

## Chapter Two: The Call

Daria pressed the button on her arm guard, uncloaking herself once she was in the store behind the Red Cheshire. Making eye contact with Van, she crouched at the door, pointing to the man with the gun.

Aiming her arm guard, she crossed her fingers and tapped a button on the LED screen. A clear shield popped up from it, and she ran to rush the male, grunting as she rammed into him.

Once he was knocked back into the fountain, she held her shield up to block a gunshot, yelping out.

"And now we have an interruption." The jean jacket Cheshire sighed, turning towards her and dropping his megaphone. Raising his hand, he tilted his head at her, pulling his mask down. "Silver? Your arm guard?"

"Uh...lithium?"

In a flash moment, Van hit the jean-jacket boy with a baseball bat, knocking him off his feet. Grabbing his friend's arm, he tightened his grip on the bat, glancing at the two other males. "Come on!" He ran off with her, jumping behind one of the statues as a gunshot went off. "Why would you do that?" He whispered angrily to her, glancing up as people ran and screamed.

"I couldn't just let them come in here and do that!" Daria shook her head, glimpsing down at her LED screen and pressing buttons rapidly.

"You're gonna get people killed!" He continued, peeking around the corner.

"Somebody's already been killed." She stared up at him for a moment, beginning to stand. "Somebody has to stop them."

Van sighed softly, tightening his grip on the bat and standing alongside her. "We still have to worry about the Kazan witch and the armed guy back there. I'll try to take care of them. You have the guys up front?"

"Maybe?" Daria shrugged with a small smile.

"Good luck." Van turned towards the side exit, slowly making his way down the side of the mall with his bat. Raising it above his shoulder, he turned the corner, sucking in his teeth at the sight of nothing. "Ay...where is he?" He mumbled softly, hesitantly turning to look behind him.

He placed a hand on the door and opened it, eyeing the outside parking lot. "At least people are getting to safety..." He muttered as the various vehicles pulled off. Moving to turn back around, he sighed upon seeing another reflection in the glass. "Shit..." He spun around slowly, grip on his bat tightening.

"So...you think you can take me...?" The Red Cheshire asked, a hoodie on top of his head. "With that...?" He pointed to the bat, an amused tone in his voice.

"Think...is different from try."

"You're gonna try to take me with that?"

“Try...yes. I am gonna try to take you down with this...” The brunette exhaled softly, getting into a defensive stance. *‘Think less about trying. And more about doing.’* He thought to himself, except...it didn’t seem like he’d thought it; more like it’d just come into his head as something someone had said to him.

Pulling off his mask, the other burst into flames, his hoodie disintegrating upon the fire. As the flames lessened to an ember-like glow, he tilted his head. “Let’s try this then.” A smirk crept onto his face, and he began to approach him.

“Alright, think less, do more. Think less, do more.” Van swung the bat towards him, nearly knocking his head clean off if it hadn’t been for the Cheshire’s swift dodge.

The teen grabbed his bat, tossed it aside, and continued to approach him. “What now, bat boy?”

*‘You need something metal. And something to protect yourself with. Trying ripping a hole for a metal bat and any type of shield.’*

Once more, thoughts he wasn’t thinking but seemed to add up to his thoughts. Dodging a punch from the other, he went under his arm as the window shattered, attempting to rip a hole as soon as he hit the corner of the room. Once he saw it open, he quickly reached inside to grab whatever he’d summoned, turning around with the item in his hands to block the incoming fire.

Now holding a silver shield, the fire seemed to rain down upon him briefly and stopped briefly.

“Wow...where’d you get that from?”

“From your mom, you piece of shit.”

Van peeked over his new shield, standing quickly upon seeing his sister.

“Venus, don’t-”

Pulling out her staff, his younger sister whipped it around from her back, turning the scythe’s end backward and hitting the Kazan witch with the back end to avoid stabbing him. Striking him off his feet, she turned to her brother, motioning for him to join her.

“Are you okay?” He glanced down at his charred but intact shield. “Where’s Charlie?” He looked around the area, shaking his head.

“Charlie is helping...the people escape...but he’s standing back up...” Venus got into a stance, holding her hand out to him. “Can I borrow that shield?”

Handing it to her, he looked between her and the other, gently grabbing her wrist. “You sure you can take him?”

“I didn’t finish that training for nothing.” The long-haired girl shook her head, waving him off. “I’ll at least knock him out.”

Van patted her shoulder softly, starting to run back towards the main court of the mall, examining the scene in front of him. On his left, still near the front of the mall, Daria was fighting the leader Cheshire, the other one on the floor. He appeared at least knocked out.

On his left, Charlotte was guiding people towards an exit, holding what looked like the stick of a gardening tool. Well, she was only a few feet from the gardening store. A second after she'd ushered a group of people out, she yelped as the gunman attempted to grab her, swinging wildly towards him with her stick.

*'You'll need a weapon. Try another hole.'*

Heeding the advice of what possible was his conscience, he turned around in the spot he was standing, attempting another hole above him. Maybe it would be something interesting? As he reached in and pulled the item out, he stared at the baton in his hands, nearly jumping as electricity sparked off the end. "What the..." He muttered. Shrugging it off, he began running towards the gunman as he attempted to fight Charlotte.

*'It's an improvised baton. Both a strike to the head and electrocution can prove as incapacitation methods.'*

Running up to Charlotte, he pulled her away from the man, immediately bashing him in the head with the baton. Watching him as he was knocked off his feet, he turned toward her, rubbing her shoulder comfortingly. "You okay?"

"I'm fine. Just...trying to help the people..." Charlotte shook her head, still waving for people to head out the doors. "I think that guy may be unconscious...I hope."

Van nudged him gently, waiting for him to move. Upon no movement, he nodded affirmatively to her. "We're okay. Go grab Venus from the side exit. I'm gonna go help Daria." He watched her run off, heading back through the crowd toward his friend. "Okay, what now, voice in my head?" He muttered as he approached the fight.

After maybe a few seconds of silence, his thoughts were filled with a few different voices rather than just one.

*'You only need to ensure they're incapacitated; it's not your job to end the situation.'*

*'Or you could just hide and wait for Mishap.'*

**'But think of the consequences, PM. Would that be the responsible thing to do?'**

"Whoa..." Van slowed to a stop as his head began to ache, holding it as the voices continued to argue. Feeling nearly on the verge of blacking out, he leaned against the wall, his face scrunching up in pain. They all sounded like him, but...different? Almost as if different versions of his conscience spoke to him. Older, younger, tougher, etc.

As the voices nearly overlapped each other with different arguments, the brunette spotted the holes opening around him, reaching for one but falling to his knees.

*'Quiet!'*

The voices suddenly became quiet, the first one echoing in his head.

Standing slowly, he looked down at his fists, slowly unclenching them as the pain dissipated. Were these his conscious, or were they...something else?

*'Van. You don't need any weapons from the rips. Trust your instincts.'*

"Okay...so if I'm trusting my instinct...and I'm trusting you..." He muttered aloud, glancing up at the area for a second time. Watching as more Red Cheshire started to pour in, he grimaced at the sight of them. "Who are you?" He mumbled, approaching Daria.

"Van!" The purple-haired girl punched one of the Cheshires approaching her, kicking her in the shin and knocking her over. "The main one is gone! I can't find him anywhere!"

Grabbing another Cheshire that rushed them, the brunette tossed them aside, shaking his head. "I haven't seen him. I saw the Witch and the Gunman. Where did the other guy with the Leader go?"

"Headshot Guy? No clue! I knocked the fuck out of him-"

"I saw."

"-and then I didn't see him again!" Daria shook her own head, dodging a Cheshire. "There's a lot of them, Van. I don't know if we can take them..." She trailed off her sentence, staring out of the mall entrance. "Holy shit...literally. Holy shit."

Turning his attention toward the direction, almost everyone seemed to stare at the emerging burst of light, the beam dropping to the entrance.

"It's Bask," Van muttered, watching the male burst through the doors.

Immediately, the long-haired man approached the two teens, glancing between them. "Good afternoon, kids! Or should I say evening?" A perplexed look briefly flashed upon his face, and he grabbed a Cheshire as they attempted to tackle Van, tossing them into the air.

As the Cheshire flew, she was caught by a group of vines that shot up from the air, wrapping around her.

"As you know, I'm Bask. I'm here to help until, uh...reinforcements show?" Bask gave a small shrug. "I have questions to ask, but obviously, we're still mid-fight, so I'll make them short. How many major threats do we have?"

"We had four, but my sister is dealing with one; I knocked out one, and two are missing." Van quickly stepped aside, pushing a Cheshire onto their face as they attempted to run up on him.

"Who all is trying to fight right now?" He continued, glimpsing around at their surroundings.

"A Staffmaster, me and him! He's a Fabric Ripper, I'm a, uh...Technology Goon! The girl at the end of the mall is a Banshee trying to help everyone escape!" Daria yelped as Bask blasted a beam of light toward a Cheshire. "Sorry, not trying to be scared!"

"Alright...assuming that brown-haired girl with the staff is the Staffmaster, I'd assume we're doing good. We need to find...the Mechanic and Arsenyl." Bask clapped his hands together, taking off into a run before gliding into the air.

"Wow...I wish I could do that..." Van muttered, gaze locked on him until his sister met his open arms. "All okay?"

"Yeah. I knocked him out." Venus nodded, hooking her staff back onto her back. "What now?"

"Go get Charlotte, Bask-"

"Is that the Bask?" She muttered, staring up at him with wide eyes.

"Either that or we've been Punk'd."

"I don't think this is an episode of Punk'd." Daria shook her head, joining their side. "Where do we go now?"

"Well, Bask said we're doing good. We have to find the...wait, is that the Mechanic? The...jean jacket boy...?"

"I guess it is..." The purple-haired girl looked up at him before clapping her hands together. "Venus, you should go help Charlotte...maybe we should look and see if we can help Bask, Van?"

"Yeah...that's a good idea. Be careful, V." Van ruffled her hair, watching her run off. "You lost them when?"

"When the first few Cheshire came in. They turned my attention away from the two, and when I was looking for them again, they were gone."

The brunette scanned the area with an exhalation, closing and opening his fists. "Let's see..." He walked towards where Bask had gone, Daria following behind him. Slowing upon spotting him, he peeked around the corner and motioned for his friend to stop.

Floating back to the ground, Bask walked towards the Mechanic, hands clasped behind his back. "I know you know I'm here, Wyatt...not about to fight you. As long as you don't become hostile..." He tilted his head upwards, peering behind him at the side exit.

The Mechanic turned slowly, his mask dangling from his hand. "Bask...we're on a first-name basis now?"

"Only if you allow me." The older man smiled softly toward him. "You know...for someone who leaves a trail of crimes littered across the country...The worst crime you've committed is arson...which was by yourself. Because you're not a Red Cheshire, are you? Nor are you a criminal."

"If you're going to attempt to convince me that a life with you is better, Bask. I'll pass." The teenager tossed his mask aside, and a metallic glove formed around the arm that had thrown it.

"You always make things hostile." Bask sighed softly, shaking his head and beginning to turn the other way.

"I don't exactly aim to be peaceful. I aim to succeed. Not to please the people."

"And you aim to escape today?" He turned back toward him slightly, eyeing him from over his shoulder.

"Precisely."

"But...you won't kill me. You're not a criminal."

"No, Bask. I'm not a murderer."

"I know, Wyatt. So what's it gonna be? Behind you are the police, who will shoot on my command. Behind me is the exit, where I'm sure those young heroes are waiting to stop you. It's you, me, and the escape."

"You won't kill me. You're not a murderer." The Mechanic scoffed, shaking his head. "You don't kill unless you have to."

"But I'm not afraid of allowing them to shoot you."

Tapping his foot for a moment, the Mechanic's other hand was covered with the same silvery glove, and he crossed his arms. "Then I guess I'll have to take my chances eliminating the only threat." He aimed the gun toward Bask, shooting behind him and hitting the spot near the two teens.

Yelping, Daria flinched back, her shield coming up to protect the two automatically. "Oh, hey! It works!"

Van pulled her backward from the corner, exhaling softly as Bask and the Mechanic began to fight, looking down at her. "Maybe we should-"

Suddenly, the ground shook with energy, almost knocking the two off their feet. Once they'd caught their balance, they looked at each other slowly. Peeking back around the corner, they looked at Bask as he stood to his feet from the wall he'd presumably crashed into.

Across from him, with an indent in the wall, the Mechanic lay on the floor, seemingly immobile. His gloves slowly disappeared from his hands, and he slumped onto the floor.

Bask dashed towards him, skidding to a stop in the middle of the room. Looking back at the teenagers, he glimpsed down at the floor as if collecting his thoughts. "Get the girls and come out to the officers. If anyone else tries to fight you, just make your way out. I'll meet you out there."

"Daria, go grab them..." Van waved her off, watching the hero.

"What?! Why just me?" Daria spun around, about to complain. "Oh. They're here." She turned back toward Bask, also watching him.

"What's happening?" Venus leaned onto her brother, blinking.

The Mechanic stumbled to his feet, holding his now none-gloved hand out. "You broke my suit." He stared down at his hand, dropping it to his side.

"I'm sorry, Wyatt, but it had to be done..." Bask held his hand out, palm upwards. A string of vines climbed his body from the ground, spinning around his wrists and waist to constrict him. "You didn't have to make this so hard." He gently grabbed him by the arms, walking towards the doorway.

"You didn't have to break my suit. But look at us."

The long-haired man looked back at the teens behind him, waving for them to follow with his free hand. "Find an officer, kids. I'll talk to you as soon as I'm done with...him."

Van nodded affirmatively, grabbing Charlotte and Venus' hands. Beginning to lead them out, he navigated them and Daria through the officers as they were

checked over, eventually becoming the first to sit in the back of a cop car. Looking down at the shock blanket he'd been handed, he scoffed softly.

Sitting next to him, Venus wrapped herself in hers, laying her head against his shoulder. "Are we heroes now?"

"I don't know."

*'I'll be damned if that's not considered hero work. You fought a threat, evacuated the civilians, and protected the innocent.'*

"Actually..." He looked down at his younger sister, wrapping his arm around her. "I think we are." He smiled softly at her, glancing up at Charlotte sitting on his other side.

"At least I don't have to go back to...work." Charlie shrugged, laying her head against his shoulder.

"That's the bright side of all this? Not that none of us are hurt?" Van looked down at her with a perplexed expression. However, before she could answer his question, the sound of a helicopter approaching nearly deafened the three.

Staring up at it, the oldest teen squinted his eyes, shielding them from the wind a second later. "Is that an Enforcer Sky Falcon?"

Joining the group, Daria leaned against him, yelling, "That's the new model! Do you think Enforcers are in there?!"

"I'd hope so," Van murmured, standing slowly.

As the 'Enforcer Sky Falcon' landed, the propellers stopped, and out climbed a white-haired man wearing shades. Behind him, a group of Enforcers ran out, beginning to enter the mall with their various weapons. He watched them run off, straightening the collar of his shirt, and made his way toward an officer.

"Is that...Agent Striker?" Charlotte sat up slightly, narrowing her eyes.

Behind the Enforcers, an orange-haired man stepped out, glimpsing around the scene momentarily before joining Striker.

"That is...and look behind him." Venus pointed to the other man, snapping. "That's Skye Blue..."

"Holy...shit," Van muttered, watching the two men as they approached Bask. Staring for a long few seconds, he leaned forward slightly as if trying to hear what they were saying.

After a few minutes, Bask pointed over to the teens, nodding with a slight smile.

Skye and Striker looked at the group, glancing back at each other before approaching the teenagers.

Snapping upright, the brunette looked between the group, exhaling softly. "No one say anything stupid." He mumbled, mostly to himself. Turning back front, he blinked as the two men stopped before them, feeling his sisters stand next to him. "Sirs..."

"Hey, there. Agent Emmett Striker." The white-haired man shook all four of their hands, smiling softly.

“Skye Blue.” The orange-haired man gave a nod of his head, hands in his pockets. “What’s your name?” He gestured to Van.

“Vancouver Pyun-Multani, sir.”

“Darlene Louise Boone, sir.”

“Charlotte Summerfields, sir.”

“Venus Pyun-Multani.”

Emmett pulled his shades off, hooking them in his shirt. “Well, kids. I heard from Bask that you guys did a bang-up job of protecting this mall.”

“Yes, sir. We just did our best.” Daria nodded, her arms clasped behind her back.

“You did a great job. The mall didn’t get robbed, and there were only two lives lost. Those are basically miracle numbers.” Skye crossed his arms, an impressed expression spreading across his face.

“Honestly. You took care of things like a team. I heard one of you was evacuating the citizens. Who is that?”

Charlotte raised her hand shyly, clearing her throat and pushing her hair out of her face. “It was me, sir.”

“Do you have a power, or are you just human?” Skye tilted his head.

“I’m a banshee, sir. I knew I couldn’t use my power without many people getting hurt, so I decided to help evacuate them.”

Nodding, Emmett pointed to Venus. “And what did you do, young lady?”

“I fought the Kazan witch, sir. My brother gave me a shield, and I’m a Staffmaster of Death.”

“What about you? I see some technology on your arm.” Skye turned to Daria, leaning down slightly.

“This is only a part of my suit, sir. It can provide a shield and give my arm extra strength. I focused on the Mechanic and Arsenyl.” The purple-haired girl held her arm guard for the two men to examine it.

Staring at it for a second, Emmett changed his focus to Van, gesturing with his hand. “And you, sir?”

“I’m a Fabric Ripper, sir, so I tried to help where I was needed. I provided Venus with the shield, Charlotte with the improvised baton, and Darlene with backup. My main goal was to ensure that we didn’t injure ourselves, sir.” The brunette cleared his throat, eyes glimpsing between the two men.

Skye looked at Emmett with a ‘told you so’ face, dropping all his weight onto one hip. “I think you guys had everything fleshed out well for a group of teenagers.”

“I agree with Blue. You guys seem to have a big future in heroism.” Emmett looked past them for a moment, suddenly snapping his fingers. “So...my question is. Would any of you be willing...to commune with our recruiting director, with personal references from us, and see about an interview? You wouldn’t be thrown on the field immediately, but we would train you to replace us. So we can have confidence in all of our future. What do you guys think?”



As the three girls gasped and immediately said yes, Van bit his cheek in thought, almost as if waiting for something.

“Mr. Vancouver?” Skye held his hand out for a shake.

Pausing before shaking his hand, the brunette briefly closed his eyes, opening them after a second of silence. He extended his hand and shook Skye’s with a small smile, exhaling softly afterward.

*‘Sorry, kid. I’m not your conscience. I can’t help you with that.’*

“We’ll get you in contact with our recruiting director and get you all your interviews.” Emmett smiled, pulling his shades off his shirt. “Be prepared. It’s not that hard, but...just be prepared.”

Van watched as the men walked back towards Bask, sitting back in the cop car. “Aw, shit. How are we gonna get Mom to agree with us?” He turned to Venus, facepalming.

*‘Now **that** I can help you with.’*