

My Hero Automata

(Chapters 103-106)

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Obvious Disclaimer: I do not own My Hero Academia or Nier! Both stories would be very different if I did...

Chapter 103: Reformation and Cleanup

It was only a day later than the new additions to their team began filtering in. Some of them weren't properly 'new,' instead being previous members returned from needing extended healing. Specifically, Bakugo, Hado and Fuwa had all three returned from among the students. With Gunhead and Present Mic both back as well. Present Mic was a surprise, given he was still missing an eye. But, apparently, he'd been cleared and was in surprisingly good spirits despite the injury he'd taken. The man's irrepressible nature was obviously more than a persona he donned for the public, and he'd taken to making everyone groan with pirate jokes on a regular basis. Not that they weren't glad to see him bouncing back, but puns at high-volume were even worse than normal puns. Double the pain for the same questionable groaners.

Of course, even aside from the dead, not all of those who had been injured would be returning. Some had taken career-ending injuries beyond current medical ability to repair. Though, in that respect, there was some hope for many of them in the form of Eri's previous success with All Might. That particular gamble had been something of a desperation move in the early days of the Invasion, and had been far *less* of a risk than in most cases precisely because All Might's injuries had been fairly old. The fact the man himself was also old enough that a few extra years having been accidentally shaved off in the risky procedure had only been a boon...was also a factor.

A rather important one, in point of fact, as it wasn't true for the younger injured heroes. Eri would need quite a bit more control before they could risk most of the truly grievously injured to her Quirk. Thankfully, rather than being pressured by others, the little girl herself had become extremely determined as a result of her success with All Might. With a little luck, she might gain enough control in a year or so to be able to return many or most of those with crippling injuries to the field. They could hope so, anyway. Just as they could hope that they might eventually learn enough from their enemies to figure out how to duplicate and manipulate healing Quirks. Some of the Invaders were able to heal better than pretty much anything anyone short of Eri could manage, and numerous Think-Tanks were pouring over everything Izumi had been able to provide about QE/MASO theory in an attempt to duplicate such those feats of healing.

That was in the future, however, if it happened at all. For now, they had to draw on the still able-bodied pool of Heroes and Heroines to get their reinforcements. Given the nature of the threat, they'd gotten first call on that pool, save for critical individuals needed for Greater Gate containment. So no All Might or Endeavor, but a broad availability of others to choose from. Given that their assigned city to secure against Trigger bombs was *Tokyo*, with its massive urban sprawl,

they had to pick and choose carefully. Mount Lady, for example, despite having been a major help at the Bristol Gate and on Nabu Island, would be a poor choice for operation in such dense urban areas.

Thus, the most well-known names they'd added to their number for this operation were Edgeshot and Hawks. Pulled from the Yokohama and Osaka Gate Containment Zones respectively. Ectoplasm and Hound Dog from UA, Ragdoll from the Wild Wild Pussycats, and a normally rescue-focused hero named Searchlight had all been recruited for their specific abilities to help canvas areas and track enemies. X-less, Burnin, and Kamui Woods had filled in some additional missing firepower. Lastly, Utsushimi Camie, now going by Mist Me, was joined by an older pro named Illusionist to provide them some additional stealth and ambush options.

Showcasing just how serious the operation was, there were a total of 25 Heroes that were tagged as part of the operation. Including no less than four of the most recent Top 10 Heroes prior to the Invasion. Despite the theoretical seniority of those four, it was actually Gang Orca that was acting in overall charge of the group this time. It had been discovered early on during Clean Slate that his experience leading a relatively large agency, one with numerous sidekicks, had given him a better ability to hold the complex tactical picture of multiple teams in mind during an operation. Only Izumi was better at that, due to her multi-threading and Hypercognition abilities, and as a student she wasn't *nearly* senior enough to be put in a leadership position.

The entire group, who had been briefed individually as they trickled in, was now in a large conference room, nearly a small auditorium really, with Gang Orca standing in the presenter's position. As the last person took their seat, he began the presentation that the remaining original Clean Slate crew had worked out while awaiting the arrival of their reinforcements.

"Alright, everyone. You've all been briefed on the basic situation. Our target is the Humarise cell based in Tokyo. Due to infighting and defectors, we *do* have the locations of two of their facilities, along with a tentative timetable for their plan. What we *don't* have, yet, is the location of the Trigger Bombs. In light of that, our mission is actually divided into two segments. The first will consist of two search teams, each of which will be *stealthily* infiltrating the two known bases. The goal will be to both search the bases and, potentially just as importantly, tagging the occupants."

Gang Orca triggered a slide on the projector behind him, showing two teams listed. The first consisted of Mist Me, Edgeshot, Hound Dog, and Searchlight. The second team consisted of Illusionist, Ragdoll, Jirou, and Izumi.

"These two teams are built around the abilities of Mist Me and Illusionist. Both of whom are capable of hiding the rest of their teams under illusions, enabling them to somewhat brazenly search the facilities in question. Hound Dog, Searchlight, Jirou, and Izumi all have some form of enhanced senses they will be using to guide the two teams around any enemy patrols of both bases, as well as singling out enemies to tag via their team's respective means. Meanwhile Searchlight, Edgeshot and Izumi have farther abilities that will help you bypass internal security systems, electronic or physical."

In Izumi's case, of course, that was her cyberpathy. There was virtually no chance any electronic system Humarise could come up with could defeat her ability to spoof it. It pretty much

required another cyberpath to even detect her and 2B, let alone stop them from accessing anything even vaguely digital. Searchlight, meanwhile, had an interesting ability to move himself and others through light beams. Between himself and Edgeshot, there shouldn't be any physical security in their team's target base that they could avoid, disable or bypass.

“Hopefully, they will find the bombs. In which case, they will secure them and call in the remaining teams for a full assault. In the event they do *not*, however, Ragdoll and Hound Dog will be the next link in our chain. Ragdoll possesses the ability to ‘tag’ up to one hundred individuals, and will tag every member of Humarise she can so they can be tracked to other locations. Locations that might reveal the whereabouts of the bombs, assuming they aren't in either base we know about. Meanwhile, Hound Dog will be performing a similar role. His Quirk allows him to track scents for dozens of kilometers, and his team will have special scent markers they can and will apply to every individual in *their* base. In this way, we will be able to map the movements of Humarise and identify other members or locations of interest.”

A listing of other teams replaced the scout teams, letting everyone see who they'll be working with. Bakugo and Burnin in particular looked like a potentially vicious combination, and all of them look solid as heavy assault teams.

“We have one additional bit of good news, which is going to make all of this work. A remaining member of Humarise who doesn't want to burn the world down like an idiot managed to contact some of the defectors. Because of how tight security has gotten since the Invasion, and in light of the defectors, Humarise has cut all contact between its cells. The entire operation is now on a synchronized countdown timer set for 5 days, 12 hours, and 32 minutes from now.”

He stopped to let that sink in for a moment, much of the room tensing at the news they were on a tight deadline for certain.

“While that puts pressure on us, it's honestly mostly advantageous. It means that individual groups in each of the 25 cities that are under threat can execute their own operations *without* Humarise knowing that their cells are being eliminated one by one. Of course, if anyone fucks up and they see on the news that a Trigger Bomb goes off, they could still set off their own. Which makes it *absolutely imperative* that we don't fuck up. Got it?”

Sober nods and ‘yes sirs’ came from all corners. Gang Orca nodded gravely right back.

“Right. We don't have a lot of time, but we'd be stupid to rush into this without the various teams getting some time to work out a system together. For the next two days, we do just that. The scout teams go in at midnight two days from *now*. Which will give us three and a half to find and secure the bombs in Tokyo. Gather into your teams and head out to Urban Simulation Ground Beta. All of your teams have at least one UA staff or student on your teams, so they can show you the way.”

There was quiet shuffling and murmurs as each group gathered to get moving...

Nedzu, Eraserhead and Grand Torino exchanged speaking glances as the room fell silent. Across from them sat a devastated looking Aoyama Yuga and his parents. The telepathic

interrogation of Doctor Garaki had, at last, finally revealed who the mole at UA was. Given the potential effects on morale if it became known, Nedzu had decided to take only his favorite minion and the extremely experienced veteran Hero with him as he sorted out what to do with the resulting mess. Eraserhead was mostly useless against a terrorist group with very few Quirk users anyway, and Grand Torino simply wasn't a frontline fighter these days. He'd been helping, quietly, with the retraining of response teams still being cycled through UA. But he just flat out didn't have the physical stamina for more than that any longer, despite his incredible skills.

It was thus relatively easy to arrange for the two not to be missed for the time being, while they made a pointed visit to figure out what to do with the particularly ticklish problem that this represented. A visit they'd deliberately timed to coincide with the initial meeting of the Clean Slate teams going after Humarise. Izumi and 2B were, by far, the most likely individuals to not-so-accidentally stumble upon what they were attempting to keep quiet. Given the careful timing, even those two would be too heavily focused on the Humarise issue and their new teams to spot Nedzu, Torino, and Eraserhead sneaking off at this exact moment.

The Aoyama parents had attempted to bluff and lie.

Aoyama Yuga had not.

To the young man's credit, he'd done his best to unflinchingly pour out every detail he knew about the affair. How he'd been born Quirkless, the deal his parents had made with All for One, and every action since All for One had returned to threaten them. He had, so far as they could tell, left absolutely nothing out. He'd described the information he'd leaked that had led to the USJ attack, along with revealing that he'd been able to pass along to All for One which of the Terrain Training Camps Yaoyorozu and Midoriya had chosen to attend. He'd even freely admitted that he'd been recently reactivated by Garaki and passed on information about UA's weakened defenses.

The problem was that he'd also lied in the information he'd passed on.

Since the death of All for One, Yuga had been carefully editing what he gave the League. He'd hoped that, without their boss, they wouldn't be able to verify the information. His efforts a fumbling attempt toward luring the League into making a mistake based on the faulty information. His parents had been completely shocked when he'd explained that, proving that the young man must have been doing it entirely on his own initiative. As a way to attempt to limit the damage he was doing. It might even have worked to destroy the League faster, if they'd executed their attack on UA while the Jaku raid team was still readily at hand.

Adding to that was the lack of actual, effective, harm he'd done. The worst that could be laid *partially* at his feet was the death of a number of Coast Guard and JMSDF sailors during the Nomu attacks related to the Water Terrain Training Camp. Even there, Aoyama hadn't had a clue *where* that training was taking place, due to the compartmentalization that UA had put into place precisely to limit exposure from a possible traitor. Meaning that All for One had gained the information about where the training was happening all on his own, from entirely different sources. Yuga was still *partially* to blame in that instance, as he'd allowed the villain to narrow his scope. But that partial blame was also essentially the only effective action he'd taken. The USJ had failed, and the League had been unable to make use of his information about UA.

All of which had to be weighed against two other factors. One, that he'd been coerced via direct threat to his family's lives in the first place. Two, that after the Invasion started he'd thrown himself into frontline action at every chance. Both to limit how much useful information he could provide about the Heroes, *and* as an attempt to assuage his own guilt for the actions he'd taken. He'd been injured, more than once, throwing himself between civilians and Invaders, and done a great deal of good in the roles he'd volunteered for since the fighting against them began.

His actions since the Invasion began were legitimately Heroic.

Morale, riding high among his classmates right now with the League's defeat, would nosedive if his status as a spy was outed at this time.

Silently, all three men acknowledged that they were going to have to come up with an alternative solution. These three couldn't be allowed to get off scot-free. Yet, they couldn't afford to out this publicly. It would take an effective combatant off the field, while doing nothing but damage to morale. Nedzu thought very carefully through a dozen different possible options, before arriving at one that he felt would satisfy everyone *enough*. Not fully. He doubted that was possible. But enough.

"I think, that the three of you are about to become volunteers in a new program. The military is looking to form as many people as they can into trained militias. I do believe that you two," Nedzu stabbed a finger at the parents, "are about to make a sizable donation, much of your family fortune in fact, to that effort. As well as volunteer your time to help with their logistics setup, since both of you have experience with such things."

Nedzu's gaze shifted to Yuga, even as his parents slumped in a mix of relief and despair. They were not precisely good people, but they weren't horrible ones either. For them, loss of their considerable wealth and the constant fear they'd already been living under would be punishment enough.

"You, young man, are going to also volunteer. You have enough combat experience and training at this point to help teach civilian volunteers' basics of defending their homes. It will not be glamorous. You will not receive the accolades and prestige of a Hero. But you will be able to repay the damage you have done by protecting others."

Unlike his parents, Yuga didn't flinch or slump at the idea. Instead, he only bowed his head.

"I do not deserve even that much, Dean. Thank you for the mercy of at least allowing me to do *something* to help."

Nedzu nodded. Despite everything, the young man legitimately had a Heroic core to him. He had simply been forced to choose between family and the right thing. Not a decision easily made, and one Nedzu wasn't equipped to be the judge of the right or wrong of. His morality wasn't exactly aligned with humanity, after all. Though the fact that Eraserhead and Tornio both looked grimly satisfied with the option he'd selected assured him he'd gotten it more or less right this time. It wasn't quite satisfying, given that it had been *his* territory this trio had threatened. But Nedzu could live with it. So long as he got the traitor *out* of that territory.

He would see this done, then wash his hands of the matter. Whether the young man would ever feel he had absolved himself? Nedzu neither knew, nor cared. Perhaps the knowledge that it would likely haunt the traitor to his dying day would be punishment enough, in a way. Perhaps it would not. But at least it was one loose end tied up without costing them more resources at a time where they had entirely too few resources to waste...

Chapter 104: Tag, You're It

Izumi tapped Illusionist on her shoulder, the thirty-year-old woman in a tuxedo-like magician's outfit-cum-leotard nodded silently and her fingers twitched. With that twitch, the hardlight illusion that had duplicated a blank wall went from a static fixture to a mobile form of optical cameo, even as the rest of the team carefully filed behind her. The group of four Humarise grunts coming in together was their best chance yet, and Izumi had silently used her cyberpathy to trigger a tiny glitch in the false door, disguised as a wall, as the group approached it.

To their credit, the group of terrorists checked their surroundings carefully before activating the hidden security panel, causing a section of wall inside the old warehouse to retract slightly inward and slide aside. With Illusionist making them all invisible, though, the terrorists didn't see them despite only being an arm length away. Better yet, the overall noise of the semi-active warehouse covered any possibility of their team being detected by sound. The three men and one woman slipped into the hidden entrance once it fully open and, normally, it would have closed so quickly after them as to be impossible to follow. The very slight delay Izumi had caused, which wasn't quite enough to be *truly* out of place, was just long enough for the four infiltrators to slip in behind the quartet.

All of them did their best *not* to breathe sighs of relief as none of the group looked back, where they could have potentially noticed the slight visual distortion as the optical cameo failed to keep up with the team's rapid movements. Illusionist's Quirk was *extremely* useful, but every Quirk had its limitations. In Illusionist's case, it was an increasingly large lag in the image the faster you moved.

Take things slow and steady? You might as well be perfectly invisible from an extremely broad spectrum of light extending well into the infrared and ultraviolet wavelengths. Far more than the Mark I standard human eyeball could even detect. Move at a fast walk? There would be just enough visual distortion that someone sharp enough might notice. Try to run? There'd be a visible motion blur that would be *extremely* obvious in good light. Though it could still be missed somewhat easily in the dark.

Given the fast-walk that'd needed to perform to get through the secret door behind the terrorists, there would have been at least *some* visual distortion. Though the dim light of that part of the warehouse would have made it harder to pick out, there had still been a small risk. Thankfully, none of the group had even glanced back, despite the door taking slightly-longer-than-usual to slide closed. On the digital side, of course, Izumi had easily been able to edit the blur out in real time. So the security room had never had a chance to see a thing. Sadly, it would have been a tad too obvious to open the door with no one going through it. The annoyingly competent terrorist cell had

used a physical pressure switch combined with the electronic sliding door in an effective-though-crude method to keep merely hacking the door from being enough to get in.

Honestly, she supposed they should have expected this level of paranoia from a group that had a hate-on for Quirks. They probably spent their sleepless nights thinking of all the way people with Quirks could screw them over or something. Well, whatever. Now they were past the outer security, and she'd already gotten a good feel for the layout of the building via the hacks she *had* slipped into the system. Sadly, there were lots of sections, including entire storerooms, where the cameras didn't cover. Which meant they were going to have to physically check them all for the bombs. Not to mention canvass the entire underground lair with Jirou's sonar and her own sensors to check for any extra hidden spaces.

Finally letting out the sigh she'd been holding in as the quartet they'd followed gained a safe distance from them, Izumi flashed a new set of directions on the team's HSN displays. Despite her relative lack of seniority, the fact she could mentally coordinate via messages on the team's HUDs meant Izumi was calling the shots inside the building. They'd worked out a system of physical cues that Jirou could give her to warn of anything she detected herself. But, otherwise, the group was radio silent and reliant on Izumi giving directions via their HSN-linked heads up displays. Unlike Mist Me on the other team, Illusionist couldn't cover sound, so it was the best working solution they'd been able to come up with on short notice.

Now, they all moved forward in as close to sync as they could manage with only a day to practice, to make it easier for Illusionist to keep the group covered. At Izumi's direction, the headed straight down to the bottom levels of the underground lair. It was the area with the most blank spots in security, so it made the logical place to start in Izumi's judgement. They could work their way back up from there...

Nearly five hours later a sweating Illusionist *finally* let their cameo drop for that last time, in a small office they'd hijacked three buildings over from the warehouse.

"Fuuuuuccckkk, that was tense. And we didn't even *find* anything."

Ragdoll and Jirou, both equally strained looking, groaned their own agreement without the need for words. The four of them had searched the building from bottom to top, even including a couple of hidden rooms and the *security office itself*. There had been at least a dozen close calls where they'd nearly been run into, or run out of room to maneuver and hide in. Twice, they'd had to stop in security blind spots to let Illusionist mentally recover a bit. Once, Jirou had needed to create a decoy noise with her jacks by reaching *past* someone at the last second to make them switch directions.

Three times, Izumi had nearly missed physical security measures that would have given them away, for particularly secure rooms. Only cramming a bunch of advice from some breaking and entering experts in the last day having allowed her to spot them. The worst part, of course, was that it was exactly as Illusionist had said. They hadn't found a single trace of the bombs. Ragdoll spoke next, voice a bit hoarse from lack of use.

“Well, I got all 87 of the ones present at this base tagged, at least. And we know one place that the bombs *aren't*. Hopefully, the other team had better luck. If not, one of the people I tagged might still lead us to them.”

True, of course. There was a reason this was a multilayered plan. It had still been an agonizingly tense five hours with no immediate reward, though. Well, they'd just have to check in at Might Tower, which they were using as a Central Hub for this operation, and find out what they'd learned from all this. What the other team had discovered, as well as what 2B might have gotten out of some of the offline systems Izumi had connected her to while in the base. 2B hadn't been reporting anything she found datamining the enemy as they went to Izumi, since it would have been a distraction when Izumi needed all her concentration. Though she would have at least alerted them if she'd found mention of the bombs. Meaning Izumi wasn't overly hopeful about that angle...

“So we came up empty at both sites.”

Grimaces crossed faces and groans sounded through the room as the reduced group went over what they'd found. While everyone was being sent the data, it just wasn't practical to have twenty-five people chiming in on every detail. As such, only members from the scout teams, plus Gang Orca, Ryukyu, Miruko and Midnight were present. Even from the search teams, Hound Dog and Searchlight were out actively following scent trails that had left the second base. Reduced to just ten people, the group was a bit easier to manage, and the remainder of the various teams were getting in more training time together in the meantime.

Unfortunately, Miruko's blunt statement was entirely too accurate. The team led by Edgeshot hadn't had any better luck than Izumi's team. Less, really, since they hadn't had the ability to tag people quite as effectively as Ragdoll. Said Heroine was only minimally participating in the conversation herself, busy marking the movements of the people she was tracking on a digital display that was being repeated on a larger wall-map display for the rest of them. Izumi pointed out the only high note they currently had.

“We did get some information from the data mining 2B did. The bombs *were* at the base my team searched and were only moved two days ago. She's busy using every camera she can hack in the area to try and track any vehicles that could have moved them. They aren't, from the data we got, exactly small.”

Ryukyu nodded acknowledgement of that, taking over the conversation next.

“True. And if anyone can find any or all of them that way it's 2B. Tokyo has a *lot* of traffic to track, even for her and even with so much shut down because of the Invasion, though.”

That was, unfortunately, true. Tokyo might have taken a lot of damage during the Era of Chaos, descending at times into something of a near cyberpunk dystopia, but it remained the largest population center in Japan. Moreover, All Might hadn't built his tower here for no reason. It had, at the time he did so, been the area of the country in most desperate need of being forcefully straightened out. Under his influence, the city had revitalized and flourished, becoming one massive signal and representation of the Era of Peace he'd ushered in for Japan.

That didn't mean the police and military that guarded it had forgotten.

Quite the opposite, in point of fact. When the city had been slowly reclaimed and rebuilt, it had been *fortified* as well. During the period where no one was sure the new peace would last, a lot of defensive infrastructure had been put in place, and a *lot* of Hero agencies that were more willing to work with the police and military were encouraged to plant in the city. Moreover, due to the high amount of *governmental* infrastructure that remained anchored to the city, those defenses had been quietly maintained to a significant degree even as the peace stretched on.

The result was that it fared *far* better than it should have, given the sheer population density, during the early days of the Invasion. Even now, because of the governmental complexes here and dense population, it was among the first places that Izumi's RADS arrays were being deployed. Combined with the permanent presence of *multiple* Rift Rapid Response teams constantly deploying, and a significant chunk of Tokyo was functioning. Not at its normal levels of commerce, no. But at high enough levels to actually produce significant traffic on the roads again. Combined with the damage all over the city, which left gaps in camera coverage that wouldn't normally be there, even 2B was facing a bit of a nightmare slog to try and crunch enough data and piece it all together.

"I've got something interesting here. Interesting and fucking disturbing."

Surprisingly, it was Jirou that had spoken up. She'd clearly been feeling out of her depth enough among this group that she'd barely spoken, but now she was reaching forward to connect several points that had markers showing tracked Humanise members moving about. Her tracing on the map highlighted where her finger had been...and then she pointed at the rough area that was in the middle of the points she'd traced.

"The rebuild Tokyo Dome. Guess what it's being used for right now?"

More than one person cursed as they realized what Jirou was alluding to. Miruko, not exactly shockingly, was the voice that was heard over the others.

"Fucking bastards! There are over *150,000* refugee civilians currently housed in that dome!"

Jirou's voice was grimly horrified as she pointed out what they were all now mentally reeling from the realization of.

"The vast, vast majority of whom have *Quirks*. Which means a stupidly high concentration of targets for their unstable Trigger. Exactly what they want for maximum impact. Who wants to bet as we get more of a picture of where they are moving, that there's a similar pattern around other major refugee areas?"

Even Miruko was looking pale and horrified as they all stared, quite the feat on her darkly tanned complexion. It took long moments for Gang Orca to speak into the abrupt void of sound.

"We can't be certain yet, but it makes too much sense. Resolution, SonicWave, Illusionist. I want you three to deploy to *quietly* search the area around the Dome *now*. We'll keep tracking from here, looking for more patterns. And I'm going to send a quiet word along to the international teams. If *one* cell is trying this, it's possible all of them are. Virtually every major city has mass refugee

facilities right now, because of the Invasion. And SonicWave is right, they'd make *perfect* targets by the standards of these lunatics."

Nodding firmly, despite still being a little worn down, all three of those named were up and moving almost before he could finish giving the order...

All three of the scouts held perfectly still, tense. A tension that probably had something to do with the fact they were less than two meters from a bomb bigger than Jirou. It had taken an hour of searching through various underground passages, some of them old enough not to even be on modern maps, discovered only via Izumi's sensors or Jirou's sonar. But they *had* managed to find one of the locations that the Humarise terrorists were vanishing into. Part of a no-longer-stable subway system, the terrorists must have had one of their rare Quirked members open it up. Certainly, the *vents* that had been carved to push the high-pressure cloud of unstable, aerosolized Trigger out to a dozen places, post-detonation of the bomb, were new.

There were also three of the terrorists present, which was adding to the tension as Izumi ran every single scanner she had over the bomb. Finally, she sent a bug-out signal to the other two, and they veryyyy slowly and carefully backed away from the bomb and terrorists alike. They had to wait for a window where none of said terrorists were looking, to get back out the escape tunnel. They managed it with a little patience, and immediately made to break contact completely. Once in a relatively safe place, confirmed by Jirou, they connected back to the Might Tower central base via their HSN links. The moment Gang Orca picked up, Izumi spoke.

"We've found one of the bombs. I've just sent you the location, including video feed. I also got a good spectrometry scan of the explosives their using. I highly recommend you start getting our backup and trusted JSDF people to sneak detection equipment onto the various JSDF vehicles moving about the city on patrol. With any luck, that will let us pin down all the bomb sites in a few hours. Unless you have any other orders, we'll circle the Dome doing the same thing and pinpointing exact entry vectors for any more of the bombs here."

There was a long few seconds of pause as Gang Orca processed that, then his voice came back strong.

"Agreed. Get moving on checking around the Dome, but don't get spotted. We'll working on getting a pattern established to cover the city with detectors, now that we know exactly what we're looking for."

The connection cut abruptly, and Izumi turned to Illusionist and Jirou.

"Well, let's get moving you two. The faster we find these, the less likely some assholes gets a chance to set them off."

Firm nods came from both women, despite their visible tiredness. Moments later, they were moving on to the next site that Ragdolls Quirk had noticed Humarise grunts grouping up at...

Chapter 105: Operation Idiot Swatter

This time, the location of the Clean Slate group was one of the largest and oldest high-security briefing rooms in Might Tower. Built when Tokyo was still a mess and Might Tower wasn't even half completed, the old briefing room was actually *under* the Tower and more than large enough to handle their fully assembled group. That was particularly important this time, as all twenty-five Heroes were present, plus Captain Mikto and all five JSDF Lieutenants serving at platoon commanders under him. Gang Orca was once more in control of the meeting, standing on a small, raised platform with a projection of the city behind him. That projection was marked with the known location of all Trigger Bombs, along with the two Humanise central bases. In total, there were twelve bomb locations marked. Not as bad as it could have been, but still horrific.

"Alright, ladies and gentlemen. This is the final briefing prior to Operation Idiot Swatter."

The name of the operation got some snorts and smiles, which the Hero let die down before he continued.

"Despite the name, sadly, these people are only idiots in a single sense. In all other ways, they've set up an *extremely* solid operation. One that, according to our international counterparts, they've managed to repeat more than a dozen times over throughout the world. In the rest, they were thankfully a little less competent, with several cells having been caught based on the information we passed their hunters. Fourteen potentially devastating operations remain active, including ours. And we have only 36 hours remaining until their scheduled start time."

That sobered the room up completely, and Gang Orca let the near dead-silence hang for long seconds, making sure he had everyone's full attention.

"That said. Our focus has to be on our own part of the larger operation. The moment this meeting ends, the three small teams that have the combination of stealth and expertise needed will begin operations. The goal for those three teams is to sneak in and disable as many of the bombs as possible before the terrorist's notice. In an ideal world, we might get very lucky and they disable all of them before anyone catches on. As we very much don't live in such a world, each of your strike teams will be waiting to come down like the wrath of kami on your assigned targets. Anyone who has their target verified safe before the ant hill gets kicked over will redirect to the base raids."

There were nods all around, of course. While this was the final briefing before the operation kicked off, every individual team had already been briefed by someone in more detail. Including the JSDF platoons who were set up with various containment and neutralizing methods in case the worst happened and one or more of the bombs went off. Even one going off would be catastrophic, potentially affecting tens of thousands. But the JSDF units had enough chemical neutralizers and other countermeasures to at least keep the cloud of Trigger from spreading to include the *millions* that it would affect if it hit all of Tokyo.

"Alright. This is your last chance to bring up questions, concerns, or additional ideas folks. Anyone got anything?"

There was a long silence and a lot of shakings heads. It wasn't particularly surprising. They'd had nearly a full day since the first Bomb was located to work out the game plan and adapt to any suggestions. A few specific heroes had even been brought in and added to the JSDF units based on those suggestions. Such as a Backdraft and Cementoss, who were both now part of the

containment plans if things went to shit. Enough water would wash the trigger out of the air, and dense enough concrete could contain an explosion in the first place. Last resort measures, but ones that had to be thought through just in case.

“Very well. You all have your assignments. Get to it! Infiltration teams, you’re officially on the clock. Make sure to check in before and after each bomb site! Team leaders, check in once you’re on site at each location, the infiltration teams won’t go in until you’re in place near your site!”

Acknowledgments came quickly, and everyone moved with alacrity to get their individual parts of the operation underway...

Izumi breathed a near-silent sigh of relief as she cut the last connection to ensure the bomb she was working on was inert. Gesturing to Illusionist, the older woman nodded and shifted the currently-static illusion to a mobile one again. It took them a few moments to get proper line-of-sight on all three of the Humarise members present, but as soon as they did, Illusionist used a red dot only visible on the inside of her hard light projection to indicate which one she would go after. Izumi nodded, focusing on the other two and figuring out the best approach to get both of them quickly. Both were male, so the option was honestly obvious, and she quickly signaled back that she was ready as well.

An instant later, Illusionist’s hardlight projections switched from stealth to offense, quickly gagging and restraining the woman she’d chosen, even as Illusionist herself darted in and struck her target with a precise blow to the base of the neck that caused her to slump. The other two, Izumi’s targets, never had a chance to react either as Izumi had instantly accelerated into a blur, knocking one into the other then releasing a small amount of Midnight’s pheromone-gas that she’d captured into digital storage over the gasping pair.

While on women the pheromone sometimes took a few seconds, on men it was nearly instant, and both of them ceased struggling before they could even properly process what was going on. Izumi and Illusionist both quickly separated them from their manual detonators and comms devices, before Izumi keyed her HSN link and called it in.

“Central. Delta team confirms Delta-Three bomb and personnel disabled. Repeated confirm Delta-Three bomb and personnel disabled.”

The response was quick, the voice of the JDSF Lieutenant that had been earmarked for Central communications routing responding in a crisp, clear voice.

“Confirmed. Delta-Three, all targets disabled. Good work. Shifting your current strike team as extra support for Delta-Four.”

Izumi nodded, then spoke a quick confirmation. This was the third of four bombs that she and Illusionist had been assigned to disable. The combinations of Mist Me and Ectoplasm, and Edgeshot and Searchlight were each assigned to the other two sets of bombs. Ectoplasm proved to have the technical certifications for bomb disposal, while Edgeshot and Searchlight together could

work so fast as to disable all targets from a stealth entrance and then have a JSDF technical team disable their bombs. Izumi, of course, could have *built* better bombs in her sleep, almost literally. Given that she'd scanned and dissected the design for everyone else, no one had questioned her ability to disarm them.

She and Illusionist, having already worked together enough to gain a degree of familiarity, had been assigned to the Tokyo Dome bombs. This had been the third of four, with all going seamlessly so far. They all expected that to change with bomb Delta-4, for the simple reason that it was guarded by multiple of Humarise's Quirked terrorists. Ones fanatical enough to *know* they would die if and when the bombs went off, yet were present anyway. Even if Izumi managed to disable the Delta-4 bomb, there would be a fight to be had. The same was true with at least one bomb in every set, proving that this cell of Humarise, at least, were irritatingly competent.

Which also neatly explained why, this time, their unused backup was being directed to Delta-4 instead of folded into the two Base Raid teams. While it probably wasn't needed, the caution was justified given the stakes. After a minute to finish securing the unconscious terrorists with proper cuffs, to be picked up by JSDF as soon as all bombs were disabled, Izumi and Illusionist quickly headed out to the Delta-4 site. Time to wrap their part in all of this up...

Kyoka had discovered that literally the only downsides to the reworked gear Izumi and Momo had made her was a personal one. Specially, having her jacks plugged in inside the armor of her new costume meant she didn't have them available for her usual nervous tics. She hadn't been aware just how much she used them to bleed nervous energy with various gestures until she'd first used the new gear, and as it was she was still working on alternatives.

Which was *very* frustrating when one was less than 100 meters from a bomb that could kill tens of thousands in a very horrifying manner, *including you*. If that wasn't a reason to have some nervous energy, she had absolutely no fucking clue what was. Drumming her gauntleted fingers in a rhythm just wasn't the same, and she felt like she was going to crawl out of her skin soon if this didn't end. Thankfully, Beta team also only had one last bomb to deal with. Less thankfully, it was the one where they expected trouble. Mist Me and Ectoplasm had just returned, and they were all gathered just shy of their objective's concealed location, working out their best approach.

"I think we just need to hit this one hard and fast. Both Quirk users here are Heteromorphic. A skunk morph and a stone man of some sort. Neither are going to be easily disabled, and either might have senses that risk spotting you through Mist Me's illusions. But if we jam the frequencies Resolution determined the detonators are capable of, all we have to do is keep them away while Ectoplasm works."

That was a very *Miruko* plan. Which, given that's who had spoken it, made sense. It also, however, fit their needs quite well. More than one person nodded at the logic, so Kyoka just went with it and added a suggestion.

"If Mist Me sneaks us close first, I can open up with a sound barrage that should stagger even most Heteromorphs. Typically, mutations only enhance hearing, not deaden it, so they'll be

nauseous at minimum. Follow that with Miruko and Momo engaging, and I doubt there's any chance they'll be able to get back on balance."

Her addition to the plan got a thoughtful look from Miruko, then a curt nod.

"Keep it directional, yeah? My ears are fucking sensitive too, you know."

Kyoka snorted but nodded. She had more control than to disable her allies too...at least with her costume. Less so without it.

"Right, that's what we'll do then. SonicWave as the opener, then Keystone and I move in. Keystone, stone face is yours, I'll take the skunk lady. Who fucking better not actually have a scent spray or I might kill her."

There were half-hearted chuckles at that, but everyone nodded and moved into position when she gave the order to start. Now that sneaky was out of the picture, mostly, Miruko was in charge. Kyoka stuck to Mist Me, the other girl blowing out the illusion mist that she'd named herself after. Both of them used it for cover, the others trailing a few steps behind as they closed the distance to the secret entrance. Mist Me's Quirk was extra useful right at the moment, as she could easily get it under the crack in the hidden door, using it to cover herself opening it. Even the sounds were dampened by her mist, and in less than three minutes they were in position for Kyoka to hit both of the Quirked members of the terrorist group. The Quirkless pair with them was, thankfully, farther way from the bomb.

Kyoka took a deep breath, then sent the pre-prepared message via HSN for Momo to kick in the jamming. She got a response two seconds later...even as all of the terrorists looked down at their detonators in surprise as they made a shrill alarm noise. Not letting them react, she stepped out of the sound-dampening mist and let loose with two brutal sonic pulses from her gauntlets, set at wide-angle to catch all four of them. The two Quirkless men practically collapsed, and the skunkgirl screamed in pain as her hands flew to her ears. Stone man didn't react as much, but even he staggered and clutched at his head...

And then two blurs moved past either side of Kyoka's head.

An instant later, those blurs resolved into Miruko and Momo, who landed heavy kicks to both opponents, sending them flying away from the bomb and into the far wall. Not dallying herself, she triggered her Base Boost move as a dash, closing in her own blur of sonic-wave boosted speed, aiming for the Quirkless pair. One of them had managed to fumble out a gun, and she kicked it out of his hand, incidentally shattering that hand in the process since Base Boost was still active. Oops.

The other one screamed...apparently seeing something horrifying as Mist Me's mist enveloped his head. Focusing on her own target, she quickly followed up on her kick, jabbing the palm of one hand, Ear-Jack shifted to the hole there, into the terrorist's neck. Her HeartBeat Fuzz locked him up a second later...and then steel-toed boots disabled him entirely with a kick somewhere sensitive. She didn't flinch at the crunch that made. Bastard probably deserved it. Seconds later, she had him spun around and cuffed, even as he threw up and whimpered.

Thankfully, she'd managed to point him away from her before he vomited.

She looked back at the bomb to see Ectoplasm had it well in hand, being guarded by both his own clones and Midnight. The later of whom sauntered forward to knock out the two Quirkless men, Mist Me having neatly taken down the other. Stone face was already down and whimpering, while skunkgirl was midair and being bicycle kicked by an overeager Miruko. Somehow, she didn't think that either of them were going to be trouble at this point.

Honestly, compared to the League, this was all proving anti-climactic, even if the sheer damage they could have done if the bombs went off honestly made the League look like idiot children playing at mad scientist. Kyoka wasn't quite sure what to do with the dichotomy. Shrugging, she decided she'd deal with that later, shifting her attention to watching her badass girlfriend look sexy as she cuffed the giant stone dude with equally giant manacles she'd produced with her Quirk.

Hmm, maybe she could get Momo to put her in manacles like that when they celebrated this win? It had been super-hot when she'd taken charge to Dom Izumi for once. Jirou wanted some of that for herself...

Chapter 106: Debriefing and New Plans

Nedzu looked pleased with the world, or at least with them, as he sat at the head of the small, informal 'command' group again. The meeting was between the same handful that had started off the operation against Humarise, their purpose to debrief after the operation. They'd passed on everything they'd done as a series of reports already, of course. All of which for once had gone *remarkably* to plan. A nice chance from the usual, that. Now, it was Nedzu's turn to provide information in return.

"Excellent! Highly excellent, everyone! Better yet, I can also forward quite a bit of thanks to all of you from the international teams. All Humarise cells have now been disabled, in part due to the information you were able to pass on quickly, which helped locate bombs based on the patterns and scans you discovered and made. Of all international operations, only one wasn't a complete success, with a single bomb going off. Even that one was thankfully *contained* by a Force Field Quirk that kept the affected area down to less than a city block."

Everyone around the table winced, something which caused Nedzu to nod.

"Yes. It was still bad, causing quite a bit of damage and some eighty-seven deaths, but it was *far* better than it could have been. Better yet, the French Heroes and Military were on top of the issue and the Rift Bubble that predictably sprung up afterward has been contained as well. Though it is now the largest currently known bubble and the forces in Paris are still fighting to close it properly."

More winces. That was exactly what they'd been afraid would happen if the bombs went off. Not just the immediate and horrible loss of life, but that it would open the way for *immense* Rift Bubbles. If 87 Quirks going super-critical all at once, expelling all the power of the owners simultaneously, was enough to make a Rift of unprecedented size? Then 100,000 people would have basically opened the door for an *army*, right at the heart of a major population. Do to the targeting of refugee areas, that had been the estimated average size of the groups that would have

been affected even just in the initial bomb dispersal. Let alone when the airborne Trigger *kept* spreading from the detonation sites.

Since there had been *seventy-five* such sites in total, it would have meant the virtual certain loss of humankind to the Invaders. High Treason didn't even begin to describe what Humarise had attempted, and it wasn't like any of those that had been directly involved would avoid death sentences in any country that had them. Since Japan did, in fact, still have Capital Punishment, all of those they'd captured from the Tokyo cell would likely quickly be executed. After, of course, the telepaths ripped any useful information from them. Villains were rarely so sentenced. But these weren't Villains, they were terrorists. They faced a long drop from a short rope here in Japan, and similar fates in many other places.

"The Heroes and military of France are confident in their ability to close the Bubble in do time, possibly even gaining a chunk of Harvest Stone large enough to help with certain studies for their trouble. More to the point, a single *partial* failure out of roughly three hundred bombs is still an incredible accomplishment. The WHA has also, thankfully, located the cult leader of the organization and detained him. Flect Turn will be handed over to the telepaths to make sure there aren't any more lingering surprises, then promptly executed. His sentence has already been determined by an international War Crimes tribunal. Given he openly ranted about his plan, freely admitting to it, there wasn't much point in a drawn-out trial. Not under the wartime circumstances we currently face, at least."

Mixed expressions and sighs went around the table his time, causing Nedzu to perform his imitation of a smile. Heroes weren't a blood thirsty lot, for the most part. But none of those present thought Flect Turn's particular brand of *batshit insanity* was safe to leave lying around. Even in a prison. Some of them, including Izumi, were undoubtedly a bit torn about the fates of the rank and file in Humarise. But their leaders...there was a certain grim acceptance there, at least.

"Our own operation, of course, went off without a hitch. We didn't even take any casualties this time! Which means that we won't need a serious amount of downtime before Clean Slate gets rolling onto its next target. Or series of targets, actually. As we aren't quite ready yet to take on the Meta Liberation Army, we'll be hitting several smaller groups in rapid sequence over the next couple of months. That, however, is for another briefing once we all come back together again. For now, everyone has four days off to enjoy themselves. Miss Midoriya, Miss Yaoyorozu, if you would stay behind for a few minutes, I believe we have a bit of other business to discuss."

The two of them nodded, even as everyone else cheered a bit, looking relieved at the idea of taking a few days off. While the Humarise mission had gone remarkably well, it had still been grueling, and *very* tense because of the stakes. Coming almost directly on the heels of the Nabu Island raid as it had meant that most of the original Clean Slate team were even more ragged than their loaners. And some of their loaners had been borrowed straight from the front lines themselves.

With only a few more bits of commentary and parting comments, everyone began to file out, leaving just the Dean, Momo and Izumi behind. Once they were alone, the Dean gestured to Izumi.

“You said you wanted to speak with me in your message. I assume it’s about something more than the revisions to the shield-penetrator missile design you sent along at the same time? Very good work on that, by the way. Not that I expected any different. You two never disappoint and the design team has already gotten back to me with pleased thanks, as you solved two problems they were struggling with. Though, of course, you gave them a few more new ones along with the solutions.”

Izumi and Momo both smiled wryly at that. The designs had been good for what they were, but they’d spotted some issues the original team hadn’t. None of them were unsolvable, but it was going to take a rework of the basic missile body to accomplish it all. As they were intended for use in existing missile systems which Izumi and Momo didn’t have the specs for, they’d had to leave the new issues they’d created for the original team to deal with. Though, as Nedzu had said, they’d also sent along some fixes for QE field attunement and provided a rather elegant solution for a precision targeting issue the original design had been struggling with. Still, that wasn’t the topic of the moment, and Momo opened their pitch as planned.

“No. Thank you for the compliments, but that wasn’t what we needed to talk about. Instead, what we have is a proposal for the future. A possible way to alter the current structure of the Hero and Military joint defense in order to rationalize for future needs. Right now, we are using a great many non-specialists to plug every hole. But Izumi came to grasp recently with just how *long* our war with the Empire of Zurrick is likely to be, if nothing dramatically changes. Something I suspect you’ve also spent some time thinking about.”

Nedzu’s expression had focused into the sort of intensity he only displayed when a truly challenging problem came along.

“I have, of course. There are considerable issues in the short and medium terms. But I suspect what you’re thinking of is the medium to long term? I haven’t been able to put as much time into thinking of a solution there as I’d like, with all the hats I’m wearing, as a human might put it. But some changes in curriculum are going to be needed. Along with possibly greater long-term interconnection with the military, which I’m less than pleased about.”

That was good. It meant that Izumi’s idea, refined by Momo, might appeal to Nedzu more. It would prevent the need for full integration, at least on the defensive side. What the military eventually did on the *offense* was a different matter. But, then, that was what the military was really supposed to be for. Even Japan, for all that its forces were explicitly labeled as ‘Self Defense Forces,’ recognized that the military was really something you preferred to deploy *over there*. On someone else’s territory, not your own. There was a reason few governments had settled on a police-state as a solution to the Villain problem and had adopted various Hero Systems instead. Deploying tanks and air strikes in and on your own cities was...less than ideal.

“You would be correct. What we’ve come up with is, in fact, a somewhat radical variation on the same sort of core system that was adopted when Heroes first came on the scene. And as happened then, so too now do we think that UA would be a good place to begin putting the new idea into practice. Not as a part of the Hero Course, but as a new system entirely...”

Izumi had been accessing the central hologram and uploading their presentation as Momo had gotten the ball rolling. Now, a single word appeared as the first slide of that presentation began. Taking over from Momo, since this was her idea in the main, Izumi grinned with just a little excitement.

“Dean Nedzu, let me introduce you to what I hope will be the next evolution in how our world categories its defenders and organizes their efforts. I call them *Guilds*...”

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