, the second up several dozen meters in the air, and the third down into the ground as hard as she could, Mason creating a crater where he landed. Elle looked down at Mason from above, and gave a glare.

It was clear to everyone that Elle was about to rain Hell on the professor.

Mason regained his footing and got himself in the air again, being propped up by his mech. He saw Elle swiftly approaching him, and tried to act fast, to little avail. Elle came at him swinging, aiming for his face

- Her special is protecting her from most of the damage Mason can return, since by now the two had started a huge fist fight, sparks flying as the two mechanical suits clashed
- Elle is just seeing red. She's trying to disable Mason and disable his suit, so she can insult him right back. she isn't aware that her hands have started bleeding from pounding against metal with little protection.
- she ends up breaking both of his wrists, and probably knocks a few teeth loose. Elle def almost breaks her hand
- She finally gets him on the ground and sends a final splash to send him towards the group. When she lands, Elle is panting, ready to deal a killing blow

The dust cleared. Elle lowered herself to the ground, panting and holding her now bloody knuckles. She began walking towards Mason, not quite finished with him yet. Mason struggled to regain his balance, with two broken wrists he couldn't regain his footing in the mech quickly enough before Elle could get to him, leaving him practically defenseless.

Mason just barely got his feet off the ground before stopping suddenly in the air. He struggled briefly, barely moving within his new restraints, and looked around for an explanation.

"You really need some better security on your creations, Old Man."

Elle and Mason turned to the new voice.

It was Talon

"Like really? All it took was a password guess. A little hint, 'password' is *not* a secure password. Not like your Boomer ass could grasp that concept. Let's be real, we all call you old 'cause you look the part! The gray hair is *not* doing you any favors, like you know hair dye exists, right?"

Talon continued his speech, degrading Mason the same way he had done to Elle, giving Elle the opportunity to sneak behind Mason, completely unnoticed. One by one, Elle began taking out bolts and screws in Mason's mech, planning to disassemble it to keep Mason grounded.

"You really thought you could win this, didn't you? Like honestly! You tried to go up against the greatest mechanic in the splatlands with tech from 10 years ago? No wonder you lost!" Talon continued, moving himself closer to Mason.

Elle took out the remainder of the fasteners, and leaned in closer to Mason.

"You really need to work on your craftsmanship, Fossil."

As she spoke, Elle pulled out the last bolt, causing the entire mechanism to comically collapse beneath Mason. He let out a pained groan as he hit the pile of debris, landing flat on his back. Elle and Talon looked down at him, their faces expressionless. Killer walked over and picked up Mason by the back of his shirt, holding him up like a spoiled child by their mom. He tried to kick and squirm out of her grip, but Killer's superhuman strength was too much for his old self to fight.

"What ever shall we do with this... whiny child? Death feels too generous."

Mason looked at Elle, and felt a lump in his throat.

"How about... a taste of his own medicine. Take him to Iris. She'll be happy to have another... toy. For now, let's keep him in the palace to give Iris some time to prepare."

Mason's ears drooped the second Iris' name was mentioned. She was well known to be a master of genetic experimentation, and she could be relentless with her tests. She had done so many experiments on herself that she hardly left her swim form, and only a very select few knows what she truly looks like, but according to witnesses, it's close to the horrors from folklore.

Mason looked back at Elle, her vacant eyes holding the same rage as their first argument, and felt a sense of remorse for the first time in this entire situation.

Elle's eyes lingered on Mason for a few seconds, before she turned to face the group again. They were all focused on assessing everyone's condition and helping them back to the palace. Elle walked over to the group and stood in front of her wife, who was putting a splint on Zach's broken arm.

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(Aftermath of everyone in the infirmary, Elle refusing treatment from anyone but Ruby, and then the final close of Elle, Ruby and Zach, sleeping together)

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(small epilogue of Mason in Iris' lab, seeing Thaddeus there too)



# Notes

Fight portion:

- Elle flies in carrying Harriet, dropping him on the ground before landing herself, with the rest of the agents and red fang walking behind them
- “Well well, Alicia Stanlin, you decided to show up. Hope you and your pathetic posse are ready to fight~”
- Mason does a reveal of the suit, making two of the tentacles crash right next to Harriet and Elle. Harriet grabs Elle’s arm and pulls her closer to himself, to help protect her.
- Mason continues his short speech, saying something about “I said if you ever want to see them, not save them”, then revealing the trio.
- Elle freezes for a second, shocked to see her family brainwashed
- “aw, the small but brazen Alicia frozen in fear? How cute. You’re gonna get defeated by your own family, as dysfunctional as it is!”

Phase one, Hypnoshades;

- Ruby goes for the larger group, Zach to Elle and Ciel to Harriet. This results in several smaller fights, With Elle struggling to keep up a fight in fear of hurting Zach.
- Ruby is missing her shots on purpose, also allowing Kyle to sneak to the hero’s side
- Harriet is swatting at Ciel’s face, to try and knock the shades off her face, but is only causing scratches to be made on her face.
- Elle ends up striking Zach with the handle of her brush, breaking Zach’s arm. Elle hears the bone snap, but Zach is unphased, and this when they figure out the shades block pain receptors.
- everyone is too focused on the Trio to notice that Rebel is trying to take things into his own hands with Mason

Phase two, low tide ink and rebel getting taken out;

- Unsure of how he does it, but Mason “kills” Rebel, with Rebel landing on his back unresponsive.
- Queue Hop staring daggers, Sail and Isaac holding him back telling him to focus on Rebel.
- Hop takes Rebel and portals away, leaving the remaining group back to the fight.
- Mason commands the Trio to attack, but when they don’t, that’s when he sees Jenna and Steph shooting the shades off their heads; Jenna on her hoverboard, Steph flying. They come in from opposite sides and try to keep Mason away from elle and the downed others
- The agents scramble to bring the three out of harm’s way, Harriet taking Ciel and Se’Kai coiling around them. The squid sisters are with Zach and Ruby.
- Mason makes a comment about Steph and Jenna being dicks, and moves to swat them out of the air

Phase three, ✨ trauma ✨;

- Jenna dodges, Steph isn’t fast enough to avoid it, and sends out an electrical shock upon being struck.
- She lands on the ground, now showing two people, Steph and Killer.
- Killer makes a comment on how Mason is like beef jerky and not even worth her time, and quietly spots Baxter and Bomber
- Marie notices that everyone is accounted for except Elle, and Callie sees her Inktank on the floor near them.
- Mason says; “oh, Looking for someone? She’s right here~” while one of the tentacles has a hold of her by the wrist.
- Mason was standing at the edge of the stage, holding Elle over the edge, leaving the group in shock. Killer sneaks away and flies under the stage to catch Elle if she falls. (she cant use her wings without the ink tank, so she cant fly away)
- This is where Baxter and Bomber make their appearance, unknown to Mason.
- “remember Moray Towers, Alicia? Remember those suicide attempts? Here, let me help you~” or *something like that*

- Baxter flies up himself to shoot the arm holding Elle, freeing her and Killer catching her and bringing her to Ruby and Zach.

Ludicrous phase;

- Elle sits for a few seconds to catch her breath, and that's when Mason began degrading her, and goes way too far

- "You're Pathetic and weak! You're NOTHING compared to ME! You're nothing but a lowly, good for nothing, mechanic, who LOVES to take MY creations, make them better than me, and call them your own! You should have offed yourself all those years ago, it would have saved everyone the headache of dealing with you now!"

- during this, everyone is disgusted by Mason's words, and Elle's special had begun to charge on its own, unknown to Mason

- "Really? You'd stoop so low as to tell me to kill myself? Listen here Mason. I'll show you 'weak'. I'll show you 'pathetic'. Because that's what you will be once I'm done with you."

- Elle dashes at him, something like a horizontal SplashDown, knocking Mason over.

- Elle's special is basically a Triple SplashDown on steroids. Instead of three splashes all at once, its three consecutive ones, more like the inner agent 3 fight.

- She knocks him down with the first, up in the air with the second, and back into the ground with the third.

- Her special is protecting her from most of the damage Mason can return, since by now the two had started a huge fist fight, sparks flying as the two mechanical suits clashed

- Elle is just seeing red. She's trying to disable Mason and disable his suit, so she can insult him right back. she isn't aware that her hands have started bleeding from pounding against metal with little protection.

-she ends up breaking both of his wrists, and probably knocks a few teeth loose. Elle def almost breaks her hand

-She finally gets him on the ground and sends a final splash to send him towards the group. When she lands, Elle is panting, ready to deal a killing blow

After the Ludicrous phase;

-Mason hits the ground and skids towards the group who's now shocked about the brawl that just occurred. He tries to get up, and get himself back in the air before Talon disables his suit, which locks him in place.

-Talon emerges from the group with his hacker sleeve thingie thats on that hacker jacket.

- "dude. You really need to make your shit more secure."

- Talon comes up to Mason, letting Elle come up with a new plan, and she slips out of Mason's sight

- Talon starts going off on him, throwing insults left and right; some quotes;

"Dude, the gray hair is so not a look, hair dye exists." , "there's a reason we call you a fossil, the white hair does *not* help." , "can you get some original ideas? You claim to be an inventor but you haven't had an original idea in a decade. This whole thing *gesturing to the suit* was so much better from Doc Ock." (Other examples to be added)

- while being insulted, Elle has managed to totally dismantle the suit, with one more bolt to make it comically collapse beneath Mason.

- "You really need to work on your craftsmanship, old man."

- The suit crumbles, leaving Mason on the pile of rubble groaning in pain. Killer picks up Mason by the collar of his shirt and asks what to do with him.

- "How about we give him a taste of his own medicine. Iris." Elle says

Directly after fight;

- Elle ends up walking back over to Zach and Ruby, with Ruby trying to put a rudimentary splint on Zach's now broken left forearm. Both are crying, from both pain, and relief from Mason.

- Elle drops to her knees in front of both of them, wanting nothing more than her family. Ruby pulls Elle to herself and Zach, with them both hugging her protectively.

- Harriet tells everyone to help those who need it get to the infirmary, so their wounds can be tended to
- Ruby and Zach are the only ones Elle lets near her, lightly foreshadowing her refusal of help later.

Aftermath - infirmary; might be a separate doc

- Ruby is in one bed, on her back with a nurse tending to the large bruises on her abdomen, while Zach is in one next to her, with a different nurse adjusting the cast on his arm, and some cuts on his cheek. Elle is curled up on the end of ruby's bed, passed out from mostly exhaustion at this point. Ciel is in a bed across the room, passed out with Harriet asleep on the bed with his head down

- The nurses finish and leave the group alone and Zach notices that everyone but her has been treated at this point. He asked ruby about it, and ruby tells him that with what mason did, specifically to her, it reset her mental state to where it was when her and Elle first met, where she was super self-conscious, and extremely codependent.

- Ruby says that Elle would probably only want herself [ruby], Zach, and maybe Ciel and Harriet.

- They all stay in the infirmary for about a week or so, Elle sleeping by ruby's side, and ruby using her hand to hold elle. Zach is mostly moaning about the lack of caffeine, and Ciel is just tired.

- Megs and Isaiah stop for a visit, and are disheartened by Elle's condition, not having seen her this bad since they were kids. That's kinda when Zach gets told the same story about Elle that Harriet got

Aftermath- bedroom;

-After they are all permitted to leave the infirmary, they all go to Elle and Ruby's room, and Ruby immediately starts taking care of Elle. Zach is doing what he can to help, which is mostly being a hand to hold while Ruby cleans out wounds.

-Harriet and Ciel make sure to check on Elle (which surprisingly is Harriet's idea) after they are well enough to be up and about.

-wrap up story with Elle finally falling asleep and sleeping soundly

To initiate Zach's plan to lure the mystery figure in close enough to take him out, instead of going straight to Ruby's bed to be by Ruby's side, he shifted his attention to the dresser to his right and he walked over to it. He opened the dresser and readjusted himself in a position enough to not only make his act look believable but to also give him the right position to see directly behind him if the figure so happens to try and sneak up on him.

After observing Zach's oblivious search through the dresser, the figure slowly snuck out from around Ruby's bed and quietly tiptoed up to Zach, slowly reaching towards him to grab him by the mouth and take him out in silence. Zach looked up at the mirror above him, seeing the figure that was once behind the bed now sneaking up to him. As the figure got closer, Zach began to think up a way to stop the figure before it could get ahold of him and attack it with enough force to stun it.

Since Mason and Zach are physically about the same size, it's a struggle for one to overpower the other, but Mason gets an upper hand and knocks out Zach.

him hitting the floor is what makes ruby snap awake, and mason acts swiftly to take her away. She sends an SOS through her chip to alert the others before Mason jams the chip rendering it useless.

Zach would wake up to Elle hovering over him making sure he's okay, and he can hear the panic in her voice because Ruby is gone. Zach tells Elle exactly what happened, and Elle doesn't take it very well, saying something like "Oh he's playing dirty? Fine. I won't be holding back anymore."

Queue Elle neglecting herself lol

when Mason hears what Zach so willingly repeats, he stares him down, and without warning tazed him. zach yells out in pain, dropping to one knee holding his arm where he got tazed, still in front of ruby.

mason scoffs and threatens to do it again if zach acts out again.

Ruby would slide the shades down her nose just enough to see her actual eyes and wink at Elle, and Elle, in a moment of vision clarity from adrenaline, sees it and nods. She knows Ruby is okay

Zach directs charges at Elle, trying to use the roller he has to counter a swing from her brush. The two fight like a sword fight but with brush/roller class.

Ruby not being brainwashed would greatly help the larger group better counter mason, since she knows his fighting style (bad)

Rebel skids across the ground, landing on his back. Right in front of Hop.

Hop froze. Memories of his past came flooding back, memories he would have rather forgotten about. All the fear and trauma of his childhood returned to him, causing him to fall to his knees. He couldn't lose him. He had to do something.

Mason had turned away to deal with Elle once more, leaving the larger group in a tense silence. The remainder of Red Fang quickly placed themselves between the chaos and Rebel, who still remained unresponsive.

Sail broke the silence.

"Harper, take him to your mother's lab and keep him stable. We'll hold off this fossil for as long as we can. Get. Rebel. To safety."

Hop scooped up Rebel and used his tail to rip open a portal directly into the depths of an underground lab, swiftly leaving without another word. The remaining trio turned back to the fight, Marisa catching a glimpse of a pair of people zipping by overhead.

"Things are 'bout to get a bit easier; Backup is here!" she mentioned to the others.

Elle thought for a moment, closed her eyes and took a breath. It was drawn out and shaky, and ended in a long exhale.

Ciel getting taken:

- talks to Harriet in the library so he knows where she's going and when she should be back (safety concerns all that)

- she goes off, and tells Harriet that if she isn't back by that night, to raise the alarm and start lookin for her (she knows she was a target, wanted to make sure someone would look for her if she didn't return.)

- she gets to the shore where she usually swims to the smokeyard, and looks around to make sure she wasn't followed

- just as she jumps in, she gets snatched by mason and he scurries to the lab

- cut to evening with Harriet being super on edge and snappy (i'm not entirely sure how he would react tbh other than badly)

Help from the fish:

- Bomber leads Elle & Harriet to the shore, and calls for Coco

- Coco takes the trio to a close Salmonid settlement where Mama Flipper Flopper was waiting

- Bomber explains to the higher Salmonids about the problem, and asks if there is anything that they can do to help/ anything that can even be done

- Mama explains that she and the other Highers can't do much of anything without causing more issues for the city

- Harriet says that since Coco is on good terms with the city, they could have Coco be a scare factor at least, and a last resort if Mason is too much (basically miku miku beam him)

-Mama is okay with that idea, and thanks the group for their battle to get Ciel and the rest back to safety

*She's too damn persistent! And Zach... he's just as pathetic as I thought. For a former soldier, he's the weakest one I've worked with.*