**Infiltration 16.8**

“Okay, team one, Break, Mouse, Kayden, Taylor, Theo. Mouse, you’re team lead. Go for the closer guy. Panacea, Glory Girl, you’re with me, we’ll take the one on the lower level. Theo, I know you have a knockout gun, try and use it. Panacea, same. If they fight though, and start turning into capes, don’t hesitate to kill. We don’t want Alexandria, Legend, or Eidolon suddenly deciding to wreck the base from the inside, and we don’t know the spy’s capabilities, just that they can use the powers of others,” I rattled off. “Everyone understand?”

I got a round of nods. I wanted everyone to suit up, but I didn’t know how much time we had, and the man the infiltrator was impersonating’s shift ended in five minutes. That said. . .I waved my hand, dismissing the costumes they had put away in their rooms, and re-making them in front of me. With how many secrets had already gotten out, or were about to get out, this was a minor one.

“Everyone suit up. We’re not going into this half-cocked,” I ordered, turning my back on them.

Kayden made a throat clearing noise, and Herb went, “Huh? Oh, yeah!”, presumably turning his back as Kayden stripped to put on her armor.

“Done!” Mouse announced after less than a minute, and I started to turn, only for Kayden to shout, “No we’re not!” I turned right back to face away.

“Zilla, status?” I requested instead.

The VI replied, “Unchanged,” and I nodded. The two minutes it would take to suit up were worth not fighting an unknown Trump/Changer in our civvies. Well, in *their* civvies, as *I* was always armored, in one way or another.

“Ready,” Kayden announced, and I turned. “Okay, everyone ready?” Confirmations answered me. “Good, let’s go.”

Panacea, in her bio-armor, and Glory Girl, in her impenetrable plate armor, both moved over to me, taking my outstretched hands, and I teleported us close. We got a couple of odd looks, mostly Panacea, but the few people in the halls got out of our way.

Quinn directed us, telling us to hold at the end of one hallway so the others could get into position, and we could approach them at the same time. Given the go ahead, we walked to the office he was in, along with a few others, and I opened the door.

My first instinct was to announce the person’s name, but I wanted the person in grabbing range before I did that. Our target, who was either a deadly spy or a harmless employee, was standing talking to a middle-aged latino woman, and, as far as I could tell with my Sight, had no power whatsoever.

It annoyed me, either not being the one to find the spy, or maybe having my Sight obscured, or, fuck, maybe there was a Stranger element to the power, I didn’t know, but we closed anyways. However, Robert didn’t give me a chance to talk, his eyes going wide as he grabbed the woman he was talking to and, with a strength that belied his slightly heavyset form, tossed her at us.

Glory Girl automatically moved forward to catch her, and ‘Robert’’s form wavered, becoming something else too fast for me to see before suddenly becoming a man in grey and black spandex, grey lightning sparking around him.

I only had enough time to read ‘his’ power as Burst Speed before he darted forward, coming to other side of Victoria, putting her between us, and ‘his’ hands darted up, unlatching her helmet. “Here!” I yelled into the coms, watching everything happen almost in slow motion, kicking in my powers to move as fast as I could, grabbing my enhanced pistol as Amy shot forward yelling “Vicky!”

The Spy’s form shifted again, Glory Girl coming around to slam ‘him’ with a fist, only to hesitate when ‘Panacea’ stood in front of her, robe and all. My gun came up, but ‘Amy’ darted her hand out, like a striking snake, and tapped Vicky in the cheek.

The teen dropped like her strings had been cut, and my gun fired, catching the flinching spy in the shoulder instead of the neck. ‘Her’ form twisted again, and a Cape I didn’t know, a tall woman in purple armor, took another shot, the bullet ricocheting off her armor. Dark purple gas vented from her costume, and the others in the room, who’d just started to flee or hide, dropped as well.

The woman’s power was Gas Creation, but I *didn’t know what kind*. Was it knockout gas, or *poison?* I had to make a decision, and it was the same decision I always made. “Save Vicky!” I ordered, even as the spy started to charge me.

Swinging for her, she flickered again, now a tall, reedy man with the power of Gas Body. He passed through me, and, turning, I could almost feel his body through Aerokinesis. His arm, the one that passed around me was slightly to the side, away from his body, but was being pulled back.

Narrowing my eyes, I decided it wouldn’t.

Turning and slashing out with my sword, I took the wind it created and multiplied it, hitting the orphaned limb with hurricane force-strength, blasting apart the construct, which turned to a bloody mist after it got far enough away from the spy’s body, a mess of blood, bone and tissue.

With a cry, the infiltrator shifted back to reality, missing an arm, only to flicker into a gorilla like creature, skin dark and rubbery. It was hard to see, but I could See its powers, which helped me focus, and notice that it, also, was missing an arm. It busted through the door, and I followed, insects emerging from vents to keep eyes on it.

It was already regenerating the limb, skeleton first, then tissues, as it reach the far end of the hall and turned the corner. I shot out after it, sword raised as I rounded the corner, knowing that it’d turned to strike me in return. I barely felt the impact of the fist, prepared for the hit, not stopping as I slashed it from shoulder to hip, but my blade had barely cleared it before its flesh re-knit. It spat something in my face, which started to grow, and I wasted a precious second, ignore another shield popping as it slammed into me with it’s arm, Metal Tendrils stabbing through the bottom of my boots and grounding me.

Swinging out blindly, it’d taken a step back, arm fully regenerated, and its form shimmered again, settling on a broad man, in steel armor, hand glowing red with heat as he drew them forward, making a triangle gesture, and I caught a flash of Plasma Projection, but under that a Flicker of *another* power.

***Masquerade.***

Starstuff shot down me in a stream, glowing hexagons appearing before me and deflecting the attack. It had enough mass moving fast enough to set off my defenses, but I’d learned it cared more for kinetic energy than any other, and it held fast.

I still would’ve been burnt, maybe even cooked, but my Immunity kept me safe. I felt a surge of power coming for me, and my Stellar Negation kicked in without me asking it to, creating a safe bubble the instant before Mouse Protector appeared before me, flinching backwards in panic at the conflagration around us.

Reflexively, I grabbed her, pulling her tight, *“I negate fire,*” I told her, *“small bubble.*”

She nodded, and readied a knife, and, after *far* too long, the fire cut out, the floor glowing bright red except for the circle we were standing on, the walls melting. The Spy paused, a masculine, *“Really?*” muttered even as Mouse hurled a knife at him, which he dodged, caching a sword-blow to the back that dented his armor as he fell forward.

Shooting his hands down, more plasma started to pour from them, but it shot him back towards her. She started to dodge, before her eyes went wide, realizing he was going to miss her *on purpose*, teleporting away before she could be hosed down with his exhaust.

However, I wasn’t idle, and fallowed him, moving faster than he could, using a bit of Light to accelerate me, knowing it’d be lost in the flames, and caught up to him, slugging him in the gut as his power gave out, sending him flying as I shattered his armor.

He shifted as I didn’t stop my pursuit, yellying “Safe!” and Mouse was back, hitting the ground at a run beside me and hurling a dagger towards the know stunningly beautiful woman in silks, who turned to us, barely dodging the weapon as she asked, voice leaden with her power of Seductive Song *“****Why can’t we be friends?”***

Karen stopped, and I almost did too, but my vision went red with rage. “Is that fucking *Smashmouth!”* I roared, infusing my sword with momentum and hurling it towards her, more letting it go then actually throwing it.

It struck true, piercing her heart, half her body gone in an instant and the wall behind her destroyed as the blade didn’t stop. She dropped, form shifting again into someone familiar, spewing a dark grey ash over everything.

I hesitated, the mental whiplash of the effect making me stumble, even in mid-air. Mouse did as well, shaking her head even as I read the newest morph’s power. “Mouse, out!” I yelled, as the ash caught fire, and she teleported out as the wave of heat washed over and around me, the woman reborn, whole but missing her costume over half her torso, rose from the burning material.

I started to close again, but she extinguished the ash, shifting to Mouse, and disappeared. She, however, teleported out with an *actively marked dagger.* I smiled, Teleporting even as Quinn tried to tell me “She’s on-” appearing to one side of her, the *real* Mouse on the other, her blade and my fist arcing in from to different directions. We hit, her blade cutting deep into the spy’s arm as my fist hit her ribs a half second after. My strike only starting to sink in, and I felt her ribs break under her armor, when the imposter teleported away.

Mouse grabbed me and we followed her, to a Mark Mouse had left up top, out of the base and in the ruins of Brockton Bay, and into *hell.* My defences slammed into place, Aerokinesis, Acoustokinesis, Stellar Negation, and Projectile Protection all acting in concert as I came face to face with a living explosion.

Before I could even concentrate on it, Area Teleportation flexed, shoving Mouse back the way I came, as Projectile Protection failed, my shields broke, the force shoving me flying backwards into a building, breaking more shields.

The continuous explosions shut off, and I flew back through the building, blowing it out with a wave of hand and a spark, setting off a directed explosion, showering the area with rubble as I flew out.

Alexandria was there.

She didn’t so much as flinch as a piece of concrete bounced off her helmet, staring at me, half her costume gone. “She’s gone Tirumvirate,” I announced, “Stay back.”

The spy just stared at me. “What *are* you?” she demanded, incredulous.

“Fuckin’ *pissed,”* I replied, moving forward to punch her, only for her to fly backwards faster than I could move, arms folded, floating as she just looked at me in disbelief.

“That was *Ashbeast,”* The fake-Alexandria commented, with more emotion than the original would ever show. Now that I knew what to look for, I could pick out her underlying power, underpinning a model of Temporal Stasis, peaking out through the cracks.

I shrugged, flicking a hand out, chambering a metal spike under my costume, grown from the metal that ran through me, and filling it with Momentum. It wouldn’t do shit against *Alexandria*, but if she shifted, she was dead. I couldn’t make out the details, covered up as the power was. The spy had to see the original, but see didn’t mean the same kind of ‘see’ that I used. I didn’t know if there was a time-limit, or a use-limit, or anything else.

“Doesn’t this all seem a bit much for a simple spy job?” I asked, waving in the direction of Eclipse. We both knew she could shift to Mouse and teleport back in if she wanted, *or could she?* I didn’t like flying in the dark like this, but it was the way most had to fight. Didn’t mean I had to like it.

“You *killed* me,” she shot back, seething.

The Momentum in the shot was reaching dangerous levels. I moved it to the top of my arm, shifting my costume to launch it, and starting to charge a second. “You got better,” I quipped, waiting for her next move. “Better question, why be a spy? With your power you could help-”

“I don’t *have* to protect *anyone,*” she shot back, glaring. “But I’m protecting *everyone.*”

I laughed, “So you work for Cauldron? Figures.”

 She looked at me, confused, though given that she was a *spy,* her statement of, “*Who?*” meant *nothing.*

“So, did you find what you wanted?” I asked in turn.

“I got enough,” she told me. “And you’re gonna let me go, I’m going to tell *everyone.*”

I snorted, “And I should just *trust your word?*”

She looked at me, and while her eyes were covered by a mask, the set of her mouth made her disbelief clear. “You think you can take *her?”* she demanded, motioning to herself.

“I think you aren’t as good as they are, or you would’ve hit me already,” I observed, as I enclosed the area with a dome of hardened air, as we both floated, slowly circling each other.

She gave a bitter laugh, “Your funeral.” Blurring forwards almost faster than I could follow, she slammed into my re-formed chest shield with a fist, not bothering to defend against my answering cross right into her jaw. With the crack of breaking bone, I hit her, *hard,*

She was launched to the side, and I unloaded the Momentum Spike into her back. It hit with an ear-splitting *CRACK,* firing her into another building.

I waited, a shell of hardened air around me as I waited, not sure if that’d killed her, done nothing, or somewhere in-between. Either way, I readied the next spike, still filling it with momentum.

A piece of rubble flew at me, and a hexagonal shield caught it, shattering, but bleeding off enough energy that it just bounced off the air-shield, breaking it but not all the way through.

“I’m *Alexandria!”* the faker screamed, “What the Fuck *Are You!* Why can’t I *Be You!?”*

She was holding her mouth, blood pouring over her lips, but otherwise unharmed. *Melee only,* I noted, almost clinically, the Spike not having carried my ability to negate her power. Even then, if I’d fully negated her power she *wouldn’t have a head*, so the counter wasn’t complete.

Given that she seemed to *actually* be just as strong as the original, that was vital intelligence.

Her question however, had an obvious answer. *Blank.* However her power worked, there was some kind of -cognition power, not pre- probably, that allowed it to function. Not that I was going to answer her. “I’m just so awesome I broke the mold,” I quipped, opening up a hole in the shield, ready for her to shift and run.

She did, but she dashed to the side, breaking through the dome without stopping. I gave chase, and I could see her form shift, spotting a second power, Perfect Mind. I wanted to fire, but behind her was where our people were still working, and I couldn’t risk hitting them. She vanished with a pop, and I got there in a second, the area feeling. . . *odd.* Like it was half here, half somewhere-else.

I could feel one of my powers tugging at me, and I let it activate, Area Teleportation pulling me to a wide open field. A wide open *empty* field. Looking around, feeling with every sense I had, there was. . . *nothing.*

“Fuck!” I swore, flying up and looking around. “Overwatch, the spy come back?”

“*They didn’t*,” he told me. “*What happened in the city?*”

“She turned into fuckin’ *Ashbeast,*” I swore, freezing as a thought struck me. “How’s Mouse?”

“*She’s fine,”* Quinn reassured me. *“Beaten and burned but-*”

“I’m fried and mashed, but this Mouse is ready to bring the cheese of Justice!” Karen called, but her voice was hoarse.

Now high, high above the ground, I could make out mountains in the distance. “Spy turned to Strider and bailed. I was able to follow, but she must’ve shifted again and used something I couldn’t track.

I saw a flicker of movement below me, and fired, the Momentum Spike hitting like a bomb, sending dirt flying in every direction. “Wait!” I called, creating and charging another Spike. Nothing moved. “Fuck, must’ve been a rabbit.”

I pretended to relax, but the Spy didn’t take the chance to run, or blind-side me, or anything. “Okay, she’s, he’s, *it’s* probably gone.” I waited, but there was still no movement. “Okay, where the fuck *am* I?”

*“Inner Mongolia,*” was the answer.

“Damn, these things have good coverage,” I sighed, shooting my last Spike into the ground to get rid of it. “Allright, coming back.”

Warping back, I returned to my sword, which was embedded in a wall. Yanking it out, not really sure what to do, I started to walk out through the thankfully empty office area, most of the base still not in use yet. The walls were still glowing red, and I slowly worked my way down it, gradually cooling it off to not further damage the metal.

Returning to the room where we’d confronted the spy, Vicky and Amy weren’t there, and neither was the latin woman who’d been thrown at us. The gas had dispersed, and the other workers were still on the ground.

They weren’t moving.

Grimacing, I moved to one and knelt down next to her, her skin purple and splotchy. Knowing it probably wouldn’t work, but having to try anyways, I pulled back the tips of my gloves, I reached down, putting my hand on her face, the skin coming off at my touch, like a shocked tomato. I tried to push my power out into her, to give her my immunity to poisons, but nothing happened.

Panacea’s power didn’t work on the dead.

“Any injured?” I asked, standing, looking around the room, committing their faces to memory. More dead. Did I bury them with the Leviathan dead? No, I’m sure their families would want them. *Shit,* I thought, *their families.* They’d known this would be dangerous, we were literally in the Green Zone, working in an underground base. That didn’t make the fact that I’d lost people that depended on me hurt any less.

“*Only a few burned; Panacea is healing them now.*”

I nodded, focusing on the Mark that Mouse was carrying. She flinched as I appeared, one eye open, the other a ruined socket, charred skin around it, having been caught by the heat outside of my negation range. “How do I look, Vejy?” she asked, giving out a shuddering cough.

Without thinking I dismissed her helmet and mask, revealing half her face blackened and burned, and reached up, toughing her bruised, but unburned, cheek. “Jesus Christ, Mouse,” I swore, healing her. “You shoulda said something, I would’ve come straight here and healed you!”

She nodded weakly. “But you were after the dick that did this,” she objected, the strain in her voice easing as her flesh started to regrow.

“Well, they got away,” I muttered darkly. “And she might be able to come back again. . .” I trailed off, thinking of what I’d seen of the spy’s power, focusing on something that wasn’t the dead or my wounded teammate. “You okay with a slight complexion change?

Karen stared at me, before nodding, once, the burns on her neck flaking and causing her to narrow her eyes as she hissed in pain.

Familiar with doing this from working on the Replicants, I tweaked her just a little, making her a tad bit paler, un-reddening her cheeks a tad, shifting her a bit closer to Irish instead of the french-spanish coloring she had before. I still kept healing her, and had to change the skin as it healed, looking unnaturally two-toned otherwise.

Finishing up the healing, her eye re-generated, I unbraided her hair while she waited, holding it out and using it as a guide as I re-grew what’d been burnt off. “You probably want it cut by someone who knows what the fuck they’re doing, but. . .” I waved towards the mirror that sat beside her hospital bed. She hesitantly moved, looking herself over.

“Why?” she asked, curious, not complaining.

“I’m *not* one-hundred-percent sure, but the spy needs to have seen you to be you. If you no longer look like, well, *you,* then I *think* the power won’t work,” I offered. It’d just been snippets, glanced when the infiltrator had shifted forms, but I *should* be right here. “Hopefully they won’t be able to instantly enter the base through your Marks now. Um, you okay?”

“I am now,” Mouse told me, with a smile, and I turned away to go help heal the others. “Hey, Vejy-mite,” she said, grabbing my elbow and turning me back. “This isn’t your fault.”

I blinked, “But if I-”

She reached forward to put a hand over my mouth, bouncing off my helmet, but I stopped talking anyways. “We’ll talk ‘bout this, but until *we* agree this is your fault, this isn’t your fault.”

“That’s not how fault works,” I tried to argue.

She winced, “Just. . . go heal, and come talk to me. Okay? We’ll have a meeting, I know how you love your meetings,” she joked. “But, not right now, okay?”

“Fine, I’ll find you after,” I agreed, turning away and hurrying off to heal those that wouldn’t have been injured if I’d been better, the image of the dead woman several floors below joining the hundreds of others that rested in the back of my mind.

The people that were dead because I wasn’t strong enough, hadn’t done enough, and who were now gone forever because of me.