

Once we were far enough away from the shop that I didn't feel worried about leading people to the area, I quickly donned my uniform. As I did, Alya and I discussed what my singular charge had unlocked.

"Almost all of it is low-level, very short buffs," I explained, securing my mask tightly. "Most of them are... well, they are kind of useless. A few of them might end up coming in handy eventually, but the time to cast is too long for them to be useful in a fight."

With my mask on, I pulled out my overcoat, pulling it on and tugging it straight. I then sat down on a crate to pull off my shoes and pull on my combat boots.

"There is a jump spell that increases my jump height and a spell to slow my descent from tall places, but they take a good six or eight seconds to cast," I explained, tying my boots before standing. "Handy if I see the issue coming and have time to pause, but like I said, I probably won't be using them in a fight."

"I thought you said you got what you wanted?"

"Oh, I did," I assured her. "It's a bit on the low end, but we expected that, having only used one charge. It's like a double buff, increasing my speed and burning mana to wash away the stamina drain."

"That seems... more advanced than I would have assumed a level one purchase would surrender."

"Well, it's a low-level buff, tied directly to how much mana I'm burning," I explained. "Higher levels might offer more efficient ratios, but I won't know for sure until I buy it. Plus, I have to hold the spell while I use it."

So far, almost all of my spells were functionally one-and-done. I would focus and chant the words, and the spell would form, and then it would cast. There were a few spells in the healing spells topic that I could cast and hold, the most useful of which would pump a trickle of healing energy into a person to just barely stabilize them, keeping them alive while using the barest amount of mana. There were also a couple of lightning spells, but those were even less like the new spell.

Basically, I would cast the spell and hold it, letting my mana trickle in to keep it active. While I was holding it, I would be unable to cast any other magic without first dropping the old spell. This didn't come without a benefit, though, as I could adjust how much mana the spell was burning to give myself a quick burst of speed, or to lower the buff down to the point that my mana regeneration would mean I could hold it forever.

"Okay, Alya," I said, settling into my uniform. "Go ahead and start-"

"There's a mugging going one block to the east," Alya immediately responded, not even waiting for me to finish. "Three men attacking a pair of women."

"Dammit," I cursed, already running out of the alley. "Lead me there!"

I ran out into the street, scaring the crap out of a few pedestrians before running along the sidewalk. As I did, I focused on the spell, casting it on myself as I ran.

"*Marathona potestas cursus!*" I called out as I focused my mana around my hands.

Several pale blue bands formed around my wrist, sliding down over my body, linking around each of my limbs and torso. Immediately, what little stamina I had used returned, and my speed increased. I adjusted the spell as I ran, quickly toning it down until I could hold it for a long while without running out of mana. I was still significantly faster than I was before, my boots pounding on the ground as I moved. If I had to guess, my speed was just around half again what I was usually capable of, so most likely twelve or thirteen miles per hour.

I wasn't exactly breaking any records, but the fact that I could essentially do it forever meant I could still get around the city pretty well, especially with Alya guiding me along the most direct route.

"Next alleyway," Alya whispered into my ear as I wove between people, skidding to a stop at the entrance of the alley.

Sure enough, fifteen or twenty feet into the trash strewn gap between buildings was a small group of people. Three men stood leaning over a pair of women, all three of the men wearing ski masks. As I watched, one of the men was going through a purse, one already lying half torn on the ground. Both of the other muggers were armed with knives, and I could see a pistol tucked into the waistband of the one going through the purse.

"Hey!" I called out, somehow managing to keep the stutter out of my voice. "Put down the purse and put your hands on your head."

"Wh- CAPE!" One of the knife-wielding criminals said, pointing me out to his friends.

Funnily enough, the gun-toting guy did drop the purse, but instead of putting his hands on his head, he immediately reached for his gun. I jabbed out with two fingers, sending a small bolt of electricity out to slam into his arm, burning him and rocking him back. With his attempt to shoot me sufficiently delayed, I held out my palms.

"*Attonitus imbre fulgur!*" I shouted, three arcane symbols appearing around my hands before popping, lighting firing out, and washing over the three muggers.

The electricity made them jump and convulse, falling over and collapsing to the ground. As they were still recovering, I quickly walked over them, pausing over each man.

"*Somnum scintilla*," I said, mana dancing between my pinky and thumb, drawing out three sparking arcane symbols, which flared, pulled together and dropped from my hand.

The sparking charge dropped down and landed on the first man's chest, instantly sinking into his body. He clenched and arched his back as the spell overwhelmed his nervous system and knocked him unconscious. He would wake up four or five hours from now with a headache, feeling like he had been tased.

I quickly cast the same spell over each of the other muggers before finally standing up and turning to the two victims. They were both standing half a dozen feet away, one of them in front of the other, as if to protect her slightly younger friend. The one in the back was quickly developing a black eye, while the one in front had a busted lip.

"It's okay, you're safe now," I said, trying to sound confident. "They won't wake up for a few hours. Are both of you okay? Any serious injuries?"

It took a moment for them to respond, the one with the busted lip speaking first.

"N-no, I think we are okay..." She said, looking back at her friend to confirm, getting a small nod in confirmation. "I... Thank you."

"It's not a problem, Ma'am. I was on patrol and spotted these chumps," I said, shoving the closest man with the tip of my boot. "Giving you a hard time. Why don't we get you guys out of this alley and call the police?"

They both nodded, the protective woman leading the other out. I pointedly ignored the fact that the older one chose to step *on* the criminals in her path, rather than over. As I followed after them, I quickly rolled all three of the muggers into the recovery position before exiting the alleyway.

Both of the women had sat down on the curb. It didn't take long for the shock and adrenaline to fade, as within seconds of sitting down, the younger woman burst into tears. I gave them space, standing nearby as I called the police. They promised to send a squad car down after confirming that the victims were healthy and the aggressors were incapacitated.

"Arcanum, huh?" The older woman asked, having overheard me talking to the police. "I don't recognize you, so you must be new."

"Very, still trying to figure all of this out," I admitted, rubbing the back of my head. "Doing okay so far, I think."

"Yeah, I would say so, too," She said, giving me a weak smile. "I... I don't think that would have ended well."

"Yeah... Oh! Would you like me to fix that?" I asked, tapping my lip to point out her injury.

"...Fix it?" She asked, gently touching the cut along her lip, wincing as she did.

"Yeah, I can heal people," I explained.

"I...think I'm okay," She said with a frown. "No offense, but... You just admitted you're new..."

"No problem, I completely understand," I said, holding up my hands in acceptance. "I would be a little iffy about it as well, in your shoes."

We waited for a few more minutes in general silence, broken up by the occasional snuffle from the younger victim. There were quite a few people hanging around, watching and even recording, but I ignored them. I knew this was coming, and I just needed to push through it.

Eventually, a police cruiser pulled up and parked beside the sidewalk. Two cops, one older, slightly graying woman and a younger man, stepped out of the cruiser, both of them approaching slowly. The older woman said something to the man I couldn't quite hear before stepping closer to me. Her partner turned and focused on the victims, talking in soft, hushed tones.

"Arcanum, I assume?" She asked, giving me a look that told me she had seen it all and wasn't impressed.

"Yes, Ma'am," I said with a nod. "I was patrolling the neighborhood when I spotted those men making themselves a nuisance."

I nodded back down the alleyway to where the three muggers still were, lying on the ground in the mud, grime, and trash. Unsurprisingly, they hadn't moved, still lying in the positions I had put them in.

"They dead?" She asked, suddenly a lot more tense, her hand sliding down her side.

"No, Ma'am, just unconscious," I explained. "I have the ability to knock people out for a few hours."

"Your power is to knock people unconscious?" She asked with a snort, giving me another look. "I guess that makes me a cape as well."

"That's just one of them," I explained with a chuckle. "They will wake up in a while with a headache and some muscle aches like they were tased."

"Huh... well, let me take your statement, and then you can be on your way," She said, pulling out a pad of paper and a pen.

I spent a few minutes describing what I had seen, and what happened afterward. When I was done, I helped them load the three unconscious men into the back of their cruiser, their arms locked up in handcuffs. The older cop expressed her thanks for the help before climbing

back into the cruiser and pulling away. By that point, both of the women were long gone, having called for a cab.

"Alright, Alya, I guess you can start looking for another one," I said quietly, giving some of the pedestrians around me a wave and a nod.

With the police and victims gone, the crowds' pressing curiosity quickly got the better of them, and they began getting closer, many of them still holding up phones. Rather than have to deal with anything, I gave one final salute before running off, picking a direction and reapplying the running buff as I went.

I move through the city, ignoring pedestrians as I did, stopping a few times to get my bearings and adjust my course. For about an hour, nothing new happened, and I basically just crisscrossed the city a few times. I was tempted to push further into rougher neighborhoods, but a healthy dose of caution held me back. I was looking to help and start building a reputation for myself, but I wasn't confident enough in my powers to fight other capes.

Of course, I was running through what was normally considered Empire territory, but... well, I might have been deluding myself a bit about how risky what I was doing was.

After just about an hour went by, Alya once again whispered into my ear, warning me that there was a car accident just a few blocks down the street I was about to pass. I immediately cut and ran towards the accident, Alya once again proving how invaluable she was by guiding me there.

I arrived at what seemed like a pretty rough accident, with a crossover and a normal car both looking pretty mangled. Both cars were in the center of a four-way intersection, and at a glance, it appeared someone hadn't spotted what color the lights were. As my marathon spell faded, I jogged into the street, looking into the broken window of the nearest vehicle, the car.

Sitting there, partially hidden by the airbag, was a woman, probably around my age. She was dazed and had cuts along her face and burns along her arms. Her left wrist also seemed a bit rough, maybe broken from the airbag, which was probably where the burns were from as well.

"Ma'am, can you hear me?" I asked, looking past her to make sure there weren't any other passengers. "Ma'am?"

"I.... yes... Head..."

"Ma'am, you were in a car accident," I asked, reaching in and tearing the airbag cloth free from the deployment device. "I need you to focus on me. I am a parahuman, and I can assist you. Would you like me to help?"

She seemed to focus on me long enough to realize I was wearing a mask, and after a moment, she nodded. Not wanting to waste any time, I double-checked that the crumpled door was stuck shut before getting to work.

"*Scalpere metallum*," I intoned, focusing my mana on my hand.

My energy spun up and around my pointer and middle fingers, spiraling around it until it reached their tip. An arcane symbol flashed, and the small, glowing, three-inch white blade extended from my finger. It was just about the most basic metal-cutting spell out there, but it came free with Geomancy as a way to prepare metal for the partional, so I wasn't about to complain.

I quickly cut along the door lock and hinge before pulling the door away from its frame and tossing it to the side. The woman was starting to wake up fully, the daze passing. When I stepped back to her side in the frame of the door, I gave her a once-over to make sure she wasn't impaled or bleeding anywhere.

"Ma'am, I want to help you out of the vehicle, but I'm worried about your neck and head trauma," I explained, the woman wincing as she shifted in her seat. "The good news is, I am a healer. If you allow me to treat you, we can avoid all the worry."

"Healer?" She asked, focusing on me, her eyes locking on mine. "Are you... are there any side effects?"

"You might notice some fading in older scars, as well as any old injuries, but that's it."

She chewed her lip for a moment before eventually nodding, wincing a bit as she did. I reached in and quickly cast four different healing spells, fixing her wrist, which was definitely broken, her concussion, and the burns along her arm. She watched me with wide eyes the whole time, but when I was done, she smiled.

"T-Thank you," She said, starting to get out of her seat. I helped her out until she was standing steadily.

"No problem, Ma'am," I said with a smile. "Now sit tight. I need to go take a look at the people in the other car."

She nodded, pulling out her cell phone, while I turned to head to the crossover. In the distance, I heard approaching sirens, so I put a little pep in my step. I respected the hell out of any emergency service workers who kept up in a city like Brockton Bay, but I also knew this would be easier to do without them getting involved.

I hurried to the next vehicle and got to work.