

## My Hero Automata

(Chapters 98-100)

Novus Peregrine

### Chapter 98: Breadcrumbs

Distracting Izumi with sex, no matter how kinky, had only been a temporary measure and Momo had known it. Thankfully, she'd also had more plans than just the one, and had enlisted Inko and Nedzu both in said plans. Inko had managed to sit on her daughter for another day, insisting both that she attend an in-person visit with their therapist, then spend the rest of the day cooking and relaxing in the Midoriya penthouse. A safe space for all of them that, thankfully, had so far remained untouched by the war with the Empire.

After Inko had come Nedzu. Momo knew her girlfriend well enough to understand she didn't *sit still* very well. Not when there were things to be done and problems to be solved. It was thus that she'd arranged for Nedzu to personally task Izumi with something that would help her find closure regarding the Jaku operation, while also keeping her away from direct combat and other stressors for a bit longer. Specifically, he'd tasked Izumi, Momo, and 2B with putting the investigation skills he'd started training them in before the war to attempt to locate where the League of Villains might have fled too. To that end, he'd provided them access to all the material that had been compiled on the League and its assets. Which, interestingly enough, included follow up on the work Izumi and Momo had done trying to track who owned the cameras pointed at UA's gate.

The job was something nice and traditionally heroic and served to give Izumi something to focus on. Even more importantly, it got her *away* from the large-scale meetings that were so draining on her social/emotional batteries. All while being something that *needed* doing, so Momo's girlfriend wouldn't feel guilty about being assigned to the task. Honestly, the only downside is that they'd had to let Jirou go elsewhere for the time being. Their *other* girlfriend didn't have any training at all in investigation, and was off rotation after the post-Bristol break. That said, with the lower number of Rifts opening country-wide, Jirou had actually been assigned to a search and rescue team for the time being. Which was a relief for both of them.

"I think I might have something?"

Momo straightened, turning from her own currently fruitless perusal of the data the forensics people were still pulling out of Jaku four days after the raid. Seeing she had her attention, Izumi threw something up on one of the workshop's projectors. It was a complex series of schematics, generated by someone going over the Nomu growing/stasis pods with a scanner-type Quirk that created a high-fidelity 3D image. Moments after the image appeared on the wall, specific parts were highlighted in red.

"See these parts? All of them are highly custom work, high quality too. They all show signs of being made to the same standard, by the same manufacturer. Right down to the serialization on them. More to the point..." Izumi waved at the screen and two of the smallest parts turned green.

“...these two parts were *also* present in a handful of the cameras that we helped Nedzu try to track backwards after the mass attack on Hero schools.”

Izumi’s powers meant she didn’t actually *need* any flashy hand waving, only using them for theatrical effect. Something that was shown off as, this time, a far more complex series of actions happened on the screen as Izumi sliced the 3D model apart and isolated the components. After they were all alone, another set of identical components appeared next to them, labeled as coming from seven of the cameras that had been observing UA. More importantly, under them was opened the result of an independent investigation that had been run into their source. A quick skim caused Momo to straighten in alarm.

“Wait, Nabu Island? Isn’t that the island off the coast that’s been surrounded by storms since the invasion?!”

Izumi nodded grimly.

“Yes. Given how grim things have been, and the indication that it was a villain takeover rather than an action of the invaders, it hasn’t been dealt with. The population there was small to start with, and no one could justify freeing up the level of force needed to breach the storms. Thankfully, that equation has changed, and it’s actually on the list of places to be dealt with by Clean Slate, anyway. We even have some initial scouting results from the less combat-focused members of our taskforce.”

The parts and reports vanished, replaced by a different set of reports. These signed with a familiar name that made Momo smile.

“I’m glad to see that Koda is doing well. Even if he was unsuited for combat, his Quirk is incredibly useful for intel gathering. I wasn’t aware he’d been shifted away from Rift monitoring, but it makes sense with the much lower rate of them opening now. That and most of them being predicted by the algorithms anyway.”

Izumi nodded, a little bit of tension vanishing at the reminder that not *everyone* who had been lost from UA’s heroics groups was for horrible reasons. Some of them were, as far as anyone could tell from the few contacts they’d retained, actually doing quite well. Koda’s gentle nature had been horribly unsuited for the violence needed against the Empire, but he’d done fantastically good work as a scout spotting Rifts. And now they were looking at a scouting report compiled entirely by him, with him having been able to communicate with a number of sea animals that could pass *under* the storms, rather than through them.

“According to him, the villains there are led by someone called Nine. Who, most suspiciously, appears to be named after the *number of Quirks he has*. Either he’s secretly a Nomu that’s able to retain human appearance, or else he’s got a lesser copy of All for One in the same way many of the Nomu at Jaku had copies of the same Quirk.”

Momo grimaced at *both* possibilities. A Nomu able to look and act normal would be a serious danger for infiltration. The ability to copy *All for One*, on the other hand, was a quiet nightmare everyone involved had thought of, but which no one wanted to mention. Unfortunately,

she tended to agree with Izumi's conclusions. Though there was, of course, one additional possibility.

"It's also possible it's convergent evolution. Copy Quirks aren't unheard of by any means. If he's copying them rather than stealing them, it might just mean he's simply got a similar Quirk."

Izumi shrugged back in response.

"Sure, it's possible. But you and I both know it's not likely. Either way, I think this is enough to take the case to Nedzu, don't you?"

Momo sighed and nodded. They'd only been at this for two days. She should be glad it had taken so little time. But she was afraid it meant they were going to get thrown right back into the grinder again. Possibly before Izumi was really ready. Well, needs must when a slow-burn apocalypse has the world's steering wheel...

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Nedzu looked over the data silently.

They had, of course, spent several hours compiling more of it. Including siccing 2B on running down possible identities for the handful of villains Koda's animal spies had gotten them images of. Who knew that dolphins and turtles made such good spies with the right bribes? They hadn't managed to identify Nine's real name, but they'd linked him to previous crimes, some pretty 'mass death' sort of crimes as it happened. He'd even appeared alongside his current companions several times in the past, and two of *them* they did have names for. Kon Chōjūrō, Villian name Chimera and Hasaki Kiruka, Villain name Slice. Another villain had gone unidentified, with all they had to go on being that he appeared to be able to manipulate the cloth wrappings he wore.

"This is good work. A solid lead. It also, unfortunately, presents us with a problem."

Nedzu had, apparently, finished their report. Closing the files they'd provided, he turned and accepted a teacup from Momo with a nod of thanks. She was one of the very few people that he would actually accept making him tea, and he took a slow sip of it appreciatively before he spoke again.

"The interrogation of the fire villain has also finished. There were some...disturbing revelations that aren't going to be made public any time soon, as they would be a major blow to public morale. We also, however, got a feel for the current state of the League and their plans. According to what Dabi knew, Shigaraki was being 'upgraded' in a medical pod much like are used for the Nomu, though somewhat more streamlined and advanced looking. Presumably, it is the same pod that you noticed missing, causing you to realize that most of the raid targets had escaped Jaku."

Izumi and Momo both paused, grimacing and putting down their own teacups. The idea of the already-dangerous Shigaraki being 'upgraded' by a mad scientist was certainly not good news. Though at least the job didn't seem to be complete just yet, if they'd escaped with him still in a medical pod.

“Unfortunately, in addition to that information, he knew something of their plans. Apparently, they were planning strikes on both UA and Tartarus. Supposedly, they have someone on the inside at UA, who has fed them information about how relatively weak our defenses are due to spreading ourselves out helping against the invasion. Oddly, whoever their mole is doesn’t seem to have told them anything about operation Clean Slate. Given how obvious your training was, I can only conclude that whoever the spy is doesn’t *want* the League to succeed. Had they attacked while you were training, they’d have lost more completely than even at Jaku.”

That was...alarming. The idea of a mole had certainly been an obvious one to consider, after the USJ. But, at least for Izumi and Momo, the idea had fallen by the wayside after All for One’s death and the start of the Invasion. The idea that a mole might have been in place this entire time was disconcerting, to say the least.

“As for the Tartarus strike, that one was meant to be more surgical. They intended to take out the guards and blow the high security wing wide open. A special Nomu, made from a villain named Mustard, apparently has some sort of chemical warfare ability that was supposed to send the guards into a berserk fit, leaving them unable to respond when a set of suicide-Nomu took care of the wall. We have a location they were planning to stage from, and had been intending another rapid raid in hopes the League was still going to go with that plan.”

Nedzu set his tea down after one more sip, then leaned back and closed his eyes for a moment as he considered. Then, he nodded to himself.

“They still might launch the Tartarus plan, if nothing else as a distraction to keep us busy. So we’ll have to take that threat seriously and raid the hideout we’ve identified. However, I believe you may have given us a better idea of their actual fallback location. Nabu Island really *shouldn’t* have the sort of facilities to make those parts. Not at the quantities they would have needed for them to produce both cameras *and* all the Nomu containers.”

Nedzu pulled up the information they had on Nabu island before the storms. Rural, low population, mostly only of interest to the relaxation-seeking type of tourists.

“Just the cameras was excusable. A small specialty shop run by someone making custom parts was what the investigator found, and it was feasible. But Nabu has a population of less than 1,000 and is virtually entirely rural. The larger facilities needed to make such parts in bulk should never have been able to remain unknown there. Which indicates a hidden facility, perhaps quite an old one which supplied All for One during his original reign. Combined with this Nine and his actions, it does seem like an extremely likely target. Which means we need to find a way to plan two separate raids, in short succession, on two wildly different targets.”

The dean’s smile was just a little too excited at the prospect for them to like as he clapped his hands together.

“Now then. Since this is a tough problem indeed, and you’re both familiar with the personnel available for Clean Slate, I suggest we do some preliminary brainstorming immediately...”

## **Chapter 99: Ready or Not**

The Jaku Hospital Raid might have been short a few critical bits of intelligence, but they'd had plenty of firepower and weeks of training to figure out the best solution, along with at least *some* idea of what their target would be like. As Gang Orca and Momo both towed metal shells quickly modified into life support pods under the storm wall around Nabu island, they had none of that. They were going in nearly blind, with effectively no JSDF support unless or until they could shut down who or whatever was powering the storm around the island. It was also an uncomfortably small team that would be part of the initial raid. Though if they could bring down the storm, they would have additional support available.

Honestly, the only good point was that there would be no teleporting out of *this one*. The downside, for the villains that is, of holing up on Nabu island was that it wasn't a very *large* island. It was completely possible to surround it with teleport jammers, and *water* was far less effective at blocking those than ground. While they hadn't been able to penetrate the ground deeply enough in Jaku City to completely cut off teleportation, they *could* pull that trick off here by staging jammers in the waters outside the storm wall. Thankfully, submarines had so far been among the least useful naval craft against the whole extra dimensional alien-invasion thing, leaving the handful available to Japan free for use by Clean Slate.

Assuming the League was here, they weren't going to be running.

Of course, that didn't mean they wouldn't be *fighting*, and it was uncomfortably possible that the raid team could be overcome this time. While every single person they were bringing was a heavy hitter or veteran Hero, they just couldn't bring that many people. Both because of their method of entry *and* because a simultaneous raid was being aimed at the staging area meant for the attack on Tartarus. It was absolutely critical *that* attack be stopped dead, and it was always possible at least *some* of the League would be present at that location. Particularly if they were as-yet unaware that Dabi had been thrown straight into the hands of an ungentle WHA telepath.

Between the dead and injured from Jaku and the need to split targets, they'd needed to pull reinforcements from elsewhere just to attempt these raids. And those reinforcements weren't as integrated into the teams as those they'd lost had been. There had been a brief day of crash-training to familiarize them with basic tactics the raid teams had worked out. But that was about it. They were leaning heavily on raw experience to cover the compatibility gaps, this time.

Of the original Clean Slate teams, only Eraserhead was joining them from the UA professors, and only Momo and Izumi from the students. Miruko was also with them, as were Ghost Ember, Selkie and, obviously, Gang Orca. But that was it from the original list of Pros, with Ryukyu, Snipe, Majestic, Manual, and others broken off to the Tartarus projection team, aiming to hit the second target. Their own reinforcements were, at least, high quality. Crust was the most prominent hero to join them, pulled from the front lines for this quick strike. Fourth Kind, X-Less, and Mount Lady made up the other reinforcements. Competent, experienced, and at least in Mount Lady's case a powerhouse in her own right with how she'd grown since the invasion started.

Eleven heroes and heroines. That was all that could be spared for a potentially catastrophic raid. At least for the initial strike. If, and it was a bit of a scary if, they could get the storm down, then they would get another 11 Heroes of lesser experience and power. Many of them support-oriented, such as a healer that had been spared from the entirely-too-many places that still needed such

Quirks badly. Just as importantly, those heroes would bring with them significant JSDF forces. But they had to bring the storm down for that to even be an option. Which mean disabling or killing whoever was maintaining it. Nine was the primary suspect, but they didn't even have proof of that much, technically. This raid had so much chance to go wrong. But, well, sometimes there was no choice but to throw the dice and hope they came up your way.

“Storm wall breached, ten minutes to ascension, do any final checks you need to.”

It was Momo's voice that back through the speakers of their crude vessel. Tension ratcheted higher, even as the various heroes in Izumi's own survival pod began double checking loadouts that had already been double and triple checked. Izumi was both luckier and less lucky in that there wasn't anything she *could* check, since her intended loadout for this mission was entirely within her digital inventory to save space in the pod. She did triple-check that everyone's HSN comms were online. But that was honestly redundant as 2B would have highlighted it as an issue if anyone had fallen out of the tactical net. Forced to do nothing but run through the motions she would take as they surfaced, she had a horrible time not thinking of all the ways this plan could go wrong. Starting with the possibility of them being detected while still in the water. Thankfully, ten tense minutes passed without that coming to pass.

“Breaching!”

There was a crackling tension in the air...but nothing dramatic happened and everyone tried to relax. They failed, of course, but they certainly tried. Nabu island might be small, but it wasn't *that* small, and the pods they'd been traveling in had been using the best stealth methods they could lay hands on. They'd also approached at night, fully intending to try getting out of the pods and onto land before they acted.

It would improve their odds immensely if they could take out some or all of their targets from stealth. Which was the thought process that had Izumi's pod breaching on a small beach with no proper path up onto the island's central level. It was all cliffs here, and Izumi was the first to spring out of concealing pod at their base. She immediately deployed a Pod that had been optimized for stealth. It's red-and-black camo pattern virtually vanished into the night as it zipped off, 2B guiding it as it passively assessed the island.

The 2B managed Pod didn't go alone. It, being powered by Izumi's Quirk and having a stupidly low energy return to hide in the first place as a result, would be heading to the south side of the island, where most of the population was. Nine and his crew had been mostly staying in that area, and 2B's goal was to find them. The *rest* of the island, however, was also going to be subjected to scrutiny as Momo used her Quirk to produced several dozen small drones. Each was made to be as stealthy as possible, but the needs for their power supply and propulsion meant a good enough sensor net might spot them. Still, again, risks needed to be taken. If they could finish the main villain base without even engaging Nine, it might allow a cleaner victory.

All of it, unfortunately, meant that the already tense heroes and heroines were stuck with another round of 'hurry up and wait.' Hiding the aquatic pods had taken them a bit of time and kept them busy. But after that, they were stuck watching the various feeds from the drones available on the HSN channels for the op. The more eyes on those the better, but it still wasn't exactly keeping

the more rash members of the team from going stir crazy. Miruko, in particular, was looking very disgruntled as her foot rapidly thumped into the sand. Wisely, no one attempted to speak with her.

“Found something! There’s a cave system under that northern island offshoot, and I just caught glimpse of a Nomu at an underground entrance.”

It was Miruko, of all people, who tersely spat the information out. A flick of her ears somehow acted as a signal for her HSN device, something that had to be custom programming, Izumi reflected. She pushed the thought aside as she reviewed the seconds of video Miruko had literally ‘flicked’ to all of the other HSN devices in the group. It played on loop and, sure enough, there was just a brief instant where a Nomu was visible. Izumi marveled that the woman had been able to spot it at all, when the Drone’s algorithms had missed it for being so brief. Gang Orca, the most senior hero present and thus leader of the team, clapped her on one shoulder with a giant hand and a grim smile.

“Well spotted. That confirms at least some degree of League presence. The only question remains if we hit them first, or Nine and his crew first. I don’t think we want to try for a double header with our already diminished numbers.”

There were nods all around at that, but before anyone could venture an opinion, another message came over the HSN. This time, it was from 2B.

“New information. The Stealth Pod has eyes on Nine and Chimera. Nine looks...vacant. And there’s some sort of collar in Chimera’s fur. Detecting an active wireless link, heavily encrypted enough I don’t want to try messing with it.”

Izumi frowned, activating hypercognition for just a few seconds to run through all the possibilities. She dropped it to posit the most likely scenario.

“A double cross. If Nine got his ability to wield multiple-quirks from All for One, it stands to reason the league also embedded a failsafe. If they activated that to *take control* of Nine after All for One died and the invasion started, they could have ordered him to take over Nabu as a backup, particularly if they already had a facility here. Then they use Nine and Nomu to put control or explosive collars of some sort on the rest of Nine’s team. Effectively giving them a subordinate group of heavy hitters as a proxy.”

There was a low whistle at that, Ghost Ember speaking a moment after the whistle.

“Damn, that’s cold even for a villain group. It matches what I understand of All for One’s MO to a T, though. Which, if it was a standing backup, and the League merely activated it...”

There were nods and murmurs of agreement all around, though Gang Orca quickly brought up a relevant addition.

“Be that as it may, at least Chimera and Slice are wanted for other crimes. I’m officially recommending attempting to take Chimera, Slice, and Mummy alive *if possible*. Nine, however, is too dangerous if he’s directly under League control in some fashion. He’s also, I remind everyone, already got an immense body count. 2B, Momo, Izumi. Chances for surgical elimination?”

Momo and Izumi looked at each other, communicating without the need for actual comms. They *could* do it. They'd done it before, after all. But doing so now would be...telling...if anyone cared to compare notes and connect it back to their previous actions against All for One. Then again, given the current climate, the chances anyone was going to give a damn about that were low, and it wouldn't be definitive 'proof' anyway. Slowly, Momo nodded and Izumi answered.

"A surgical application of the Kill Order on Nine is possible. It will be *very* lethal, though. And not at all subtle. Chimera will be alerted instantly and will undoubtable rouse the others."

Several of the heroes looked *uncomfortable* with the suggestion. Gang Orca did not.

"If I order you to, will you comply?"

Izumi sighed but nodded.

"Yes. Under other circumstances I would flat out refuse. Given the high risk of this mission specifically...yes."

Gang Orca looked into her eyes for long moments. Whatever he found there seemed to satisfy him. He nodded.

"We'll try for the double header after all, then. Mount Lady will be nearly useless in the caves, anyway. So we split. Izumi, Momo, Mount Lady, Selkie. Eliminate Nine, disable Chimera, Slice, and Mummy. Everyone else, we move to the cave entrance and engage at the same time the elimination happens. We go in hard and fast. Hopefully, with Nine down the storm wall will fall and our backup will follow right on our heels."

That was...a big split, but the logic fit. Sending Izumi, Momo, and Mount Lady should result in a hard and fast take down of Nine's team. Selkie, meanwhile, could both hit from the water to help with that rapid takedown and guide in reinforcements through the rough waters after the storm came down. Izumi still didn't like it at all, but with Miruko and Crust added to Gang Orca, the other team wasn't exactly lacking heavy hitters of their own. Eraserhead would also be with them to shut down any particularly nasty surprises.

There were a few token protests, but ultimately the logic was too fundamentally sound and everyone agreed with grimaces. Most were shooting uncertain looks at Momo and Izumi, clearly still uncomfortable with giving what amounted to an assassination mission to their youngest pair. Not that Izumi was exactly happy with it either, but they were putting a bit too much stock in it, in her opinion. After all, all of them, herself included, had been slaughtering sentient enemies in job lots for months. Some of whom they'd recently discovered were effectively slave soldiers.

She didn't look forward to this, the idea of killing a fellow human in cold blood still leaving a pit in her stomach. But she'd already accepted that they were at war, and she'd been present in spirit when they'd done the same thing to All for One, even if 2B had technically been the one to pull the trigger. It was a little different, since Nine might *technically* not be in control of himself. She clamped down hard on that thought, however, and forced herself to get moving. They would need to sneak carefully into position for this...

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Momo laid out on the grass and Izumi looked at her in confused horror.

“Momo, what are you doing?!”

The question was a hiss, despite them still being a solid kilometer out from their target. Momo looked at her with a grim expression that shut down Izumi’s protests before she could properly voice them.

“If you think I’m letting you take a shot like this *again*, after you had to do the last one, you’re crazy. Particularly when you just broke down mere days ago.”

Izumi started to rally, but Momo shut down her next protest even more firmly.

“And 2B doing it is just as bad. She had to actively pull the trigger last time, and you *know* she’s not really okay with killing humans. All for One was enough of an outright monster that her original programming didn’t cause her serious trauma over eliminating him. But Nine might not even been willing in all this. Probably isn’t, in fact. So no way in hell I’m letting her do it either.”

Izumi grimaced. That was a low blow. But not an inaccurate one. 2B was no longer beholden to her original programming, and she’d been with Izumi long enough to come to see humanity as the flawed race they were. But she’d still been ‘raised,’ for lack of a better word for it, in a society that revered humans. Nomu and Monsters were easy for her to kill without remorse. Humans were...dicier. She could and would do it to spare Izumi and Momo. But it would likely haunt her even more than it would them, without exceptional circumstances like All for One who was legitimately more monster than man.

“...Can you even make the shot?”

That was her lass, feeble argument, and it got the dismissive snort it deserved. Momo might not a living super computer the way 2B and Izumi were, but her own Quirk’s mental enhancements combined with her suit’s technology meant the shot was trivial. Nine wasn’t even moving. Just *staring* out toward the storm, right out in the open in the town square. Izumi closed her eyes, knowing she was defeated.

“I’ll be prepared to follow up on Chimera than.”

Quietly, hating every second of the shuffling crawl, Izumi moved down the hill they’d positioned themselves on. Once in the shadow of a building, she summoned up her Combat Flight Suit and linked up with it. Once ready, she took a deep breath and signaled the tac net. Quick confirming double clicks came in from Mount Lady, Selkie, and Gang Orca. Everyone was ready. Momo was free to take the shot. Long seconds passed as she made sure it was perfect...

And then a nearly identical hypervelocity railgun round to those that had killed All for One lanced out.

Nine never had a chance.

All for One had needed to be thoroughly distracted by All Might before they even dared *attempt* the shot. The ancient supervillain had been in possession of dozens of sensory and reflex enhancing Quirks, some of them continuously active due to his own physical sense of sight having

been crippled in his penultimate battle with All Might. It was entirely possible Nine had *some* sort of enhancements. But if he did, they clearly weren't enough, as he went from *having a head* to *very much not* between eyeblinks. Bare instants later, even as the sounds of the railgun thunderously echoed over the island, Selkie lept out of the water to attack Chimera, who had been patrolling the docks.

There, at least, Chimera was more than fast enough to react, sending the Hero backward, back into the water, with a brutal punch. He was forced to dodge capture-foam rockets fired from a newly summoned Pod a moment later, even as Izumi roared in to engage him at close range, the villain going through some sort of transformation as he jumped backward to avoid her initial hit. To the north of the city, Mount Lady abruptly grew in size, armor developed with Mellissa's miniaturization technology expanding to cover her even as the villainess Slice appeared, launching razor show spikes of hair at the now-giant woman. All the while, elsewhere, Gang Orca and Miruko led the charge into an underground base.

The battle for Nabu Island had begun.

## Chapter 100: Here We Come

Izumi dodged a fucking *hyper beam* by only a narrow margin.

"What the fuck! Since when is Chimera a pokemon!"

She also did her best to ignore Mount Lady's commentary on the fight. Though, she admitted, the giant would who had been forced to take the blast instead of dodging had a valid point. Their intel had said that Chimera could take on the characteristics of a wide variety of *animals*. Izumi was very unsure that animals were supposed to be able to spit energy beams! Maybe in Australia? But those were *Quirked* animals, surely? She might need to do a little reading on pre-Quirk Australia...she'd heard some crazy things in the past.

Forcing the errant thought from her mind *again*, she dove under another shot of Chimera's *totally bullshit hyper beam*, and delivered another punch towards his midsection. She'd made the mistake, the first pass, of underestimating him and she'd held back. This time, she was going close to full throttle...but he *still* managed to get his hand up in time to block. Impressive as that was, it wasn't enough for him. She felt the bones in his forearm snap and he went flying back to slam *through* a nearby warehouse. Before Izumi could follow through, she was beset by more of the infernal dolls Mummy used, various items being wrapped and warped into golems of a sort. They weren't much of a threat to her, but he'd almost immediately taken to pulling *people* out of nearby homes and wrapping them up as golems so she couldn't be too violent with them.

She cut the most recent set of golems with clean precision, but doing so forced her to slow down just enough that Chimera reentered the fight. He was looking fucked up, with one arm a wreck and oozing blood from a few shallow gashes he'd gotten on this way through the building. Sadly, those didn't keep him from firing his knock-off hyper beam again, forcing Izumi to launch into the sky to avoid it. Luckily, it seemed Slice was down, as Momo entered from stage right an instant later and cold cocked Chimera. He'd become too fixated on Izumi and the blow took him totally by

surprise. His head snapped around...and then he slumped. Izumi's instruments said he was still alive, but unconscious, and she unloaded several dozen gallons of her strongest capture foam in his direction. Hopefully, that would actually hold the bastard.

With Slice, Chimera, and Nine down, Mummy didn't have a chance. He'd realized that and tried to flee, only to end up *stepped on* by an irritated Mount Lady. Well, made he was the sort that was into that and wouldn't be too upset. Just as Izumi was about to launch more foam toward him, the collars around all three of their necks started beeping. Eyes widening, Izumi jumped back...and barely cleared the explosion as all three of the villains were abruptly rendered headless by bombs embedded in those collars. Mount Lady had been sent stumbling and cursing by the blast but was still the first to speak.

"Fuck! All that effort and the bastards suicided! Or were murdered, or something! Fuck!"

Izumi forced down the temptation to curse viciously herself. The bombs virtually proved the trio probably hadn't been doing this voluntarily. Forcing down the gorge that wanted to rise at the way they'd been *executed*, she tried to focus on the positive.

"The storm is clearing and there's no more villains topside that we know of. Selkie, Mount Lady, secure the town. Momo and I will join the main raid team, along with the incoming reinforcements."

Two acknowledgments came across the comms, even as she and Momo raced off toward the only entrance point they knew of. Hopefully, the rest of the team was okay...

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"Fuck! Just *die* you fucking Psycho!"

Said psycho was another of the Nomu High Ends, and it was *completely unhinged*. It showed higher thought and the ability to speak, but the shit it said was like a bad slasher flick! The fact that it fought with its own *ribcage* warping as an attack and defense didn't help, and Miruko was being hard pressed to keep up with the damn thing. The other high-ends present were tied up with other heroes, and two of them had been defeated...before Eraserhead had been warped away by their bloody teleporter! Thankfully, the distraction of trying to make even short-range teleportation work through the jamming had cost the warp-gate user, who'd been taken down rather permanently by Crust.

The problem was she was pretty sure they were out of time.

Mad scientists cackling like that were near-universally a bad sign.

The fact that the pod he was standing over was hissing and billowing fog didn't help either.

Ghost Ember appeared from her incorporeal state an instant later, putting a flaming sword through her target's head. It didn't get up, and Miruko tried to rush the mad doctor...only to hit some sort of barrier that reflected her blow back on herself painfully, as a new voice spoke through the fighting. It was rough, like it had just woken up, but she sadly recognized it at the voice of the 'leader' of the LoV after All for One's death.

“Garaki. Why are there heroes interrupting my awakening?”

The mad scientist as the gall to look apologetic, even as Crust and Gang Orc finished off the last Nomu High End and both tried to assail the barrier. It didn't work, and red eyes glared back at them as the fog started to clear.

“Apologies, Shigaraki, but they tracked us after we were forced to flee Jaku. This is the backup site you ordered Nine to secure before going under for the procedure.”

There was an irritated scowl on the face of the pale looking Shigaraki that was followed by Miruko's instincts *screaming*. She lept away from the barrier, only barely avoiding getting stabbed through the heart by a black tendril. Crust managed to intercept a series aimed at him with his shields, but three of them shattered before the fourth stopped them cold. Gang Orca blocked most of those headed to him with a sound wave...but X-less and Fourth Kind were less lucky. Only Ghost Ember reappearing from her incorporeality turned the stab against X-less from lethal to merely serious, causing it to miss anything immediately vital as the Heroine pulled X-less partially out of the way. Fourth Kind survived by sacrificing two of his arms, which were now riddled with holes. Worse, two hits had gotten through and he had a pair of deep stab wounds through his abdomen as well.

“Annoying. Just die like you're supposed to.”

Visible muscle coiled on Tomura's arm, even as he lashed out toward all of them with more tendrils. None of these hit, now that they'd had warning...but he practically vanished and reappeared with his fist embedded in Gang Orca's gut. The hit threw the large Hero into the ceiling...which cracked and a bit of light spilled through. Sunlight. It had been just before dawn when they kicked everything off, it having taken time to work everyone into position via stealth. If that was sunlight, then their winding passage through the caves must have taken them closer to the surface than they'd realized.

Shigaraki must have thought the same thing, as he blinked at the light for a moment before smirking maliciously...and blasting Gang Orca's falling body with some sort of Air Cannon attack. The second hit against the ceiling truly shattered it, bringing it down on the Heroes, even as Shigaraki simply rose through the air into the light. Garaki had taken the chance to scamper, leaving only Heroes and dead Nomu behind. All of them saw the black lightning building in the LoV leader's hands, Crust throwing up shields and Miruko racing upward on falling rubble to try and reach him before the attack back down into the now open chamber went off. She knew she wouldn't reach him in time, but they were sitting ducks if they just let him fire down into the room!

Just as her life flashed before her eyes, Shigaraki flinched and shifted to one side, causing the black lighting to miss and rake the hillside beyond the ceiling instead of firing into the chamber. The flinch also allowed him to dodge the streak of black-and-blue armor, sparking golden, that had nearly hit him. Miruko knew who that had to be, and shifted her attack to launch rubble with a kick, forcing Shigaraki to reflect the attack with that barrier of his. Growling, he launched himself upward to avoid a glowing spear a second later, Izumi appearing where he'd just vanished from.

Miruko *hated* that she was glad for the help. But one thing was clear. This bastard was their worst fear come to life. A copy of the All for One Quirk and an unknown number of Quirks with it. They were going to need all the help they could get...

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Izumi gritted her teeth as Shigaraki repelled another wave of missiles. She and Momo were dancing around him, trying to find a weakness in his defenses with ranged attacks. Beyond their opening attempts to blindside him, getting in close was just too damn risky with that decay Quirk of his. Unfortunately, it was obvious that either he or someone else had thought through his Quirk combination.

He obviously had a basic physical and sensory package, to have even sensed them coming and reacted in time. Then there was that reflection barrier that nullified physical attacks, and at least three separate ranged Quirks she'd identified so far. Rivet Stab and Air Cannon were known favorites of All for One they'd been told about by All Might. The third one was some sort of shotgun projectile effect that was seriously annoying to dodge or block. Actually, that Black Lightning he'd used on arrival technically counted as fourth ranged ability, she supposed. Though she was guessing it had a charge up time, as he hadn't tried to use it against either her or Momo since then.

Dangerous at a distance, utterly deadly at close quarters. Extremely good defenses, high mobility. Izumi was beginning to understand just how *utterly aggravating* it was to fight someone like her or Momo. On, sure, she'd know that on some level from her frequent spars with her girlfriend. But those were friendly spars, ones which generally were limited so they didn't get too out of hand. This was *not that*. Shigaraki was going for the kill whenever he thought he had a shot. Not just on them, but on the Heroes stuck on the ground, forced to resort to their own ranged attacks in an attempt to contribute.

Frankly, if not for Crust being able to provide them with mobile cover, their allies would have been more of a liability than anything. As it was, they were mostly contributing by forcing Shigaraki to split his attention as many ways as possible. That was the one way in which he clearly wasn't able to match them. She had carved a line in his side, and Momo broke one of his arms, early on, as he couldn't quite force his situational awareness to keep up with all the vectors of threat. Unfortunately, those wounds had healed almost instantly, proving he *also* had a copy of Hyper Regeneration. Joy.

"Word on Eraserhead?"

She clipped out the question in a brief moment of exchanging weapon types, switching for the massive Quad-Barrel gun she'd used again Miruko in the Final Exams. It worked for a few moments, forcing Shigaraki to use that barrier only on her while others got their licks in. Despite his dodging and return fire, he got clipped several times...before apparently figuring out how to split the barrier so that he could use more than one. Fuck. He was still learning. Miruko's voice came back, annoyed sounding but with information.

"No joy on Eraser. They found him, but he was dropped into a group of Nomu. Good news, he won and seems to have taken out their cloner in the process. Along with figuring out how they were pulling mind control shit. Some kid with a hate on for heroes. Bad news, he's injured badly

enough he can't join the fight until the healer gets to him, and the fight is making it hard to get close to the base."

Well...fuck. Eraserhead's Quirk normally didn't completely shut down every Quirk a Nomu had, but it would have suppressed at least *some* of Shigaraki's Quirks. Regardless of which ones it shut down, it would have given them an opening. Without that, they were stuck in a pounding match, hoping his stamina gave out before theirs did. Which, lacking full knowledge of what Quirks he had, they couldn't really count on. Momo could probably go the distance with him on stamina. Izumi, on the other hand, might not be able to. She still hadn't perfected the transfer from QE batteries well enough to get flawless extension of her stamina the way she wanted. Not even with the CFU as an intermediary.

No, a pounding match was a poor idea. They needed something to change the equation and, even as she switched weapons again, coordinating a hit-and-fade with Momo's use of Blackwhip, Izumi racked her brain for ideas. She was almost completely enmeshed with 2B at this point, her partner working with her to simulation possibilities, even as they traded off between piloting varying types of Pods and Izumi's body. They couldn't maintain a link this deep for long without consequences. But if Shigaraki escaped, it would be much worse than a few weeks spent untangling their thoughts from each other again. The both tsked as their attempt to use a *second* Pod, something they almost never did because of the strain of maintaining more than one of them, failed. The beam of energy it fired *did* clip their enemy, but he healed it almost immediately. They dismissed the second Pod and dug deeper into their experimental projects library.

Oh, that could work. Maybe.

Especially if they combined it with *that*.

It was risky. Draining. They'd never tried using it in combat specifically because of how much it took out of Izumi for even a single activation. And adding the second factor was equally risky, as it would overclock her current body and leave her frozen in place for several seconds after it ended. So, how did they make it count?

Involve Momo, obviously. If they could just *pin* Shigaraki in place, Momo could finish it. Making a decision, 2zumi flickered an aerial position and orientation to their girlfriend, along with a time. There was a brief moment of consternation as the two of them both realized they had enmeshed too deeply again. Then they pushed it aside. They could deal with it once Handjob was dead. Wait, did 2B really tag Shigaraki in her system with Katuski's name for...not the time!

Trusting their girl to have their back, they created a support Pod of a type that they'd never used in combat before. They split themselves, digging deep to keep two Pods online in order to not give away the game, the original Pod continuing to fire rockets and energy beams to herd Handjob as best it could. At the same time, one of the 'chips' they'd been developing as Super Moves was activated.

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System Override: Programming Initiated

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Evasion Mode Alpha v0.92 Activated

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Much like the current iteration of A2's Berserk Mode, the 'chip' they'd programmed to tweak their systems wasn't complete. They hadn't solved the heat issue that overclocking caused, meaning it was only good for twenty seconds and then they *had* to stop and vent heat. Not doing so risked brain damage they weren't sure the auto-repair functions of her Quirk could heal. Still, as she summoned up her personal copy of *Spear of the Usurper*, a particularly nasty spear that did its best to scramble the electrical systems of anything it was impaled into...including human nervous systems. On most humans, it was *very* lethal, so Izumi had never used it outside training. But 2B certainly had. And if it helped pin Handjob in place even a microsecond longer, it was justified.

Waiting until Shiggijob was in just the right place, 2zumi activated the support Pod that had, until that moment, simply hung there. Whatever senses Shggijob had clearly included a danger sense of some sort, as his eye widened the instant before the pod charged him and activated. But it didn't matter. The *Slow Time* Pod emitted a *Field*, and despite his attempt to dodge, he'd been caught in the edges of it. Since neither Izumi nor the Pod was affected, he wasn't escaping it until it ran out of juice. It moved to keep him in its field, even as he tried to fry it with black lightning, moving at 1/10 speed.

To slow. Much too slow.

2zumi, boosted by the Evasion Mode Chip that accelerated everything about her to four times their normal maximum, lept into the *Slow Time* field, utterly untouched by it. Despite any boosts or warning he had, he couldn't block. If 2zumi had aimed for his head, he might have been able to shift it out of the way. But they hadn't done anything of the sort. No, they'd aimed center mass...and punched the *Spear of the Usurper* right through his body, just below his ribcage. Despite obviously having durability Quirks, they weren't enough, and the spear went in one side and out the other, even as Izumi's pure power and speed drug them both out of the slow time slowing field.

They plowed into the side of the hill, the *Spear of the Usurper* pinning Shiggijob to the hillside and sending vicious currents of electricity through his body, locking him up. Somehow, despite most of his body spasming, he managed to force one hand to the Spear, and 2zumi felt him *try* to decay it. But their energy constructs were just that. Energy. He was draining them as they fed it more energy to keep the spear intact. But that was okay. 2zumi had already pushed back, leaping clear as the overheating began to shut down their body. They'd already done what they needed to.

Momo flashed out of the sky in a bolt of pure gold, armor rapidly shredding under the pure, unrestrained power for a full-body One Hundred Percent - One for All Strike. The entirety of Nabu Island shook as a 300-meter-deep crater appeared, epicenter where Keystone had just delivered the mother of all smashes. A smash that had impacted directly with Shigaraki's head. 2zumi, almost completely locked up as their body vented heat, hovering only by grace of automated systems in their Combat Flight Unit, grinned fiercely.

“Shrug that one off, bitch...”

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